

## Document Citation

Title	<b>On the beachhead</b>
Author(s)	Andrew Sarris Andrew Sarris
Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	1980 Jul 16
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The big red one, Fuller, Samuel, 1980



# On the Beachhead

By Andrew Sarris

**THE BIG RED ONE.** Written and directed by Sam Fuller. Produced by Gene Corman. A Lorimar production released by United Artists.

**HONEYSUCKLE ROSE.** Directed by Jerry Schatzberg. Written by Carol Sobieski, William D. Wittliff, and John Binder, based on a story by Gosta Steven and Gustav Molander. Produced by Gene Taft. Released by Warner Bros.

**NO NUKES.** Directed by Julian Schlossberg, Danny Goldberg, and Anthony Potenza. Produced by Schlossberg and Goldberg. Released by Warner Bros.

I have heard the first squeaks of outrage from the chorus of Kael *castrati*, but I remain moderately serene in this summer of so far so-so movies. Something *really* good must turn up sooner or later. My abiding faith in the regenerative powers of the cinema is unshaken. Meanwhile, Al-jean Harmetz has reported in the *Times* of July 9 that the late Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, *Vertigo*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The Trouble With Harry*, and *Rope* may soon be available for commercial revival, in which case a new generation of moviegoers would be in for a tremendous treat. Otherwise, nothing released so far this year has generated one-tenth the excitement of NBC's live televising of the Borg-McEnroe Wimbledon final, a competitive classic of such intensely intestinal tennis as to make most of the trivia covered in the *Voice's* laboriously grouchy television column seem like retarded child's play.

What I *should* be covering this week are Sam Fuller's *The Big Red One*, Jerry Schatzberg's *Honeysuckle Rose*, and Julian Schlossberg and Danny Goldberg's *No Nukes*. *Variety* has seemed vexed with my reviews for a long time because they cannot easily be labeled as favorable or unfavorable. *Variety's* new epithet for what it considers wishy-washy critiques is "inconclusive." In the black-ink/red-ink religion of *Variety* there is no place for the heretical reviewer of mixed mind. More often than not these days, I am genuinely mixed. However, if I were paid to write one-word descriptions of my attitude toward films—and I see no reason why I should be—I would employ *Variety's* sacred word "favorable" to describe my reaction to *The Big Red One*, *Honeysuckle Rose*, and *No Nukes*. They are not classics by any stretch of the already hyped-up imagination; there is a lot wrong with each of them. But they kept me reasonably attentive even when the air conditioning broke down, and, on occasion, I could feel the deep stirrings of art, beauty, and emotional sincerity.

*The Big Red One* has already been covered extensively in this column from Cannes, and its 68-year-old author-auteur/writer-director, Sam Fuller, was very thoughtfully and thoroughly profiled and analyzed two weeks ago in the *Voice* by Jim Hoberman. Consequently, I do not feel that I have to touch all the journalistic bases on either Fuller or *The Big Red One*. But I would like at least to dust off some of these bases for the sake of historical perspective. Curiously, the first person to speak highly to me of Sam Fuller was Jonas Mekas, a critic identified primarily with non-Hollywood and non-narrative cinema. Fuller, though supposedly right-wing in many respects, has always appealed to left-wing critics, possibly because he never fudged the issues. From his earliest days in Hollywood, Fuller cultivated the reputation of a crazy, wild man. Writer-director Philip Dunne, a liberal, literate, public-spirited citizen, writes amusingly in his recently published memoir—*Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics*—of his brief encounter with Fuller at the Fox Studio: "I attended a Zanuck conference with writer-director Samuel

Fuller. . . . Zanuck always had a weakness for Sammy Fuller, whose flamboyant and sometimes violent style matched his own. I was in a conference with Zanuck at a time when Sammy was shooting one of his war pictures on the lot. A violent explosion rattled the windows of the office. 'That,' said Zanuck happily, 'is Sammy Fuller blowing the ass out of Stage 16.'

This kind of Fuller anecdote has contributed to the legend of a wild primitive dealing with pulp material on the screen. What is therefore most surprising about *The Big Red One* is its tender feelings toward the emotionally vulnerable survivors of armed combat. In his first-hand reminiscence, Fuller recreates World War II from the limited view of an infantryman with his hundred yards of beachhead and an inexhaustible supply of fear. Lee



Marvin and Co.: emotionally vulnerable GIs with an inexhaustible supply of fear

Marvin as a sergeant father-figure holds together a platoon of callow youths (most conspicuously, Mark Hamill, Robert Caradine and Kelly Ward) who never explode on the screen as personalities in their own right. Indeed, both Peter Bogdanovich and Martin Scorsese were once scheduled to play dogfaces in Marvin's platoon, and their presence on the screen would have clearly stamped the film as a cult *homage* item. As it is, I cannot really tell how contemporary audiences are going to react to it. Fuller and his cast never snicker over the sentimental passages in the film, and Fuller's camera never shrinks from any of his characters on the screen. From his first film, *I Shot Jesse James*, back in 1949, to *The Big Red One*, Fuller has swooped in on all his characters with courage and conviction no matter how far-fetched the plotline. Curiously, nothing is so far-fetched in movies as truly remembered reality. What audiences want instead are artfully "realistic" fictions shaped to accommodate the fashionable prejudices of the present. That Fuller has remained loyal to his own vision is reason enough for me to admire *The Big Red One*.