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Bastards' Road

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Bastards' Road

Abstract

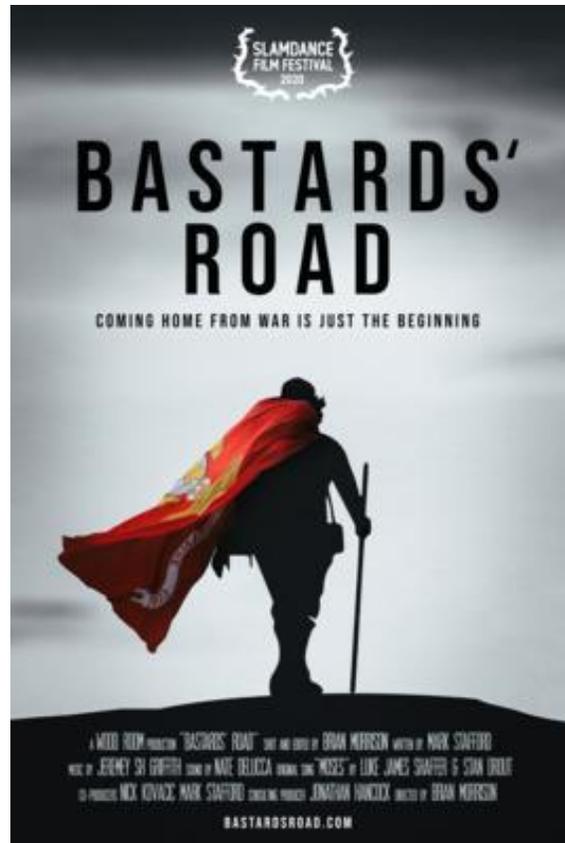
This is a film review of *Bastards' Row* (2019) directed by Brian Morrison.

Keywords

Suicide, PTSD, War, Veterans

Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



Bastards' Road (2019), dir. Brian Morrison

Bastards' Road is a heartbreaking story of redemption, brotherhood, and forgiveness. Jon Hancock of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, Fox Company (known as the Magnificent Bastards) feels an urge, maybe a compulsion (Jon sold everything he had to fund his trip) to walk across America from the east coast to Fort Pendleton, California. But Jon is not simply walking for himself; he is also walking for his brothers from 2/4 Fox Co., living and dead. Along the way he visits old comrades in arms and the families of his brothers who have died in Iraq. This film is the story of Jon's journey.

The story is heartbreaking for several reasons. First the film gives us a glimpse of what it is like to be young and at war. I say "glimpse" because I do not believe that any film can do more than that. We never understand the full impact of war on the soldiers who fight it. But the glimpse

is enough to show us the horror of war and how war changes its participants. And that is heartbreaking.

The story is also heartbreaking because it deals with the death of Jon's brothers and the suffering of their families. His dead brothers include those who have returned home and then completed suicide. The death of a husband, a son, a father creates a loss that has to be dealt with and most of the families do not know how to deal with that death. Some find the pain unbearable, while others try to live as their father, son, or husband would want them to live. Nothing about this is easy or without pain.

For many soldiers, returning home does not solve any of their problems. Indeed, since the family, friends, and neighbors back home did not have their war experiences, soldiers do not find comfort or relief when they return to their loved ones. Trying to deal alone with the trauma of war, returning soldiers often behave badly. Many turn to alcohol and drugs to deal with the pain, then behave badly under the influence, thereby creating an entirely new set of problems not only for the soldiers, but for their loved ones as well.

Soldiers are taught and trained to be strong, but when they return home asking for help it seems to be a sign of weakness or deficiency. So the very thing that might bring them help is something that soldiers want to avoid. The stigma of asking for help is itself heartbreaking. And, it is also heartbreaking to see how willing Americans are to send young men and women into war and then how unwilling they are to provide the necessary resources when they return from war.

On his journey, Jon learns the importance of his band of brothers. His brothers are the ones with whom he shares his war experiences. They are the ones who understand what they all went through. These are the people with whom he can grieve. Having so many of your fellow soldiers die generates enormous grief and it is difficult to move on until you have grieved for your brothers,

maybe even the grief you experience for the loss of part of yourself. Jon visits with the families of soldiers killed and finds others with whom he can grieve. When it comes to grief, Jon finds another band of brothers.

What all of the Magnificent Bastards need is to find redemption. How can one go on, given the things one has seen and done in the horror that is war? Others may not judge you, others may forgive you, but that's not enough. It turns out that the forgiveness of others is not enough if you are not able to forgive yourself. Forgiveness is crucial to moving forward and the most important forgiveness is the forgiveness one gives oneself. Forgiving oneself is important to soldiers returning from war and it is also an essential element in the lives of all of us.

If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts or struggling with depression, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 for help.

Bastards' Road won the "Audience Award for Documentary Feature."