

# “Dispatches” powerful book

Book Review by Alan Hirvela

Dispatches by Michael Herr

A lot of Americans say that it's not good to be reminded of the war in Southeast Asia; that we should put it behind us. A book like *Dispatches* is a perfect reminder of why people who say such things are wrong. This book makes it clear why we should, instead, be examining what happened in Southeast Asia as closely and critically as we possibly can.

Having spent a year in Vietnam during the peak of the U.S. war effort as a correspondent for *Esquire* magazine, Michael Herr has a perfect perspective from which to tell us about the war. He was with the troops in action; he saw the killing and maiming as it occurred and he saw the roots of the official deception which so completely characterized the war (and the mass media, despite knowing that they were being deceived by the military, willingly carried out the deception). He actually saw death — physical, psychological, and brutal death. He saw it being brutally and mindlessly handed out by America, and saw it being received.

In *Dispatches*, Herr describes what he saw in terms that help us to realize just how horrible and miserable the war was.

The value of the book is that it gives us an intense look at the concrete, day

to day horror of the war. And, unlike other books about Vietnam, it doesn't concentrate solely on the physical death and pain that were so much a part of the war. The special quality of the book lies in its ability to share the massive and intricate psychological damage the war inflicted upon so many who were part of it, both Vietnamese and American. Through the use of incredibly vivid, descriptive detail, the author makes us feel the extraordinary levels and webs of psychological trauma and conflict that were unceasingly and viciously created by the war. Just as the outstanding film "Hearts and Minds" showed us the incredible physical and mental anguish the war caused, *Dispatches* shows us the equally incredible psychological pain that was a vital and often overlooked consequence of the war.

Vietnam is — and should be — a continuous, ever-present part of our lives. This book through an extremely personal, narrative style of writing does an excellent job of preserving the memories of the most vicious, devastating war that one culture (White America) has ever perpetrated on another. This is not, however, a book that lectures us about Vietnam. It doesn't state that the war was wrong or right. It doesn't need to; once you've read the powerful descriptions of the war the way it actually was, the decision is yours. □

# Flinites make good

Two local individuals — one a dog and one a man — have made their starring debut in two newly released films.

"Maggie," a dog who is friends with Steve Binder and Veronica Moore, made the big time when she inadvertently walked in front of the camera during the shooting of "Hardcore" in Grand Rapids last year. The film, starring George C. Scott as a father in search of his porno-star daughter, opens with a series of shots depicting life in Grand Rapids — nice, clean Calvinist Grand Rapids.

One scene shows some children ice-skating in a park. All of a sudden, this gangling, dumb-looking dog that walks lopsided decides to go for a trot across the ice. In an instant, Maggie is a star.

The *VOICE* attempted to contact Maggie for her reaction to the film but her press agent said she isn't talking to the press at this time. He explained that Maggie is filing suit against Director Paul Schrader ("Taxi Driver," "Blue Collar") for not being paid union scale or even being listed in the film's credits.

Maggie recommended, the press agent said, that people boycott the film.

"Besides," he added, "it's a dog."



Photo by Dave Binder

Maggie the dog — Up for an Oscar or up from a nap?


Wendel Harris, Jr., son of Helen Harris, former president of the Flint Board of Education, has also made his acting debut on film (through the more appropriate channels).

Having spent the past couple of years in New York City trying to land an acting job, Wendel was chosen by a casting agency for a brief appearance in Woody Allen's new film, "Manhattan."

The scene he was in involved a gay rights parade through New York (Woody's former wife in the movie is a lesbian). Wendel played one of the demonstrators carrying the banner at the lead of the march.

Though he only received a few dollars for his work, Wendel told the *VOICE* that he was happy to have had the experience of working with Woody Allen for a day.

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