



Synopsis, Structure

FMJ

& Genre

Synopsis:

The protagonist of the film is Marine recruit J.T. 'Joker' Davis (Matthew Modine), who is part of a group beginning basic training as a Marine on Parris Island, SC. The brutal command of drill instructor Gunnery Sergeant Hartman (played by former drill sergeant R. Lee Ermey, which earned him a Golden Globe nomination for best supporting actor) shows the harsh indoctrination of the armed forces during the Vietnam War era. The drill is depicted as designed to eliminate virtually all trace of the recruits' individual personalities and transform them into killers (to "keep Heaven packed with fresh souls"). This first section of the film focuses largely on how the brutal treatment of overweight misfit Leonard 'Gomer Pyle' Lawrence (Vincent D'Onofrio) results in his losing his sanity, after which, despite Joker's attempts to intervene, he murders the drill instructor, and then kills himself.

The second part then takes place in Vietnam, now focusing on 'Joker', who is now a Sergeant, and a *Stars and Stripes* war correspondent, as he covers the Tet Offensive. The 'Joker' soon becomes familiar with both the horror and the absurdity of the war. His helmet decoration – the slogan "Born to Kill" – and the Peace symbol pin on his uniform exemplify his moral ambiguity. In one particularly comic scene Joker is confronted by an Marine Corps Colonel (Bruce Boa), demanding to know why he has a peace symbol on his uniform and "Born To Kill" on his helmet. Joker attempts to explain the duality of man theory postulated by Carl Jung which is obviously lost on the blustering colonel.

The film concludes with the soldiers' ironic rendition of the theme song to the Mickey Mouse Club. Other songs used in the film are "Hello Vietnam" and "Patriotic Full Metal Jacket Military Cadence." The film's end credits are accompanied by The Rolling Stones "Paint It Black."

Structure:

First Half: Parris Island Military Camp

Second Half: Hue, Vietnam

Full Metal Jacket (1987) has always gotten a bum rap for its clearly divided two sections. Most tend to prefer the showier first half, which details the training of Vietnam recruits at Parris Island by a crazed drill sergeant (R. Lee Ermey), as opposed to the second half, which is a more meditative reflection on Vietnam and the soul-smashing corruption of the film's narrator Private Joker (Matthew Modine). It's understandable in a sense. The first half's Private Gomer Pyle (Vincent D'Onofrio) is a much more rounded character - his girth and clumsiness are easily recognisable as traits easily singled out in a group setting - yet Modine's character, again a blank slate, makes for the perfect audience surrogate because Kubrick appears to want multiple interpretations to apply. In war, which from a mass viewpoint predicated success on the acknowledgement of dichotomies and sides, there can be no one answer. Kubrick brings individuality back to cinema viewers by destroying it onscreen. The final march, comprised of faceless silhouettes, is as democratic a gesture as an artist can give us. In that moment we are one and we are all.

Genre:

Vietnam War **Or** Vietnam War Satire

Satire: a literary tone used to ridicule or make fun of human vice or weakness, often with the intent of correcting, or changing, the subject of the satiric attack.