Not enough gratuitous violence in new Clint Eastwood film

HEARTBREAK RIDGE
By Peter Dunn

O f Clint, Clint. Clint. When will you learn that we love you for what you are, that you don't have to copy Rambo or "An Officer and a Gentleman" or "Top Gun" to be loved? We don't want women and sensitivity and warm camaraderie — we want gritty and mean. Clint, you've been belying out in the past couple of years. As The Man with No Name, or Dirty Harry (or Harry's other incarnations in "The Gauntlet" and "Tightrope") you didn't need women and seemed to relish violence. That is not to say that you weren't without women but you certainly didn't need to go chasing them, reading Cosmopolitan so you could understand them. If anything they were irresistibly attracted to your rugged, heroic charm.

And violence. Don't try telling me that the Dirty Harry saga wasn't good, clean, undated violence or that The Man with No Name wasn't violent and cold-hearted. You didn't need an army or a war for motivation, just a couple of dudes with a few less scruples than you who were irresistibly attracted to your rugged, heroic charms.

So why is it that you want us to like you? (I mean not simply idolize.) Why ruin the chemistry? We want good guys and bad guys, black and white — grey simply doesn't cut it. And the more we like a character, despite his violent tendencies, the more grey he becomes.

So how does "Heartbreak Ridge," the new film which you have also produced and directed, fit into the scheme of things? Well, Clint plays Gunney Sgt. Tom High-

way, a Marine for life who distinguished himself in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, winning the Congressional Medal of Honor. Highway is a hard-drinking trad-
tionalist who has to respect for authority figures and even less respect for self-
engrossed military authority figures who have never seen combat. Highway is, es-
entially, a disgrace to the Marine Corps, an anarchist who can't handle the bu-
rancoyry of paperwork pressing or understand the need for good public rela-
tions.

So far so good; you have established a loser with some pretty violent tendencies who is not worried about breaking rules. You even give Highway some nice, ugly scars on his face to bring home the fact that this guy is no stranger to pain and violence. Looks like the audience is in for some good headbashing.

So not: after one particular bout with the bottle and a stint in a jail cell to begin the film, Highway is told he will have one more chance to redeem himself. He is as-
signed to the training preparation of a bunch goof-offs in the 2nd Marine Recon-
naissance Platoon, the unit where he be-
gan his own military career. There is a cer-
tain amount of head-bashing that Highway
must do to gain the respect of his troop;
but it is not much fun, since he is doing it more to get them in line than be-
cause they deserve it. Already you've
broken golden rule number one: if there is to be any violence, it should be gratuitous.

Next, golden rule number two gets broken: we are asked to like Highway de-
spite his faults. Just like Highway's troops, we are asked to believe that underneath the cold exterior there is a warm heart that
communicate" with her about a "meaningful relationship." Not only does this break the tradition of the loner whom all the women wish they could get their hands on, but this subplot fits nowhere in the grand scheme of the film. The audience does not care about Highway's private life outside the Marines since the two lives never seem to intersect. So Highway's attempts to re-
kindle his romance with his exwife are simply extraneous to the film as a whole.

"Heartbreak Ridge" is not your first major departure from your stereotypical roles, Clint. "Every Which Way But Loo-
se" proved that you could play a substan-
tially different role and still make a box office smash and "Tightrope" proved that you could make a significant comment about the stereotype which you had cre-
ated. But "Heartbreak Ridge" is no such variation on a theme. This new film sets up the audience to expect the typical Clint Eastwood tough-guy, then goes about breaking all the standard rules.

"Heartbreak Ridge" is nothing more than a poor man's "An Officer and a Gente-
lemen" which tries to bank on Clint Eastwood's popularity and charisma. Un-
fortunately, Clint, the film's script and plot make you look like a fish out of water. It really is a shame, for had your role stuck to convention, you would have been per-
fect.