



LOUISE SNIDER

Desert drama just plods along

Long before the title phrase "March or Die" (PG) is spoken in the movie, it's meaning becomes clear. Either one is an actor monotonously marching along or one is a spectator dying of boredom.

The publicity releases ballyhoo "March or Die" as an epic, romantic, action-adventure film. It is none of these, except a film. Placated directing by Dick Richards and uninspired film editing by John Howard and Stanford Allen have resulted in a French Foreign Legion film that plods along, at a camel's pace.

Catherine Deneuve as Simone, a young widow, gives a stolid, expressionless performance. There are figures in wax museums more animated than Deneuve. Gene Hackman's acting as Major William Foster consists mostly of expressive twitching—tapping a pencil, flicking a riding crop, and so on.

Major Foster is an inufferable officer who keeps assuming a morally superior stance to civilians. Civilians "use" the legion to fight their battles. Foster doesn't think the legion should be used. (It isn't clear what he thinks should be done with the legion.)



GENE HACKMAN

FOSTER ALSO whines a great deal about the number of men in his command, who've been killed in battle. Lest one mistake this for humanitarian concern, note that Foster doesn't mind if his men are killed by the legion's brutal training and punishment methods. Apparently, he just objects to other people killing them.

Foster and Simone are drawn together by their mutual apathy and fey dispositions. These two unattractive qualities do nothing to enhance the action or provide entertainment. "Failure" as the subject of drama requires an expert hand, a Beckett if not a Shakespeare. No such master dramatist guides this desert drudgery.

Nevertheless, Max von Sydow and Terence Hill give competent performances. However, Hill's role as Marco, a cat-burglar turned legionnaire, is ridiculous, and von Sydow's role as the Louvre archaeologist is too limited.

Briefly, the story is about legion troops dispatched to Morocco in 1918 to accompany and protect a French archaeological expedition. Major Foster (Hackman) is the commander. Having been booted out of the American army, he's a reject, like almost everyone else in his command.

The local Arabs aren't thrilled about contributing to French culture. They wiped out the previous expedition and have designs on this one. Actually, the historically jumbled script gives the post World War I Arabs a post World War II outlook.

A SERIES OF obligatory scenes and motifs follow. There are the obligatory training scenes where boys are molded into men, men into monsters, etc.

Simone provides the obligatory female interest. She loves Marco (Terence Hill), but she doesn't want Marco to love her, therefore, she gives herself to Foster. Well, they deserve each other.

Ian Holm plays El Krim, the obligatory Arab leader—cruel and tough but concerned about his people.

Eventually, Arabs and legionnaires fight the obligatory big battle, and by the end, the raw recruits are seasoned veterans who love the legion traditions.

That shows what too much sun and a diet of blood sausage will do to a man.



Pantless in the park

While the audience huddled in coats and blankets, outdoors in Birmingham's Shain Park, John Unruh was caught with his pants off appearing with Debbie Diehl in the one-act play "Rise and Shine." In the play, Unruh is back from the grave and has returned pantless, he speculates, because he was buried that way. The start of the play was delayed briefly because Unruh misplaced his coat—which was not in the script. When the coat went on, so did the show. Barbara Underwood directed "Rise and Shine," for the Birmingham Village Players presentation at the City of Birmingham-sponsored In the Park program Thursday. Also performing for the good-sized crowd, which brought its own chairs, were a group of players from the First Theater Guild of the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham. Stan Fiol directed an abridged version of "The Importance of Being Earnest" by Oscar Wilde. Coming Thursday at In the Park will be The Executives, with music of the big bands. (Staff photos by Dick Kelly)



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Glimpses

NEW RELEASES

BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOR (PG). Wryly humorous film about French colonials waging mini-war in Africa in 1915. English subtitles. Won 1976 Academy Award for best foreign language film.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR (PG). Crisp World War II drama chronicling major but ill-fated Allied campaign in Holland. Bounty of stars make brief but effective appearances.

BREAKING TRAINING (PG). The Bad News Bears may win the game, but it's a poor showing. Without Walter Matthau or Tatum O'Neal, this sequel strikes out.

THE DEEP (PG). Suspenseful aqua-thriller with exciting underwater action and photography. Jacqueline Bisset, Nick Nolte and Robert Shaw dive in for treasure and thrills.

FIRE SALE (PG). Alan Arkin acts in and directs comedy, sometimes funny; sometimes sick, about a nutty family.

GREASED LIGHTNING (PG). Richard Pryor stars as a moonshine runner who succeeds as a stock car race.

HERBIE GOES TO MONTE CARLO (G). Disney film presents further adventures of the love bug. With Dean Jones, Don Knotts and Julie Sommars.

I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN (R). Superb acting by newcomer Kathleen Quinlan in moving and hopeful story about a teenager coping with mental illness.

THE LAST REMAKE OF BEAU GESTE (PG). Marty Feldman directed the fourth—and hopefully final—remake of this French Foreign Legion film which bears no resemblance to any others. Face with Feldman as Michael York's identical twin.

MACARTHUR (PG). A biography rather than a war movie. It traces the career of the controversial general from the fall of Corregidor to his last speech at West Point.

ONE ON ONE (PG). Small-town high school basketball star is recruited by big-time university. Robby Benson is the appealing underdog who hangs tough and bucks the system.

THE OTHER SIDE OF MIDNIGHT (R). Tawdry film of vanity and vengeance. Marie-France Pisier wastes her talent in this clinker. More sex and less story and they could have gone for the "Emmanuelle" trade.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audiences admitted.
PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X No one under 18 admitted.