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The Big Red One

THE BIG RED ONE: THE RECONSTRUCTION

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THE BIG RED ONE

(US, 1980) Directed by Sam Fuller

Sam Fuller's monumental war film is a fictionalized account of his own harrowing experiences as an American grunt during WWII. (The title refers to the badge worn by the First Infantry Division.) Lee Marvin stars as the stoic leader of a platoon of young soldiers struggling through some of the grisliest conflicts of the war, from first landing in northern Africa through D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge to the liberation of the concentration camp at Falkenau. Fuller's just-the-facts reportorial style imbues the film with ground-level authenticity, while occasional touches of his trademark tabloid sensationalism point up the random surrealistic and absurd details of armed combat. As Fuller makes clear, war is not about glory for these soldiers, but about surviving.

Producer: Gene Corman. Screenwriter: S. Fuller. Cinematographer: Adam Greenberg. Editor: Morton Tubor. With: Lee Marvin, Mark Hamill, Robert Carradine, Bobby Di Cicco. 35mm, 159 min.

In person: Richard Schickel, Curtis Hanson

Legendary filmmaker Sam Fuller had hoped that THE BIG RED ONE would be his magnum opus, an episodic tale of World War II combat in Europe. However, the film was drastically shortened by original distributor Lorimar just before its 1980 release to a running time of 113 minutes. Shortly after Fuller's death in 1997, film critic Richard Schickel and Brian Jamieson, International Vice President of Warner Home Video, decided to try to restore the missing footage. Warner Brothers had acquired all the surviving footage of the film from Lorimar when the company went bankrupt, and among this footage, Schickel and Jamieson discovered eight full sequences that had been cut as well as numerous shots that had been trimmed from surviving sequences.

The result cannot be called a "director's cut," since Fuller had not finished editing the film when it was taken out of his hands. But working from Fuller's script and notes and from the footage itself, Jamieson and Schickel have created the next best thing: a 159-minute epic that stands to enter the ranks of the great war films.

Special thanks to: Brian Jamieson, Ronnee Sass—Warner Home Video; Jill DiRaffaele—DDA Public Relations.