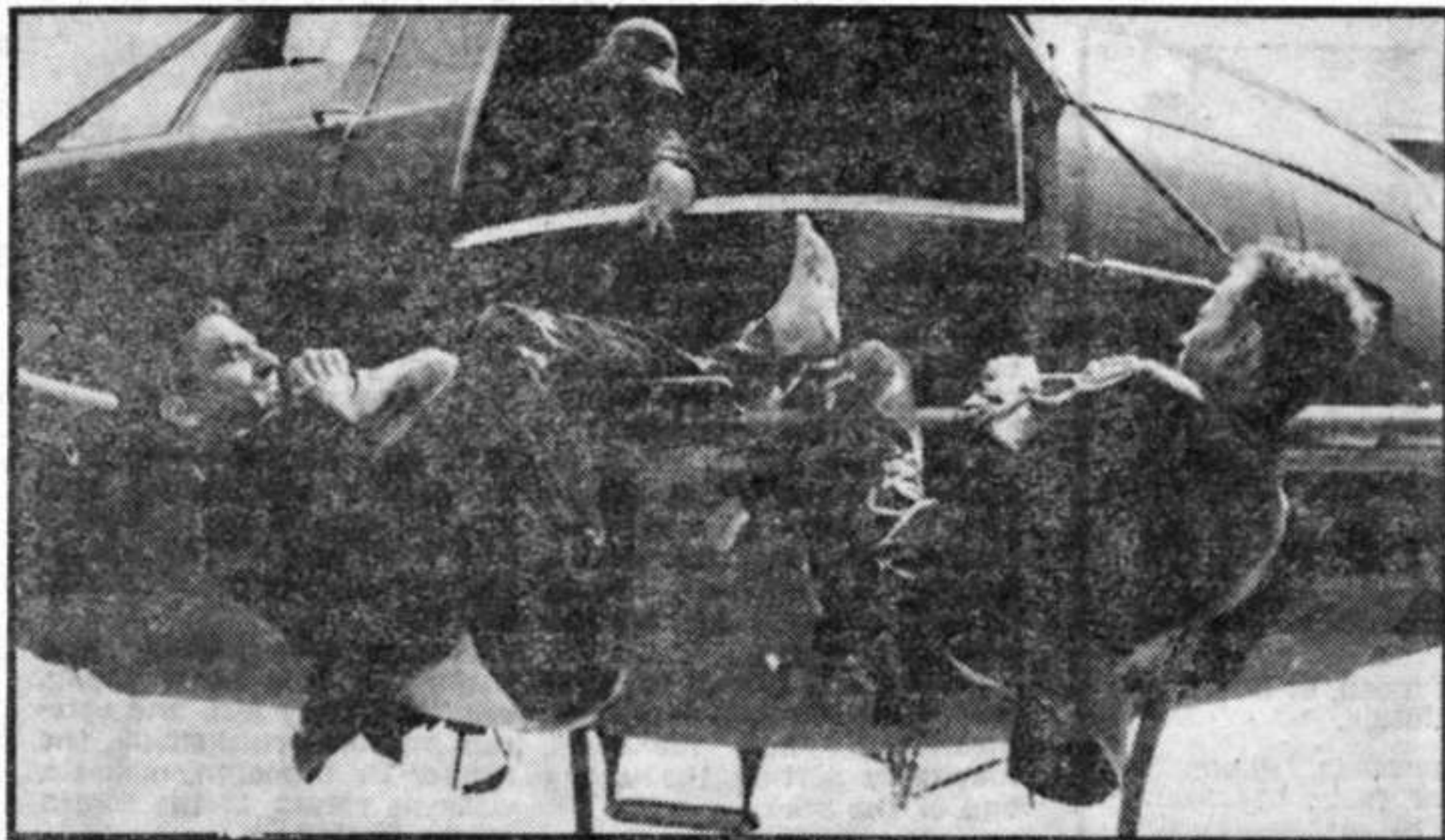


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MARGARET HINXMAN PREVIEWS 'THE DEER HUNTER,' WHICH OPENS IN THE

WEST END TODAY



Robert De Niro (left) and John Savage in *The Deer Hunter*: hanging on.

A milestone to last for ever!

The Deer Hunter. X Certificate: ABC Shaftesbury Avenue.

THERE are certain films which are milestones not just in screen history, but in a nation's history.

The Deer Hunter is not the greatest movie ever made. Its span is perhaps too large for the grasp of director Michael Cimino and screenwriter Deric Washburn. It is an epic written in small print. Somewhere along the line it loses the feeling for the human element. But it will always be the screen epitaph of the Vietnam war that scarred the conscience of America.

The only movie with which I can compare it is William Wyler's *Best Years Of Our Lives* about the reality of civilian life which had to be faced by World War II veterans. De Niro is the strong leader. Christopher Walken is a mental case. The latter, with a mightily convincing performance, confirms my feeling, after *Roseland*, that this is a major star of tomorrow.

Meanwhile, this is a film for today and may be for ever!

The Deer Hunter takes no sides in the conflict that involved America in the Vietnam war. In a spare, simple fashion it shows how that war affected the men from a small home town in Pennsylvania who fought on the American side in South-East Asia.

The three principal characters (Robert De Niro, John Savage, Christopher Walken) are buddies, steelworkers, who go off to war with the kind of confidence you see in the starry eyes of volunteers from the First World War

that, in the fullness of time and combat, is transformed into a glazed indifference: better instant death than lingering life.

Before the boys join the Army, on the home front there is a wedding party reminiscent of a similar sequence in *The Godfather*. The film creates an atmosphere of family life that is solid and true. During the Vietnam war, the heroes discover their own strengths and weaknesses in gruesome detail. It is not a film for nervous stomachs.

I think what Cimino is saying is that war turns men into animals. But war cannot dictate what kind of animal you are. That is something moulded into your personality from the day you are born.