

00:00:00	Music	Music	“Prelude and Main Title” from <i>Fixed Bayonets!</i> by Roy Webb. Slow, almost romantic orchestral interpretation of what might otherwise sound like a WWII-era upbeat propaganda-esque war song.
00:00:04	John Roderick	Host	Last week, the trusty green 120-sided die of <i>Friendly Fire</i> selected a film so superficially improbable that a small minority of faithless listeners cried out, “Foul!” <i>[With French accent] Impossible! Incroyable!</i> <i>[Regular voice]</i> They exclaimed, in the signature fake French accents of faithless people. <i>[French accent]</i> “Surely your random dice roll could not—and would not—deliver the second of Sam Fuller’s 1951 Korean War films hot on the heels of the first!” <i>[Regular voice]</i> Well, let me reply plainly in a language <u>everyone</u> understands—the fake British accent of science!

[British accent] You see, the probably that two events will both occur can never be greater than the probability that each will occur individually. So if two possible events—let’s say A and B—are independent, then the probability that both A and B will occur is equal to the product of their individual probabilities! If an event can have a number of different and distinct possible outcomes—A, B, and C and so on—then the probability that either A or B will occur is equal to the sum of the individual probabilities of A and B! And the sum of the probabilities of all the possible outcomes—A, B, and C and so on—is one! That is, 100%!

[Regular voice] In other words, the die don’t lie. And a lovely little diptych the two films together are! Both star Gene Evans as a gruff sergeant. Both filmed in the first year of the Korean War by the same writer and director. Last week’s *The Steel Helmet* surprised us all with its backyard production quality and beatnik script, so we went into *Fixed Bayonets!* prepared for weirdness! Will it be *The Crucible* performed by the Apple Dumpling Gang? Maybe *Gunsmoke* meets *A Raisin in the Sun*, produced by Arthur Miller, starring Charles Bronson! Well, it was anybody’s guess!

Instead, Sam Fuller surprised us with a war movie! You wanna talk about probabilities? There are an improbably number of exhausted, stubbled, ambiguously-ethnic-while-still-being-white, wet stogey chompers in this picture—enough to suggest that Bill Mauldin’s 1944 cartoons reflected World War Two army life so accurately that they were made manifest in the army of 1950. Just as surely as 1985’s *The Breakfast Club* created 1989’s generation of Benetton-clad, clove-chomping, neo-maxi-zoom-dweebies where they might never have existed otherwise.

Here, we have a classic platoon on a suicide mission. Left behind to obscure the withdrawal of a larger force by giving the advancing Chinese and North Koreans the impression that a whole division is defending this snowy valley during the first winter of the war. They look bedraggled, but they accept their fate because—goddammit, they’re GIs! Then—bang! Shooting and stuff and vignettes and set pieces! We have soldiers standing in freezing puddles just long enough for us to grow to kind of like them before seeing all the good ones killed. The platoon attempts to hold their position, pinned down by relentless foreshadowing and a hail of third-act voiceovers.

Standing center is the super-improbably-named Sergeant Rock, all but bulletproof. And slightly off-center, a reluctant and cowardly Corporal Denno. Gradually elevating in rank as all the better men die. Heavy lies the crown and Denno doesn't even like his helmet. It's a good old-fashioned war romp that does it all with grit and imagination. Plus, it has James Dean dancing by uncredited. Put this title on the shelf with your *Tropic of Capricorn*, you smarty-pantses! You're not aiming at a man—you're aiming at the enemy! Once you're over that hump? You're a rifler. Today on *Friendly Fire—Fixed Bayonets!*

00:04:22	Music	Music	<p><i>[Music transitions to drumroll, which leads into theme song.]</i> “War” off the album <i>War & Peace</i> by Edwin Starr. Impassioned, intense funk.</p> <p><i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i> <i>Uh-huh!</i></p> <p><i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i></p> <p><i>Say it again, y’all!</i></p> <p><i>War!</i></p>
00:04:41	Ben Harrison	Host	<p><i>[Song fades down and plays quietly as the hosts speak.]</i> Welcome to <i>Friendly Fire</i>, the war movie podcast that—when you’ve listened a little longer—you’ll find out... you’ve gotta have the <u>guts</u> to host.</p> <p><i>[Multiple people laugh.]</i></p>
00:04:49	Adam Pranica	Host	<p>I’m Ben Harrison. I’m Adam Pranica.</p>
00:04:52	John	Host	<p>And I’m John Roderick.</p>
00:04:55	Ben	Host	<p>I wavered on that! I had that written down and then I—right before we clicked “record,” I was like, “Is this—is this fun? Do I need to rewrite this? Do I need to think of a different idea?”</p>
00:05:06	Adam	Host	<p>I feel like me and John are on the other side of the casting table and we’re bringing in third hosts to come in and audition—</p> <p><i>[Multiple people laugh.]</i></p> <p>—and you come in and that’s the line read you gave it and me and John are looking at each other, like, <i>[whispering]</i> “I think he’s the one!”</p>

00:05:20 John Host *[Ben laughs.]*
 “We don’t need—we don’t need to—you can tell everybody else to go!”

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:05:31 Ben Host It’s the first line in the film, Ben! I mean, y’know. You—it’s, uh, that’s a heavy hit—that’s a heavy-hitting start!
 This is a movie that has a lot of character types that we’ve seen before, but kind of re—used—like, the tropes are—are a little different. Like, the main character, the—Richard Basehart, Corporal Denno—like, would have been the feckless lieutenant, but didn’t have the guts to lead his men? But has enough insight to have, like, taken a step back from officer candidate school or whatever? And then struggles with that the whole movie. But also, like, the generals and the colonels are like badass as fuck and, like, smoking and strategizing while they’re getting their wounds stitched up at the *[through laughter]* beginning of this movie.

00:06:14 Adam Host I rode for Denno up until he told his story about what happened during the training exercise and then I was like, “Oh, no, Denno! You should not be out at war at all leading people!”

00:06:26 John Host We only see the officers... in the first, like, two minutes of the movie. And I really missed them the rest of the film. Because they were so badass and cool. But the movie then, y’know, became... became a movie about sergeants and corporals. ‘Cause we’ve seen that guy, too. The guy that went to Officer Candidate School and washed out either ‘cause he was a coward or a fuckup.

00:06:57 Ben Host *[Ben laughs.]*
 The movie basically tells you which three characters are gonna die.

00:07:00 John Host *[Laughs.]*
 Yeah! Right! They’re like, “Well, if these three characters die then you get your last act and the movie has a plot!”

00:07:07 Adam Host *[All laugh.]*
 I feel like we’ve seen a lot of cowards and fuckups that didn’t get people amputated.

00:07:12 Ben Host But also, like, I think it’s a really different kind of fuckup. Somebody that gets people amputated and doesn’t—and—and doesn’t care? And keeps trying to take responsibilities on themselves and lead? And the kind of person that makes a mistake, realizes they are not cut out for the thing that they were doing when they made that mistake, and says, “Okay, I need to be doing a different thing.”

00:07:38 Adam Host It’s a very fucked-up Peter Principle playing out here.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:07:46 Ben Host He doesn’t want it at any point! He would do anything not to do a promotion!
 Speaking of fuckups, do you guys want to hear about a goof from the IMDB “Goofs” section?

00:07:52 John Host Sure! There are a couple that I noticed, but let’s hear what they say!

00:07:57 Ben Host At the initial briefing in division headquarters, the two-star general and the colonels are all wearing rank insignia. In actuality, officers did not—

[Sound of telegraph beeps plays in background.]

—wear their insignia on the front lines, since doing so would identify the officers as choice targets for the enemy.
It's like lighting a cigarette in the jungles of Vietnam.
00:08:12 Adam Host
00:08:15 Ben Host Mm-hm. *[Laughs.]* Or wearing your sword if you're in the Imperial Japanese Army?
00:08:20 Adam Host Right.
00:08:22 John Host Hang on just a second.
00:08:24 Ben Host You—you're not sure that that, in fact, was true? And I'm sure somebody with a PhD in—

[John laughs.]

—rank insignia on the front line that hasn't listened to the episode will correct us on Twitter.
00:08:36 John Host It seems like the kind of critique that someone might make. Like, "Oh, y'know, they never wear rank insignia in battle." But that hasn't always been true. And there was a moment, y'know, where that became policy. And I don't know where that moment was. And some military historian—you're absolutely right, Ben—will not only have the answer—

[Ben laughs.]

—but will be really mad that we didn't have the answer.

[Ben laughs.]
00:09:03 Adam Host Doesn't it seem like a policy that would've been named after someone? Like, the Williams Rule—

[John laughs.]

—clearly stipulates, y'know—

[Ben laughs.]

—named after the guy who was shot for wearing his in—
00:09:14 John Host *[Through laughter]* The bullet went right through his general's star?
00:09:16 Adam Host *[Laughs.]* It shot the insignia right off him!

[Multiple people laugh.]

You know, if you don't pull the insignia out of the wound, it's gonna get infected.
00:09:25 Ben Host Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It'll supperate and fester.
00:09:28 Adam Host Uh-huh. *[Laughs.]*
00:09:29 John Host Have we watched another movie in the entire history of this show where... one of the main actors had a—an audible inner dialogue? Where he was like, "Boy—"
00:09:39 Ben Host It's like a *Seinfeld* episode!
00:09:40 John Host "—I really hope I don't get—I really hope two more sergeants don't die! Then I'll have to step up!"
00:09:46 Clip Clip **Speaker:** Maybe one joker. Maybe two. Maybe three!

00:09:48	John	Host	We should restate that we watched, um... last week—a film by the same director and starring the same—
00:09:58	Ben	Host	A lot of the same actors, actually!
00:09:59	John	Host	A lot of the same actors. Set in the same time period. <u>Made</u> in the same time period. And they really do—
00:10:03	Ben	Host	In the same year!
00:10:06	John	Host	They really do work as companion pieces, don't they? I mean, the two of 'em together.
00:10:08	Ben	Host	I thought that this was fascinating. The Army was reputedly <u>extremely</u> upset with some of the stuff in <i>The Steel Helmet</i> . But Fox Pictures was so impressed with <i>The Steel Helmet</i> that they signed Sam Fuller to a <u>seven</u> -picture deal! And this is the first movie he made on that deal. And the military kept playing ball with him, I guess knowing that it would be better to make friends with him than, y'know, make an enemy of him or something. But um, yeah. They gave him, like, a Medal of Honor recipient as a consultant to do, like, the verisimilitude? Of, uh, of war? And they became like great friends and collaborators for the rest of his career, apparently!
00:10:57	Adam	Host	<i>Steel Helmet</i> famously had a very small budget. It was neat to see Samuel Fuller given a little more money and then what he did with it—I mean, I'm definitely <u>not</u> talking about that it was shot primarily on a set? But a lot of those great camera sequences that we enjoyed from <i>Steel Helmet</i> —like, that is a sensibility that is carried over here in a couple of different scenes that I really liked.
00:11:21	Adam	Host	I thought the snow looked <u>great</u> in this movie!
00:11:24	John	Host	It did! How did they <u>do</u> it?!
00:11:26	Adam	Host	I don't know!
00:11:28	Ben	Host	It may be the best snow movie I've seen. The entire movie I was like, "Is this in a studio and they have perfect fake snow?" Which I've never seen before. "Or did they actually go out onto a mountaintop and shoot this?" <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:11:41	Adam	Host	It's on a soundstage and yet the snow looks like you could pack it and make it into a snowball. And yet you can't see anyone's breath! So... the studio wasn't air conditioned in a way that would make snow possible the way that we're seeing it.
00:11:55	John	Host	And what a <u>great</u> soundstage! I mean... looked great! Although looked <u>fake</u> , right? That first stunt where the Jeep gets hit with the shell and blows up and crashes? It's—
00:12:07	Ben	Host	Yeah.
00:12:08	John	Host	—one of the best—one of the best blown-up Jeep crashes that we've seen in movies that have a \$200 million budget!
00:12:17	Ben	Host	It looked like they just blew up and crashed a real Jeep with people in it.
00:12:21	John	Host	It looked like it <u>really</u> hurt! And people died!
00:12:24	Adam	Host	Yeah. Those Jeeps don't have crumple zones.
00:12:26	John	Host	No! There were a lot of good stunts. There were a lotta—there were a lotta <u>corny</u> stunts. And this is a movie for sure where there are a lot of people getting shot where they grab their chest and go "Ahhh!" And then—
			<i>[Multiple people laugh.]</i>
			—fall down and die? But when people come under heavy fire, like—it was pretty convincing! Sometimes.
00:12:47	Ben	Host	I, too, wanted to go back and see what the general and the colonels were up to, John. But I really liked the structure of this film, where

you get just a moment to see what the high level is, what the 30,000-foot view is. And then you're at sea with the guys. Right? Like, you're —you see them, like, find out what their orders are and they're like, "What the fuck?! We have to stay!?" Like... *[Laughs.]* And then, like, you never get the comfort of going back to seeing, like, the general going, like, "Well, because of the valiant efforts of those brave 19 men, we were able to save thr—" Y'know. It's nothing... you're never given any more context. They just have to believe that the general made a good choice. And like, this is such a different flavor of war film where the general did make a good choice and everybody has a pretty easy time believing that? Despite all the sergeants! Like, the sergeants should be, like, "Fuck the brass," right?

00:13:46 John Host It's another instance where there's a lot of "you were in the last war" talk. And so there's this feeling that—a weird feeling, again, that—not that this war is a continuation of World War II? But that there's all this institutional memory that gives these... gives the sergeants and the officers a lot more authority. Just, like, personal authority. If you were—if you went ashore at Anzio and now you're telling a guy to run up the side of a hill, that guy's gonna listen to you maybe more than—well, you see it! When it's just the corporals left. Uh, all of a sudden there's, like, no one has any authority anymore.

00:14:28 Ben Host Yeah. I mean, you have to have good enough, like, enough authority to convince these men to have run up ladders at Incheon. So. That's, uh—

00:14:39 John Host *[Multiple people laugh.]*
Nice callback.

00:14:40 Ben Host That's the kind of authority that they're working with.

00:14:43 Adam Host Once we learn that ladder thing, we are just—

[All laugh.]

00:14:48 Ben Host We have seized onto that.

00:14:49 Adam Host That is the main thing about the Korean War.
Like a police dog chomping into a forearm, we will not release the ladder.

00:14:58 Ben Host *[Multiple people laugh.]*
Well this was a police action!

00:15:00 Adam Host Ah, there you go!

00:15:02 John Host The thing about these—both these Sam Fuller movies is that there's very little politics! No one ever mentions MacArthur. No one ever mentions the big scope of the war or fighting Communists. They talk about Communists. They, y'know, they say it as an epithet. But there's that one little sarcastic line, like, "I thought this was a police action!" and the other guy says, "They shoulda got some cops!" *[Laughs.]*

00:15:21 Music Music "Bad Boys" by Inner Circle plays in the background and quickly fades out as John continues. Midtempo reggae.

Tell me!
Whatcha gonna do?

00:15:24 John Host And, y'know, it was a little—I think probably felt—that felt a little seditious in 1951 to say that. But weirdly, no bigger context. You're—once we get with the sergeants, we're—like you said,

Ben—really embedded with them and there’s no strategic picture anymore.

00:15:44 Ben Host I mean, the last movie was much more at liberty to explore some uncomfortable topics than this one does. And I wonder if that’s the effect of having a big studio. Uh, y’know. Making the—making the movie.

00:15:59 John Host Y’know, the last movie had all that personal politics. It was, like, social commentary.

00:16:04 Adam Host And racial politics, too, right? That’s totally absent here.

00:16:08 John Host But there was never—it wasn’t really... um... there wasn’t a ton of, like, interrogation of foreign policy exactly. Right? It was all—it was all, um, at the level of... it was at a human level, rather than at a geopolitical level.

00:16:29 Ben Host The only characters were, like, the Italian guy.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:16:34 John Host Right!

00:16:35 Ben Host Who wasn’t, like, an Italian guy who was born and raised in Lower Manhattan. He was actually Italian-American. Like, an immigrant. And... and yet, like, nobody seems to notice or care about that?

00:16:48 John Host Right. Right. And it’s never explained? Which is fine! I mean, I guess he’s like—

00:16:53 Ben Host It’s like a post-racial future where Italians are treated the same as everyone else.

00:16:58 John Host That’s right. That’s right. Oh. It was such a dream!

[Ben laughs.]

00:17:05 Ben Host It was such a dream that we could one day integrate Italians. This definitely is one of the movies that falls into the—there are eight white guys with the same stubby facial hair and helmet and I can’t really tell the difference between them?

00:17:16 Clip **Speaker:** Psychological warfare!

00:17:17 Ben Host Gene Evans was always easy to spot, but everybody else I was like—like, it took me a while to figure out that Denno was going to be an important character in this movie. *[Laughs.]* He looked a lot like the lieutenant? *[John agrees.]* And then there was the guy that was always, like, that Cliff Clavin guy that was always, like, *[imitating Cliff Clavin from Cheers]* “Eh, you know there, Diane, uh, that’s a stalactite, and then, uh, the one at the bottom of the cave is called a stalagmite.” *[Impression ends.]* And—and like, the tossing around—“Oh, you’ve got an education. Like, you should be a leader” thing? I got confused with the guy that mansplained everything? So. There were like three guys that I think were—was confusing for each other at various points early in the film.

00:18:03 Adam Host How would you like to be Gene Evans at this moment in time when every movie star looks like Cary Grant or Tony Curtis? This is like being Josh Gad right now.

00:18:13 Clip **Speaker:** I’m emotional.

00:18:14 Adam Host Like, if you—

[John laughs.]

—if you’re Gene Evans. All of a sudden the world has opened to you and your distinguishing features are actually a career benefit. Like, you can pick him out of any movie!

00:18:27 John Host His distinguishing features are that he looks like a pint of Guinness.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:18:34 Adam Host It's a good time to be Gene Evans, is what I'm saying.

00:18:36 Ben Host Yeah. It sure is.

00:18:37 Adam Host Here's another shirt, John. *[Laughs.]* It's the Guinness, like, toucan or whatever? And the pint of Guinness? And it's—"It's a good time to be Gene Evans."

[All laugh.]

00:18:52 Ben Host "Gene Evans makes you stronger."

00:18:54 Adam Host Right!

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:18:56 John Host The trope of the soldier with the—a stub of cigar just jammed up in the corner of his mouth? Is always a good World War II way to, y'know, like, the Telly Savalas guy in any group—because, y'know, there's always a Rickles. But there's kind of—

[Multiple people laugh.]

—often also a Savalas? And he's the one that's got the thing—the cigar jammed up in the corner of his mouth! But in this film there were like *[through laughter]* in that opening sequence as we're panning across the platoon, there's like five guys with the cigar! Same cigar! Jammed in the same way! And I was like, well that's—that's how we tell a guy!

00:19:34 Ben Host Vogl is like up in his own little group and was mainly just there to get radioed and then stabbed in the back, right?

00:19:42 Adam Host God, there's some fun things that Vogl did without dialogue. That sort of smirk? That "What are you gonna do?" smirk up on the cliffside?

00:19:51 Ben Host Mm-hm. *[Laughs.]*

00:19:51 Adam Host Ah! So aggravating!

[John laughs.]

00:19:56 John Host Apparently James Dean was in this movie!

00:19:58 Adam Host I didn't clock him! Did you guys?

00:20:00 John Host No.

00:20:01 Ben Host I did not.

00:20:02 John Host Just another white guy!

00:20:03 Ben Host I noticed it's—in some of the, like, wider shots where there was a whole group of people on screen? That I got, like, the beginnings of an erection? But I didn't realize why? So. And then in the scene where they all have their socks off and their feet are jammed together. Obviously I got an erection there.

00:20:19 Adam Host How are you gonna know it's James Dean if he's wearing a helmet?

[Ben laughs.]

I think a big part of the James Dean thing is his hair, right?

00:20:25 Ben Host Is James Dean in the foot scene?

00:20:27 Adam Host Oh, the foot scene. That was a big moment!

00:20:31 Ben Host We gotta check wikiFeet to see if James Dean is in the foot scene!

[Laughs.]

00:20:36 Adam Host *[John laughs.]*
Have your feet ever been so numb that you couldn't feel them at all?

00:20:40 Ben Host Yeah. I love that two guys think that one foot is—have misattributed one of their— *[Laughs.]* one of their feet.

00:20:48 Adam Host I've taken a shit so long that my feet fell asleep, but the feeling came right back.

00:20:52 John Host Oh, god.

00:20:54 Ben Host Oh, yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:20:56 John Host Uh, that—that is a scene that could've been played for laughs? But it actually was, like, kind of scary! It was a very effective and small way of communicating how cold it was and how dangerous that was. But my feet have been very cold and frostbitten, and I've—I've never been—they've never been so cold that you could be—you could be hitting my foot and I wouldn't at least feel it, like, in my knee.

00:21:23 Ben Host *[Through laughter]* Yeah.

00:21:25 Adam Host Why isn't that scene funny is something I want to interrogate. And I think the reason why is that... Samuel Fuller gives everyone that breath to look at each other and think about what has just happened. Right? Like, everyone doesn't just pop up and go to their cots or go sleep in the corner of the cave somewhere. There's that moment of recognition that he lets you have. And I think that's really deft.

00:21:50 John Host Yeah. When Denno jumps up in that moment? There really is a pause there where I wondered, "What's happening? What just—where— *[through laughter]* Whose foot is that?"

00:22:01 Adam Host I thought for sure it was gonna be a dead guy who was—

00:22:03 Adam Host **Adam:** —who was laying behind them or something.

John: Yeah! I did, too! I did, too!

00:22:07 John Host *[Ben laughs.]*
And that reveal happens so slowly and there is that—there's that sort of interregnum moment where you're like, "It's a dead guy!" And then you realize, "Oh no, it's Sergeant Rock." That was very effective!

00:22:21 Ben Host Sergeant Rock is a great leader. I love the just kind of like, "Welp, only three things you gotta worry about in the infantry, gentlemen!"

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:22:44 Adam Host "So, uh, get those socks off! Get those little piggies rubbing together!" It's very matter-of-fact, but it is freighted with how much danger they are all in. Because they are fighting the North Koreans, but also the cold.

00:22:50 Crosstalk Crosstalk There's great value placed on dry socks? And yet every one of these guys is walking through that cold puddle in the middle of the cave.

00:22:53 John Host **John:** That drove me crazy!

Adam: That drove me nuts. *[Laughs.]*

00:22:53 John Host There's a big puddle—a freezing puddle—right in the middle, but you can walk around it! You could—I would be walking around the puddle.

00:23:02 Ben Host They're all wearing tall boots and gaiters! There's not—water's not gonna get in there!

00:23:06 John Host What?! Those are—those are just, like, 1950 Red Wings. Uh, they're like—

[Ben laughs.]

00:23:16 Ben Host —totally waterlogged and freezing cold!
No! If you look really closely, you can see the little Gore-Tex tags.

[John laughs.]

00:23:22 John Host There are a couple of great boot scenes. If you're somebody that likes old boots, a couple of—that—when, uh, the guy is walking across the minefield and stepping on the snow? We're just—we're close-focused on some beautiful old boots.

00:23:37 Adam Host You need your snow to look right for that scene. Right? Like, that's—I feel like the centerpiece scene that you build out from.

00:23:44 John Host Super-effective tiptoe through the minefield scene.

00:23:48 Ben Host The way the snow, like, slightly collapses when he puts his weight on each foot? Like, and—so his foot clicks down a quarter of an inch each time? Is like, boy, that is—that makes—that just piques the tension.

[John laughs.]

00:24:03 Adam Host If it's not real snow, it has to be poison. Like, it's a chemical that they could only use in '51?

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:24:09 John Host That's why you never saw it again. *[Laughs.]*

00:24:13 Adam Host Yeah. Yeah.

00:24:15 John Host 'Cause it's the powdered thalidomide?

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:24:17 Adam Host It makes me suspicious.

00:24:19 Ben Host Powdered thalidomide is the way to go, right?

00:24:21 Adam Host That minefield scene is so great in retrospect because you can see the buildup. Like, Denno has a moment to... to do something heroic without firing a weapon? But that counterpoint of him also wanting to save a life so that he's not next man up? Is just terrifically done, I think.

00:24:41 John Host Yeah. Yeah. It's a wonderful plot evolution. And then to have the sergeant die as soon as he gets him back?

00:24:49 Adam Host Oof. Yeah.

00:24:51 John Host And just erases all the heroism and Sergeant Rock is like, "Well, nice effort!" *[Laughs.]* "But he was dead anyway." *[Laughs.]*

00:24:57 Adam Host Yeah. And the minefield sketch is useless too? Like, every single reason to go out there is dissolved at that point.

00:25:03 Music Music Reprise of "War" theme song.

00:25:04 Promo Clip *[A telephone rings.]*

Hotshot Hollywood Producer: Listen, I'm a hotshot Hollywood movie producer.

Music: Fun, grooving music begins to play quietly in the background.

Producer: You have until I finish my glass of *[articulating]* kom-bu-cha to pitch me your idea. Go.

[Slurping sounds.]

Ify: Alright! It's called *Who Shot Ya*: a movie podcast that isn't just a bunch of straight, white dudes. I'm Ify Nwadiwe, the new host of the show and a certified BBN.

Producer: BBN?

Ify: Buff Black Nerd.

Alonso: I'm Alonso Duralde, an elderly gay and legit film critic who wrote a book on Christmas movies.

Drea: I'm Drea Clark, a loud, white lady from Minnesota.

Ify: Each week, we talk about a new movie in theaters and all the important issues going on in the film industry.

Alonso: It's like *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* meets *Cruising*.

Ify: And if it helps seal the deal? I can flex my muscles while we record each episode.

Producer: I'm sorry, this is a podcast?! I'm a movie producer. *[Disdainfully]* How did you get in here?

Drea: Ify, quick! Start flexing!

Ify: *[Dramatically]* Bicep! Lats! Chest! *Who Shot Ya*, dropping every Friday on MaximumFun.org, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

[Music ends.]

[Radio interference followed by laidback music with a snare drum beat. A phone rings as the DJ speaks.]

Radio DJ: Welcome back to *Fireside Chat* on KMAX. With me in-studio to take your calls is the dopest duo on the West Coast, Oliver Wang and Morgan Rhodes.

[Click.]

Go ahead, caller.

Caller: Hey. Uh, I'm looking for a music podcast that's insightful and thoughtful, but like, also helps me discover artists and albums that I've never heard of.

Morgan Rhodes: Yeah, man. Sounds like you need to listen to *Heat Rocks*. Every week, myself—and I'm Morgan Rhodes—and my co-host here, Oliver Wang, talk to influential guests about a canonical album that has changed their lives.

00:25:56 Promo Clip

Oliver Wang: Guests like Moby, Open Mike Eagle, talk about albums by Prince, Joni Mitchell, and so much more.

Caller: Yooo! What's that show called again?

Morgan: *Heat Rocks*. Deep dives into hot records.

Oliver: Every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[Music suddenly gives way to static and a dial tone.]

00:26:43 Music Music
00:26:44 Ben Host

Reprise of "War" theme song.
I feel like this is a war movie where you could, like, map this experience onto lots of non-war things? Just, like... things that you want to have the courage to do in your own life and just haven't gotten there yet? And that felt kind of unique and interesting among the films we've watched. Like, this is much a parable about just, like, finding... the courage in yourself to do something. Or having that, uh, a situation thrust upon you where you—you, like, must have that courage.

00:27:16 John Host

Well there—there're two things going on with Denno. Because Denno doesn't wanna be a leader. And that's a very relatable kind of... y'know, he washed out of Officer Candidate School even though he was at the top of his class because when he was put in charge of men in a tense situation, he made bad decisions. He panicked. Understand-ish-able.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:27:45 Adam Host
00:27:47 John Host

But then Denno also doesn't wanna fire his weapon!
Right.

And so the whole narrative of Denno being, like, "Hey, look, I'm a good soldier! I do my job! I'm here to—I'm here to play. I just don't want to lead!" ...is not true! Because Denno also is out there with like guys climbing right up his nose and he's got a bead on 'em and he doesn't pull the trigger! And at one point, y'know, there's a firefight and Sergeant Rock grabs his gun and is like, "It's cold as ice!"

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:28:19 Ben Host
00:28:22 Adam Host

But he doesn't bust him down for not firing his weapon. He's like, "You're gonna have to fire your weapon, dude! Here's some bullets! Go kill a guy!"

"Go kill eight guys!"

Denno, from that point on, starts keistering his weapon just to keep it warm?

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:28:46 John Host

So Rock won't suspect? *[Laughs.]* John, you're totally right. It seems like two different issues for Denno. One of them being a sort of conscientious objection that's totally separate from his bad leadership skills. And I wonder why they comingled them for his character so much to the degree that they did.

I'm not sure! Y'know, the—like—putting people at risk by being a bad lieutenant—not a *Bad Lieutenant*.

[Adam laughs.]

He's not doing coke off a hooker's ass. But y'know, there's two different ways of putting people at risk. Bad decisions, but also, like, he's letting enemy scouts get right into the perimeter. Uh, his failure to fire is gonna result in the death of somebody and—and maybe, arguably, does, even! Well, or at least, y'know, the sergeant takes a bullet.

00:29:18 Ben Host Yeah. We've seen a lot of movies like—movies that were made in the first year or two of World War II were much more explicitly about, like—even if they weren't just a recruitment video? Like... they were recruitment tools and we've seen movies that dealt with people that had reluctances or misgivings about being in combat and like giving them rationales for participating in the war in one way or another. And this really seems like a very distinct, uh, distinctly different project because this guy's internal struggles are not mapped onto... like, a... y'know, a larger need of the—of our society to rally together at this time or whatever.

00:30:09 John Host I think I've talked about it before, but the Korean War is—has always been really hard to get a handle on for me. What—what it felt like in... America at the time. Made even more difficult because this was my mother and my uncle's—her brother's time! Like, my mother was born in '34, so 1951 she was 17 years old. Right? All of the kids in her high school were gonna go to the Korean War and a lot of 'em did! But my father's generation, who were World War II vets—like, my dad never talked about Korea! He never mentioned it to me. So it—so it was seen as a kind of—

00:30:53 Ben Host So almost like he forgot!

00:30:55 John Host He— *[Laughs.]* I mean, it's like it was seen as a—

[Adam laughs.]

00:31:01 Ben Host —I don't know what it was seen as, right? Like...

Yeah. 'Cause it's not—it's not Vietnam. But it's got all these parallels to Vietnam in that it was quote-unquote "police action." It was an Asian nation where the South was fighting the North and it was a proxy for capitalists versus communists.

00:31:17 John Host I mean, I think partly it was that it ended in a stalemate and everybody was like, let's just forget that happened.

00:31:23 Clip **Speaker:** It was a tie!

00:31:24 Ben Host We still have troops there, right? Like, there's still a—like, the DMZ is still manned by American forces?

00:31:32 Adam Host I mean, by ignoring the true consequences in Korea, did that make Vietnam—like, did that grease the skids toward making Vietnam possible the way that it was?

00:31:41 John Host Has to have.

00:31:43 Ben Host What's the worst that could happen? We could have a huge— *[Laughs.]* A huge border to—to guard in some other country!

00:31:51 John Host Right. This is a movie where we see the Chinese. We're not fighting North Koreans in this war. We're fighting Chinese regular army.

00:32:01 Ben Host Chinese regular army and their shipping blanket uniforms.

[John laughs.]

00:32:06 John Host Which are amazing. I love their uniforms.

00:32:09 Ben Host *[Ben laughs.]*
 00:32:12 John Host I love them so much. Everything quilted, please!
 Yeah. Oh my god. They—they're not a faceless enemy! We see them repeatedly and they're not—they're not parodied. Y'know, there's politics in it, but they're not an unseen, unknowable other. They're portrayed as kind of a... y'know, like, a, um, a worthy opponent.

00:32:33 Adam Host Isn't it interesting you also see them at rest, too? It isn't just an oncoming horde or a bunch of troops taking their positions? Like, we see them eat and drink and rest and play the bugle and, like, we see different facets of them in a way that I think is unique.

00:32:50 Ben Host Yeah. That PsyOps stuff with the bugle is wild.
 00:32:53 John Host *[Through laughter]* I know, right? Super low intensity crazy-making bugle playing.

00:32:59 Ben Host So they get one of those bugles and use it to trick them—trick the enemy into thinking that there are Chinese troops in a place that they didn't know about or something? Is that—

00:33:09 John Host Who knows?
 00:33:11 Ben Host I couldn't wrap my mind around what was going on there.
 00:33:14 John Host That was a weird scene. Because, y'know, Sergeant Rock said, "Go get me one of those bugles." And he sent two guys out. And one of the guys got killed. And... it really made me think, like... y'know, when you send two guys out to capture an enemy bugle and one of 'em dies, all of a sudden that bugle cost a life. Cost one of your men! But there wasn't a ton of, y'know, like, Sergeant Rock didn't spend a ton of time going—looking at the bugle and going, "Was this worth it, guy?"

00:33:49 Ben Host Yeah. Nobody was like, "What the hell is wrong with you?! He had to die for that?"

00:33:53 John Host But in a way it also felt kinda real! Like—yeah! Go get the bugle! And—oh. A guy died because that's what happens in war but I wanted that bugle—y'know, and now we're gonna play the bugle and it's gonna fuck with them. Isn't that hilarious.

00:34:03 Music Music "Feels So Good" by Chuck Mangione plays in the background.
 Smooth jazz-pop flugelhorn.

00:34:05 Adam Host What fucked with them was that that guy played Chuck Mangione.

[John laughs.]

00:34:12 John Host That's enough to fuck with anyone!
 But I really did feel like that—

[Music fades out.]

—rather than seem like a strange, um, rather than seem like a thing the film didn't address? I feel like the film kinda did address it! The idea that... that you might lose a guy on a mission like that and that it all panned out in the end. It's the type of thing that if you were Sergeant Rock and you had mustered out of the army and you were sitting—you were working at a Pontiac dealership 15 years later—

[Ben laughs.]

—and laying in bed at night with your wife next to you and you're thinking about the guy that got killed trying to steal a Chinese bugle

for you... And yet, I guess part of being a sergeant is that you have to say, like—

00:34:55 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** A guy dies—

Adam: “Sir, I’m just trying to buy a Trans Am, man.”

[Multiple people laugh.]
[Through laughter] “Look, man, I lost a lotta guys!” *[Laughs.]*

00:34:59 John Host

[Ben laughs.]

00:35:03 Adam Host “You know what? Is there another salesman around here I could talk to?”

[John laughs.]

00:35:05 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** *[Yelling]* “The bugle!!!”

Adam: “You’re kind of giving me the creeps.”
[Yelling] “I traded a man for a bugle!”

00:35:07 John Host

[Adam laughs.]
 The guy tries out the horn on the car—

00:35:11 Ben Host

[John laughs.]

—and it sends this guy into a fugue state?

[All laugh. “Feels So Good” plays in background again briefly, then fades.]

00:35:21 Ben Host The last Sam Fuller Korean War movie we watched was about establishing one observation post. This one is about establishing a whole bunch of them. But because of the, like, ruggedness of the terrain they find that they have some blind spots. Like, that they, y’know, get snuck up on and they, y’know, they ring up Vogl on the radio they’re like, “What the fuck are you doing, man? Like, you gotta spot those guys!” And they’re like, “We didn’t see ‘em!”

[John laughs.]

And I really liked the mind puzzle of that. Like, how do you—like, y’know, there’s a spot in the road that they’re gonna try and defend. And try and make themselves see like a bigger force than they actually are. And the movie does a great job of kind of explaining the challenge of that to you and then showing you these guys actually going about doing it. And it’s, uh... it’s a—it’s a very different kind of problem than we get in a lot of movies. It’s more like—it’s like the 300 at Thermopylae, not, not, uh, y’know, your typical, uh, “We gotta go take this town or we gotta bomb this bridge,” or whatever kind of movie.

00:36:30 John Host Although the studio backlot did have a—did create a geographical problem. In that there were quite a few scenes—particularly as the siege went on—where the set just didn’t allow for the geography to... make any sense? Because people are—

00:36:50 Ben Host Yeah. It was a little confusing.

00:36:53 John Host People are looking down on other people and yet there’s a little bit of stock footage and—

00:36:57 Adam Host It had some school play constraints.

00:36:59 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Yeah. For sure.

00:37:01 John Host **Adam:** With blocking.
For sure. So that was a, um... a little bit of an issue. Particularly at the end when that Chinese squad overran them and then was able to look down on their position? I was like, "Now where are they exa—" *[Laughs.]* "How do they have—

[Ben laughs.]

00:37:21 Ben Host "—how can they see, like, inside the cave?" But, y'know.
00:37:22 John Host I don't know. Yeah.
What can you do? You can't build a set that's... you couldn't film this, like, in the Alps. That would've been very expensive.

00:37:29 Ben Host *[Through laughter]* Right. And who knows if the equipment of 1951 could stand up to the kind of environmental challenges that filming on location would've presented. One of the things you have to contend with in very cold environments is—especially in this era—is like, the batteries are like—they might be like lead-acid batteries or something like that? But they're like—they're not like modern lithium ion batteries where you can like, fly your drone wherever you want? Like, if you're out in the cold with a camera from—that was built in, y'know, 1949—the kind of batteries that power that camera lose their charge very rapidly the colder it gets. So. It would actually be, like, a technical problem.

00:38:16 Adam Host Like, they'll gather the batteries together and then they'll start rubbing them to keep them warm?

[Ben laughs and agrees.]

00:38:29 Ben Host And like one of the batteries, like... one of the batteries is your battery! And you didn't even know it when you were rubbing it!
00:38:29 John Host That's a scary moment!
Yeah.

00:38:44 Ben Host Interesting, uh, that both these movies are black and white. This was a—Ben, what was the... what do you consider, like, the era where color started to be the majority of films? When is—when does that happen?

00:39:06 Adam Host Oh. I don't know! I—this seems like it's... well into the color era. I mean, we've watched a lot of World War II films that were shot during World War II in color. So. Um, yeah. I don't know if this was—if it was still like a perfectly normal aesthetic choice? Or a—
or what.

00:39:17 John Host The fifties were really the bridge decade between black-and-white and color. But it was the mid-fifties when the Technicolor films really began to popularize.
00:39:19 Adam Host Right.

00:39:28 Ben Host But it's not like you couldn't have made a color film in 1941. Like, the technology was there. It just wasn't as available as it would be later.
00:39:30 John Host Yeah.
00:39:34 Adam Host I wonder how that snow and that backlot would've looked in color.
00:39:35 Ben Host Right!
Oh yeah. That stuff was actually orange!

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:39:38 John Host Many people don't realize that. Powdered thalidomide is—y'know, like, fluorescent orange.

00:39:41 Clip Clip *[Multiple people laugh.]*
Speaker: Some of the guys think you're playing footsies with your own squad!

00:39:45 Ben Host What do you think a 1951 Sam Fuller is trying to say to a... cinema-going public in making this film?

00:39:54 Adam Host Cynically, I feel like he is trying to say that, "I am worth a seven-picture deal and I'm not gonna rock the boat with a bunch of conversation about race relations back home."

00:40:08 Ben Host Interesting.

00:40:10 John Host That whole—"You've gotta be—"

00:40:12 Clip Clip **Speaker:** You gotta have the guts to lead!

00:40:13 John Host He hit that so hard. That it felt ironic—it felt sarcastic to me. Because there's nothing else in the movie that is spoken in that way. There's no other line in the film that sounds like that. It felt really, like, "Here's your propaganda line. Now get off my back." And it was done—it almost felt like—like a dark comedy reading of that line. To open the film on it was weird. And I felt like, "Is this movie gonna be like—is there gonna be a guy with a cigar in the corner of his mouth going, *[gruff, yelling voice]* 'You gotta have guts!'" *[Regular voice]* Um—

00:40:53 Adam Host *[Ben laughs.]*
I'm glad it wasn't! They only rang that bell once.

00:40:56 John Host Right! And so it stands out as like... like he was hoping that whatever Army censor was watching the movie would sit back in his chair and go, alright, this movie's okay. And then turn it off or something. *[Laughs.]* Not watch the rest of it.

00:41:10 Adam Host Yeah. The censor with a short attention span that just turned it off? Yeah.

00:41:13 John Host Not watch the rest of the movie, where it's like, well, it's really about a coward.

00:41:17 Adam Host The—the Army censor is Vogl?

[All laugh.]

"I'll put you in the movie! You just gotta look the other way."

00:41:28 John Host *[Ben laughs.]*
"I didn't see nothin'!"

00:41:30 Adam Host Has there ever been a more Polish-looking guy than Henry Kulky? The guy who plays Vogl? Wow. What a face!

00:41:36 John Host He's one of those guys that is like completely ageless? He could be 27? He could be 77.

00:41:44 Adam Host *[Adam laughs.]*
You talk about city miles!

00:41:48 John Host *[All laugh.]*
The film is very narrowly focused. Right? It's not just that it's—just a platoon holding a pass for a very limited amount of time. Y'know. The film almost happens in real time. It's like, "You guys—hold this pass for some number of hours while we bug out." But also it's set

in winter. Which really is a—it makes it extremely specific. About the setting. Right? If you're in... if you're in the US in 1951 and you're watching this movie, I mean, it was set within a period of a couple of months in a place in Korea—y'know, like, it—it's not... like, World War II movies we have that benefit of knowing all the different battles. So you can say, like, "Oh, the Battle of the Bulge happened in winter and this is set there, then." But y'know, we don't have that same strong memory of, like, the Korean War and all its engagements.

00:42:50 Ben Host

Yeah. This came out at the end of November in 1951. So like almost like—pre-imagining wintry combat in the Korean War.

00:43:01 Adam Host

No kidding.

00:43:03 John Host

Right. They would've had to have been filming it in the summer knowing it was gonna come out in the winter! I mean, it's very... it's so localized. That that also feels... like an interesting creative choice. Right? It—rather than make a—because I guess the war hasn't been going on long enough for them even to make a general picture of war! Y'know, the way *M*A*S*H* is kind of, like... they throw every bit of Korea in it? Y'know, there's always something happening in *M*A*S*H* because it was a ten-year-long television show about a two-and-a-half-year-long war?

00:43:41 Ben Host

Yeah.

00:43:43 John Host

But this is like—it's so narrow. It's really curious!

00:43:46 Adam Host

It's interestingly speculative in a lot of ways. Because like even when you boil down the strategy, it's just an anonymous canyon and a river and a cave. Like, you don't really know where you are geographically in country. You get a look at a map, but... that could be anywhere! Right? It doesn't matter! It's more about the people!

00:44:07 John Host

So the Korean War started in the summer of '50. And that—the invasion of Incheon and we—that was the movie with the ladders that you were referencing. What was that movie called? *MacArthur?* *Operation Cromite: Battle for Incheon?*

00:44:18 Ben Host

[Adam laughs.]

00:44:22 John Host

Operation Cromite: Battle for Incheon was in September.

00:44:26 Ben Host

Never has such a bad movie made such a big impression on this podcast. [Laughs.]

[John laughs.]

00:44:32 John Host

That was September of 1950. And then... by December of '50, that we were—the Marines were at the Chosin Reservoir. That was, like, a major incident. And then this movie was made in the summer of the following year. Um, but this movie was made after MacArthur was kicked out of Korea! So I mean, a lot of stuff has happened already! None of that is referred to in the movie. But we have had fighting in winter already for one season. Before this movie comes out. So it's not—it wasn't completely speculative. We'd seen it already.

00:45:09 Clip Clip

Speaker: I've seen it all.

00:45:11 John Host

I think that the—that these battles are referring to... like, the Chinese—more than once—really threatened to, like, invade the South, like, and just do a massive troop movement and just, y'know, push the American army into the ocean.

00:45:33 Ben Host

Yeah. Well, and crucially, this is a movie about a withdrawal. Like, they're—the main force is retreating in this movie. And that's, like, interestingly, like, so many movies treat retreat as shameful or,

y'know, like, there's a lot of emotional weight to the idea of retreating. And in this movie it's like yeah, we're gonna pull back for a second. Regroup. Then we're gonna go get 'em. Like, there's no... this doesn't reflect on the overall mission at all. The fact that we're retreating. It's just, how do we retreat from this place right now? So that we can kick their ass later, better.

00:46:10 John Host Right. I guess—this is something that I didn't realize until recently. But Seoul changed hands four times. In the war. The Chinese and North Koreans captured Seoul and then the Allied troops pushed 'em out. That happened four times!

00:46:28 Ben Host And then The Killers had it for a little while, right? And—'cause they had this whole...

00:46:32 Adam Host Oh, god. Oh no.

00:46:34 Ben Host But they weren't soldiers?

00:46:36 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** Oh, no. Hmm.

John: Oh man. Really bad.

[Ben laughs.]

00:46:41 Ben Host Hey guys, remember that great The Killers joke I did earlier?

00:46:46 Adam Host We are through the joke looking glass now!

00:46:49 Ben Host I have a question. Any significance to him being named Sergeant Rock and Republic of Korea—ROK?

00:46:57 John Host Oh. I mean, Sergeant Rock was a—was a pretty longstanding character. Right? Sergeant Rock was a comic book character. When did Sergeant Rock come into the popular imagination?

00:47:12 Ben Host 1959 is the first appearance of the comic book character. Was it based on this character?

00:47:21 John Host Can't have been.

00:47:23 Ben Host No. No reference to *Fixed Bayonets!* in the Wikipedia article about Sergeant Rock.

00:47:31 John Host I mean, it's a great name. For a comic book hero.

00:47:36 Ben Host And it was a good name for the character in this movie! It leapt out at me because I was reading the Korean War article on Wikipedia after watching this movie and ROK is... y'know, sprinkled pretty liberally throughout that article and I was like, "Oh, Sergeant Rock! I wonder if that's intentional or not!"

00:47:53 John Host That would be a clever little Easter egg.

00:47:55 Music Music Reprise of "War" theme song.

00:47:59 Adam Host Well, at the end of the movie, unfortunately, Sergeant Rock is dead. And we know this because those are his dying words.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:48:07 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** "I'm dead." *[Laughs.]*

00:48:13 Adam Host **Adam:** He tells Denno, "I told you. I'm dead." *[Laughs.]* But is this film dead, come review time? Nobody's got dry socks at the end of this film, but are there any dry eyes? I've been thinking a lot about what the right rating system would be for a film like *Fixed Bayonets!*, a film which can't really get it together enough to decide whether or not that exclamation point belongs in its many marketing materials that you find online.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:48:47 John Host
00:48:49 Adam Host

Some posters do have it. Some don't. I'm personally a big fan of the exclamation point and I want more of them to be in the movie titles. Better than a colon! Even though they often are the harbinger of a very bad film. Uh, it's gonna be on a scale of one to five bugles, we rate this film.

[John: Yesss!]

And the reason is, uh, how instrumental—

[John groans.]

—that object is. As a—

[Ben laughs.]

—as both a tool that the Koreans use to psychologically fight against our American troops and the very thing that the US troops take and use against them! It feels like propaganda! Right? It feels related to propaganda. The use of that bugle. Because it's not a weapon; it's a way to torment or rally, depending on how you're using it. And I think that's related to how we're going to be reviewing this film because in what ways does being an effective propaganda film relate to being a good film-film? I don't think that the two are very related. And I think on the one hand, this film probably did great things in recruiting a person that might feel like they would be a bad soldier?

[Ben laughs.]

The very straight line in Danno's story of, y'know, a guy watching the guys above him get killed and then him reluctantly being foisted into his position of leadership wasn't interesting enough to me to hold my attention. And this is in spite of the many great things that Samuel Fuller does as a director. And I loved many of them! Like— all those three- and four-point sequences he does. That one sequence where Sergeant Rock scrabbles down the hill, then back up a hill, and then he—he bayonets that guy behind the rock? And then he scrabbles back down again and then looks upward toward the camera to yell at Vogl?

Like, that is a one-minute sequence that he does on a crane! And the crane's constantly moving. It's just incredible, some of the stuff he does. But it's anti-incredible, some of the character development that happens in a film like this. And while we do not compare *Friendly Fire* films to each other, I found *Steel Helmet* to be a far more interesting film! In the story that it tries to tell. And I hope that this first Samuel Fuller film does not begin a pattern of less-interesting characters and less-interesting stories as his oeuvre continues with the 20th Century Fox company. I'm just gonna give this three bugles. Good but not great. Wish it were more interesting. I think I liked it a little bit more than you did! I think every film does not have to be a polemic. I think it's a really interesting demonstration of the kind of range of talent that Samuel Fuller had as a director? I mean, we've seen some—y'know, I thought *The Big*

00:51:31 Ben Host

Red One was, y'know, a cheaply made film that really showed its—its cheapness?

[Adam laughs.]

And, uh, and that's really true of *The Steel Helmet* as well. Like, the—like you can hear the sound bouncing off the walls inside the tiny studios that they shot in, even when they're trying to make it look like they're fighting in a forest. I mean, this is a much higher budget film and a much more polished film than *The Steel Helmet*. But it's also a totally different kind of film, and it is very distinct from *The Big Red One* and *The Steel Helmet*. Like, all three films are war films that take on a very different aspect of war. And I think that's really cool to see. And this one is, uh, not exactly a thinker but it is a fun action movie and I'd recommend it for, y'know, just a fun afternoon film. I'm gonna give it three-and-a-half bugles.

00:52:54 Adam Host
00:52:57 Ben Host
00:53:01 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Which half? The horn half or the mouthpiece half?

You assume that I'm cutting it that way! I'm not!

John: Oh, ho, ho! Whoa!

00:53:04 Ben Host
00:53:06 John Host

Adam: Oh, you're bifurcating it?

Yeah! Like Boromir's horn!

Oh, I never saw that coming!

[Adam laughs.]

00:53:10 Adam Host

Like Boromir's horn!

Like you go to a museum for brass instruments and you see the inside?

00:53:13 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Ben: Yeah, yeah. The cross-section.

Adam: Alright. Yeah.

00:53:19 Ben Host
00:53:21 Adam Host
00:53:22 Crosstalk Crosstalk

John: Cut with one of those high-pressure water cutters?

Cloven in twain!

How about that. Wow. It makes me wanna cross my legs!

John: I know! Yikes! Yikes!

00:53:28 John Host

Ben: The Horn of Gondor is no more!

Well, the Sword of Isildur can be re-forged!

[Ben laughs.]

[Through laughter] So can a bugle of *Fixed Bayonets!* Yeah. Y'know, I come down really hard on a lot of movies, as you know, when they insult my intelligence or when they overreach? Or, y'know, in a lot of cases when they just—when I feel like they've failed. They've failed at whatever they're trying to do. And this is a movie that's—it still feels like a play, kind of. Y'know, the—it's definitely set in a paper-mache universe.

[Ben laughs.]

And it, um... y'know, it's very limited in scope. It's trying to tell an extremely limited story. And a lot of its failures are just that you can see the—you can see the chicken wire behind the tree. The

performances are great. And I guess what I'm saying is, Adam, a lot of times you go to—um, you ride pretty hard for movies that are just fun? Or just, uh, not fun but like... well, pork chop movies or popcorn movies. Like, let's just watch it! It doesn't have to say anything. It doesn't have to do anything or mean anything.

00:54:42 Adam Host That's not unfair! But like, I think the proximity effect is happening here with me. And that just having seen *Steel Helmet* you know Samuel Fuller has that gear in him, and then he totally downshifts into *Fixed Bayonets!*.

[John agrees.]

00:55:09 John Host And that's—I think that's how I'm gonna defend myself against something like that. Which is... George P. Cosmatos is not—is not making a great war film and then making *First Blood Part II*.
00:55:10 Adam Host [Through laughter] Right. Like, you know the kind of film he's making. He's making *Tombstone* and that. Y'know?
00:55:14 John Host But there are so many... there are so many different examples of films where... where the inconsistencies, the chickenshit-ness of the failure to engage the material? Leaves me with a rotten taste. And in this case, y'know, what he did was make, um, he made a personality, uh, adventure movie. It's almost like—it almost feels like a—one of the *Huck Finn* novels. And we've seen books like that, too! Like, boys' adventure! Right?
00:55:50 Ben Host You mean, *Huckleberry Finn*—the Great American Novel, John?
00:55:53 John Host [Laughs.] Yeah! *Huckleberry Finn*. But there are a couple of other— [Laughs.] There are other—there was a lot of fanfic around *Huck Finn*? He did a lot. He—
00:56:00 Adam Host I went into a bookstore and I asked for a couple of those *Huck Finn* novels.

[John laughs.]

00:56:05 John Host You know, *Huckleberry Finn* went to San Francisco. He joined the circus. He became a surfer.
00:56:10 Ben Host Oh, wow!
00:56:11 John Host Oh, yeah. It's a whole set of 'em.
00:56:13 Ben Host He had sex with Spock, I believe?
00:56:15 John Host It's a whole—a whole series of 'em. Yeah, yeah. Um... but so—so those scenes that you referred to, Ben, like the long shots, or Adam, the ones where—y'know, Sergeant Rock falls all the way down a mountainside; runs up the other side; then comes back down and runs up—y'know, that's all—that's all just—I was just throwing popcorn in, watching that stuff go by.

And the failures—like, the fact that none of the—or a lot of the characters take a long time to distinguish themselves from one another? The most egregious scene in the movie is where the camera pans across all the different guys and we hear their inner thoughts and they're like, "I hope I'm gonna get that guy's socks!" [Imitating Italian accent] "I hope he never—he doesn't think he's gonna get my socks!" [Regular voice] and then the third guy's like, "I hope he doesn't realize I'm wearing his socks!" It was like, [makes disapproving noise akin to a gameshow buzzer being pressed when someone gets the answer wrong].

[Ben laughs.]

00:57:06 Adam Host Not really.
00:57:09 John Host That felt like a studio note moment. Like—
00:57:11 Adam Host Yeah, it did.
“Where are the jokes?”

[John laughs.]

00:57:14 John Host How about—how about one joke?
But there was never a point, I don’t think, where I felt like this movie was betraying me? You’re absolutely right that Fuller has—and I— I’m with you, that I look forward to watching other movies in his oeuvre. Uh, and hope that he continues to, like, explore darker themes. But, y’know, he doesn’t shy away from all the different aspects of cowardice and fear. But you’re right! It’s not like a four bugle movie.

[Ben laughs.]

But I’m gonna—I’m gonna go with Ben here. I’m gonna do three-and-a-half bugles, except my bugle’s gonna be cut like a normal person would cut a bugle.

[Adam laughs.]

00:58:03 Ben Host Whoa!
00:58:05 John Host Across, so that you—and I’m gonna keep the mouthpiece side so that what you get is a bugle that goes *[makes honking and spitting sound similar to what might come out of an amputated bugle]*.

[Multiple people laugh.]

00:58:17 Adam Host This is one of our finest episodes.

[John laughs.]

00:58:20 Ben Host *[Through laughter]* This is a dumb show. *[Laughs.]*
00:58:23 Adam Host Uh, who’s the finest guy? In the movie? Ben, who’s your guy?
00:58:27 Ben Host So there’s that, uh, great sequence where... we’re, uh, hunkered down with the guys in the cave and the enemy soldiers all start playing their bugles. And there’s a shot where at first I thought there were three guys playing bugles? But then one of the guys takes his bugle down and I realized it was a beer bottle and then he likes passes it to another guy who also takes a swig? And like—
00:58:54 Adam Host That was great!
00:58:56 Ben Host That—it was just a little visual gag that I just—I love stuff like that and I laughed out loud at it. And so, uh, “beer bottle that looks like a bugle guy” is my guy.

[Adam laughs.]

00:59:07 Adam Host I had a very similar guy! It was a visual gag that got me. It was when Whitey’s explaining telepathy to Borcellino? And, uh, and he’s gesticulating wildly. While—

[John laughs.]

—explaining this to him. And one of my favorite bits that I just do just for me is whenever anyone gesticulates I'll always like look at their hands? I'll follow the hands around? Because it amuses me. And the way that Borcellino does that to Whitey here, uh, it was very funny to me. So I'm gonna make him my guy for that reason. He's not doing it as a bit, but uh— *[Laughs.]* I don't know. That was a moment of levity that I enjoyed.

00:59:50 John Host My guy is the, um... is the Chinese spotter at the final sort of siege of the valley. Who *[through laughter]* is kind of like—peering over the edge of a cliff with his quilted hat on and his quilted jacket. *[Through laughter]* And he's—he's looking down and he's making these, like, hand signals—like, three fingers! Two fingers! Five fingers! And somehow that is communicating to the mortar team, like how to precision place these mortars down in the valley?

[Ben laughs.]

01:00:31 Ben Host But the look on his face is just really precious. And...
Yeah. Well it's like a coach in a dugout, y'know, communicating with the third base coach. Like, those hand signals have to be very obscure so that the enemy doesn't figure out what they're saying.

01:00:43 John Host I really dug that guy. I don't know why. I couldn't get enough of him.

01:00:46 Ben Host Good guy!

01:00:47 Music Music Reprise of "War" theme song.

01:00:50 Ben Host Well, I think it's about time to pick our next motion picture off of the big long list! John, do you have your 120-sided die over there?

01:01:00 Adam Host Affix the die, John!

[Ben laughs.]

01:01:02 John Host I do!

01:01:04 Ben Host I'm making hand signals to tell you how to roll it.

01:01:06 John Host *[Faintly, as though far away from the microphone]* Here I go! Here's the die! *[Regular volume]* Here's my die corral. Alright. Next film!

[Sound of die rolling across hard surface.]

Wow! Number... six!

01:01:22 Ben Host Very low number!

01:01:24 John Host A low number! We hardly ever get those one-digit numbers!

01:01:28 Ben Host This is, uh, this is taking us away from the Korean War and back into the warm embrace of WWII. This is a 1967 film—

["The Night of the Generals" Theme, by Maurice Jarre. Suspenseful orchestral music.]

01:01:47 Adam Host —directed by Anatole Litvak. It's called *Night of the Generals*. Making a left turn away from the troops. Hanging out with the leadership class! Alright!

01:01:52 Ben Host Yeah. That'll be next week's film. Really looking forward to it, gentlemen!

01:01:57 Adam Host Me, too!

01:01:58 Ben Host You love Poland, Adam!

01:02:00 Adam Host I— *[Laughs.]* Wow. I'm really looking forward to this one, you guys.

[Theme music begins playing faintly in background.]

[Ben laughs.]

You know, when you put it in those terms.

01:02:09 Ben Host *[Ben laughs.]*
It's your favorite country. Um, alright! Well, that will be next week. We will leave it with Robs from here. For John Roderick and Adam Pranica, I've been Ben Harrison. To the victor go the spoiler alerts!

01:02:26 Rob Schulte Producer *[Theme song continues playing louder for a few seconds, then recedes to the background again as Rob does the outro.]*
Friendly Fire is a Maximum Fun podcast hosted by Ben Harrison, Adam Pranica, and John Roderick! This show is produced by me—Rob Schulte. Our logo art is by Nick Ditmore, and our theme music is “War” by Edwin Starr, courtesy of Stone Agate Music. If you're looking for more *Friendly Fire*, last year we put out an episode covering *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, a film about the famous Doolittle Raid! And like today's film, it was made during the war it depicts! Go check it out! Don't forget *Friendly Fire* is made possible by the support of listeners like you. You can leave us a positive rating and review on your podcatcher of choice and you can also head to MaximumFun.org/join to pledge your support! If you do you'll gain access to our monthly pork chop episode, as well as all of the Maximum Fun bonus content! If you'd like to chat about the podcast online, please join one of our many social media discussion groups. Or just simply use the hashtag #FriendlyFire. You can find Ben on Twitter at [@BenjaminAhr](https://twitter.com/BenjaminAhr). Adam is [@CutForTime](https://twitter.com/CutForTime). John is [@JohnRoderick](https://twitter.com/JohnRoderick), and I'm [@RobKSchulte](https://twitter.com/RobKSchulte). Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next week with another episode of *Friendly Fire*!

01:03:49 Music Music *[Music plays louder for some time, then concludes.]*
01:03:50 Speaker 1 Guest A cheerful ukulele chord.
01:03:52 Speaker 2 Guest MaximumFun.org.
01:03:53 Speaker 3 Guest Comedy and culture.
01:03:54 Speaker 4 Guest Artist owned—
—audience supported.