

# A Mark of Excellence

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## Mr. Hamill Goes to Washington (along with the cast of *The Big Red One*)

Susan Lin

Imagine, if you will, that you are a rabid Mark Hamill fan...Oh, wait, you are, and that's why you get this newsletter. Imagine, then, how it would feel to discover that Mark is planning to make an in-person appearance at a movie theater a mere twenty minutes from your home, and in only seven days – Do you see yourself jumping for joy? Well, that was me, on a giddy day in April, when I learned of a special screening of *The Big Red One: The Reconstruction* that was going to be happening right here in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Silver Spring is just next door to Washington, DC, and the home of the American Film Institute's beautifully restored 1930'-era Silver Theater. This was the setting of choice for a nation's-capital gala screening on April 28, just days before the DVD release of the 2004 restoration of Samuel



Fuller's 1980 World War II film based on his personal experiences as a member of the First Infantry.

The charity event, benefiting children of Marines and federal law enforcement personnel killed in the line of duty, was a tribute to the late Lee Marvin, star of the film and himself a World War II veteran. In attendance were his widow, along with Sam Fuller's widow, producer Richard Schickel, and five members

of the cast: Mark, Robert Carradine, Bobby Di Cicco, Kelly Ward, and Perry Lang.

Also in attendance, Sue Depping, our own fan club president/ webmaster, and a glance at this newsletter's mailing address will tell you that her trip was a lot longer than mine!

Caught in traffic, Sue missed my first Mark encounter, which was out on the sidewalk as he arrived at the theater – my husband Jeff and I had a strategic sandwich-shop stakeout next door and as soon as the cars started pulling up, out we went. Was I nervous? Oh, indeed... See "I Met Mark" for the full story.

However, Sue would one-up me soon enough, because once inside the theater Mark and Marilou sat directly in

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front of her for the entire movie! Say, what's that greenish glow in the center row? Oh, that's Susan, looking jealously at Sue's prime location! Although my own seat wasn't bad at all - Zab, Johnson, Vinci, Kaiser - the men who played them were all sitting in the row behind me, just off to my left.

Directly behind me, however was a middle-school-aged boy, and he was saying "Luke stole my popcorn! Did you see that? Luke Skywalker stole my popcorn!" Evidently Mark had helped himself to a little snack as he passed by. There was a dignified-yet-festive atmosphere as the guests were taking their seats to the sounds of spirited marches performed live by the Marine Band from the front of the theater.

Of course, to correct the young theft victim, in *The Big Red One*, Mark is not Luke, but Griff, a young rifleman who draws cartoons when not in combat, and whose struggles to under-

stand the peculiar moral boundaries of war culminate in a poignant final scene.

The tribute itself featured remarks by Pamela Marvin, Richard Schickel, and anecdotes from two of the cast members - Robert Carradine, and Mark. The portrait of Lee Marvin painted by all was of a man whose enormous acting talents were often distilled into the slightest raising of an eyebrow - and also of a man who had a particular ability to surprise people either by exaggerating - or suddenly breaking out of - his tough-guy temperament.



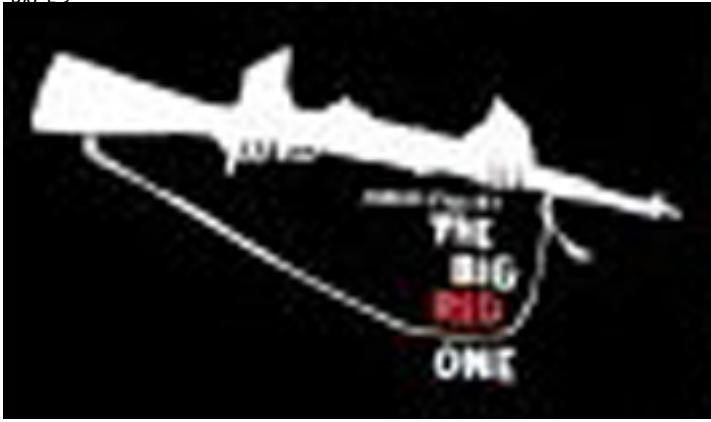
It was also said that Lee Marvin has been shot more than anyone else in film, and Mark's tale of watching someone he had admired since childhood giving a tutorial on how to get shot was by turns funny - "The best way is by machine gun, because you can do this" Mark quoted, doing a comical series of spasms - and then

reverential, as he described Marvin's simple and unforgettable version of being shot that is seen in the film.

Then came the trailer for the new version, and that preview was gorgeous in itself - watching it, I had a sense of something long overdue being finally fulfilled. It was followed by the film, and my one-woman's opinion-review appears below. It's glowing, of course, and there is added excitement in seeing *The Big Red One* finally being acknowledged by a larger public as an important work.

The film's incredible scope seemed to say it all; indeed, it was an odd transition, going from the hushed theater to chitchat and cocktails in the theater café, but soon guests and cast were mingling, munching, sipping, and snapping photographs. It wasn't a capacity crowd, but this just afforded more time for those present to meet and greet. Naturally, I spent most of the time hovering - in a constant state of swoon - around Mark, who was graciously signing autographs for anyone who asked and sharing anecdotes of experiences that ran the gamut: a grab bag that included tales of appearing on everything from the Simpsons to Howard Stern; watching the Polar Express

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## BARBARA RICE

Mark Hamill plays sharpshooter Griff whose ser-

Audey Murphy. He is your average GI thrown into a situation he thought he was prepared for, but then turns out to be so much more complicated.

*The Big Red One* opens during World War I. A plain in Europe with the only standing structure, a cross. Whether this is the only standing structure from a church a lone monument we don't know. But around it are the ravages of war. Dead bodies, broken equipment and a shell shocked horse. One American soldier is alive and one German. The German is yelling that the war is over. The American kills him up close personal as it must be with infantry. The American, it turns out, had not gotten the news that the war was over. An example of lines and dates drawn so nice and crisp in the history books, are not so clear when they actually happen.

*The Big Red One* separates itself from other war movies in it that it is not about great heroics or larger than life leaders. It is about a rifle squad and 4 soldiers the fates seem to have somehow protected and their sergeant – that soldier from the opening scene.

geant (Lee Marvin) is the American soldier from the first scene. With him in the squad are Zab (Robert Carradine), Vinci (Bobby Di Cicco), and Johnson (Kelly Ward). Mark's character is complex. He is the best shot in the squad but when called upon to kill an enemy soldier, he freezes. He asked the sergeant how can murder be okay. The answer that he gets is that it is not murder. It isn't murder when you kill an animal; it is killing, not murder. Later we hear a German non-com saying the same thing to one of his men.

Griff gets the label of a coward. It is a label that I challenge. At one point in the movie a tank is about to be blown up and native horsemen are galloping circles around it. Griff stays by this tank until he has managed to warn the horseman away, hardly the act of a coward.

But Griff, played convincingly by Mark Hamill, is no

The movie shows how soldiers were viewed by the higher commands. Tools to be used to accomplish a goal. They are not told the overall plan, they are just told the minimum of what they need to know to accomplish their task. Take this beach; find that gun. The landing at D-day, the soldiers have numbers assigned for the assembly of an explosive device. When one soldier dies the next one up takes his place. GI stands for Government Issue, another part to be used or used up. The D-Day landing shows how this philosophy affects the real soldiers.

Griff is the one to succeed but not through heroic courage we normally see in the movies, but by being given the choice of certain death at the hands of his sergeant or the chance of death by continuing up the beach.

There are moments showing the horrors of war followed by the humanity that the squad maintains. Killing German soldiers as they enter a cave with no warning, no attempt at capture. Military necessity dictating the action. Followed by a young orphan who only wants to bury his mother, being promised by the squad they will help. A promise that is kept. The sergeant wearing a helmet that a little girl had decorated with flowers to show her he appreciates it despite the fact it makes him an easier target for the enemy.

One much talked about scene is where a baby is being delivered in a tank. The ammunition belts for the machine guns being used to hold her legs up. The Americans trying to say the French word for push only to have it come out as an American slang word for where the baby is coming from. As humorous as this scene is you can't help but remember that outside this tank is the man who died bringing her to the squad for help and many dead soldiers from both sides.

Griff later manages to get the French resistance woman under a table while a machine gun in the hands of an insane asylum inmate

is blazing over head. A brief moment of frenzied passion. Hey, we knew Mark would get the girl.

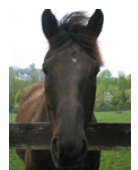
When the squad is part of the liberation of a concentration camp, you see how it affects each member of the squad as they face a horror beyond any they saw on the battle field. Griff at the end of the war finally sees the necessity and justification in killing the enemy. Sarge tries to save a child, but maybe his attempt only made things worse.

Throughout the movie we get glimpses of the other side represented by a German non-com who seems ruthless and cruel. He hides on a cross laying a trap for the Americans. He shoots at the soldiers when there is child in the line of fire—something the American sergeant would not do. He kills one of his men for voicing his doubts as to the war. These glimpses remind us that even though the Americans at times seem to have lost their humanity, the other side is in the same condition or even worse.

*The Big Red One* is not a pro-war movie nor is it anti-war. It is a realistic account of what it is like to be the main component of any war, the foot soldier. They don't

get to conduct their kill from a distance that way the air corps or artillery units do. They see the face of their enemy; they often have to deal with the bodies personally. It is a basic do the job and survive, so the next job can be done. Be kind when you can but don't get attached because the person you make friends with may be dead an hour from now.

This is a great movie and I highly recommend it. There are no unrealistic charges up the hill to the machine gun nest the rain of bullets never touching the hero. Instead you see the decisions of how to get the job done with a minimum losses and the fact that the newest member of the squad is by definition the most expendable. You see the quiet courage as each soldier deals with the stress of war in their own way. Some by joking, some by bragging, some by getting quietly off to themselves. They pass up no opportunity to have fun and relax when they can. When those times happen you see them as young men who could maybe be frat brothers at a party. But when the need arises they become the professionals they were trained to be. This is the way real soldiers are and this is what you will see in *The Big Red One*.



## *Notes From the Editor...*

The look on the boy's face was so funny, I wish I had my camera on. Mark turned around to me because I was laughing so hard. I nodded towards the boy, who was staring down the row to where Mark was sitting. 'I'm hungry!' Mark said. The Marine Band beginning to play drowned out my offer of a granola bar....

And Susan is quite right... The cocktail time afterwards was a treasure-trove of Mark's anecdotes. He chatted with anyone coming up. One fan startled

several of us around Mark by fervently stating 'Thank-you for 28 wonderful years!' The fan was under the very mistaken impression that Mark's career began with *Star Wars*! A lively discussion ensued as we discussed other favourite Mark roles. My friend stated 'Of course, you know my favourite is *Slipstream*....' In response, I asked her if I'd mentioned I'd won a copy of it on laser disc off eBay. Mark, not missing anything while signing, quickly asked 'What did you win off eBay?!' '*Slipstream*. I already have it on VHS and

DVD.' Talk of screen-names, working on the film, and favourite scenes followed.

As there does not seem to be much interest in using PayPal to pay yearly membership dues, I will not be pursuing it. Thank-you to the three members who took the time to respond! The safest way to send dues internationally is with an international money order in US \$, or by sending the cash in a registered letter. Within the US, a regular money order or cheque suffices.

## *But I already have it on VHS....*

**Susan Lin**

If you are like me, and you have to justify certain purchases either to yourself or your significant other, you may be debating whether to get the *The Big Red One: The Reconstruction* – and as a Mark Hamill fan, you might be factoring in "How many more Mark scenes are in it, and are they worth it?" Well, on that question, all I can say is yes, and coyly add, "Benjamin Franklin."

In truth, if you sat with a stopwatch and added up the additional Mark minutes, I suppose you wouldn't get a staggering number, but

there are indeed several: The new pieces come in all different sizes, and if you know the film well it can be a great game finding all the new material.

To be objective, though, the actual amount is beside the point. The additional footage – some 47 minutes – transforms the film entirely, because the existing material gets a huge boost from the new footage – everything you've seen becomes more heart-pounding, or funnier, or moving; to steal a critic's phrase, it's a "fuller Fuller," and the feeling you have af-

ter seeing this restored version is one of both awe and satisfaction.

And let's not forget those bonus tracks! There's a documentary which folds interviews with several cast members, including Mark, into one fascinating piece; and there are several "alternate scenes," including one very charming one of Sam Fuller's very young daughter, as Mark and the others coax her to sing a song. If you are a Mark Hamill fan, this DVD definitely belongs in your collection.

## Did You Catch?/Future Watch

**Mark** at the American Film Institute's 33rd Lifetime Achievement Award gala for George Lucas? Opening comments were rather appropriately made by William Shatner. Mark's speech was one of the best. A memorable moment when Mark, Carrie Fisher, and Harrison Ford were onstage together, James Earl Jones' voice could be heard, and R2-D2, C-3PO and Chewbacca were around as well. The gala was on Thursday, 11 June 2005, and videotaped. The show was aired on USA Network on 20 June 2005, 9.00 pm ET.

At the AFI screening of *The Big Red One-Reconstructed*, Mark mentioned that he will be doing a voice for an upcoming Disney feature.

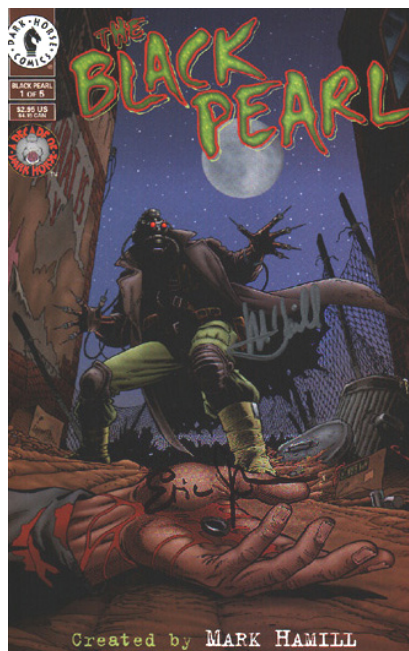
**Mark** is also voicing the character Commander Tyler in *Robotech: The Shadow Chronicles*, due out later this year.



**He** has also been working on the film version of *The Black Pearl*, the graphic novel he co-wrote with Eric Johnson. There is renewed interest in this project coming out as a movie, given the success of a number of recent films based on comic book heroes. As Mark mentioned in an interview, 'The sort of paradox is that it's the anti-comic book movie. It's why there can't be a Batman, why putting on an outfit and being a costumed avenger is, in the real world, something that would get you arrested.'

**While** there is not an official shortlist yet, there is an internet shortlist that has Mark in the running to appear as the Joker in a sequel to the recently released *Batman Begins*. Check out [www.aintitcoolnews.com](http://www.aintitcoolnews.com) and vote in their survey as to who should play the Joker! It has been stated that internet fans were responsible for the decision on who played Batman in the film.

**Regrettably**, Mark will not be attending the San Diego ComicCon this year, though a screening of 'Comic Book: The Movie' is scheduled.



**However**, he will be a judge for the Nicktoons Film Festival. As info becomes available to release, it will be posted on our website.

# I Met Mark!

-Susan Lin

Was I nervous? Oh, indeed, even though this was my second in-person meeting – in fact, the picture I'd brought for Mark to autograph was a photo of the two of us taken after a *Six Dance Lessons* matinee. Tongue-tied, I handed Mark the picture. "Oh! There we are," he said, beginning to sign, and then, "Looks like your pen's about to run out of gas." Oh, no! I got my signature, but there was just barely enough ink for the heart and arrow he drew beneath – Fans, keep those Sharpies fresh!

After presenting Mark with a valentine heart handmade by my five-year-old daughter Maggie, we posed for a snapshot which could be called a study in height contrasts.

All this was before we even entered the theater! During the film, Jeff and I sat directly in front of the VIP row, and while I was dying to turn around and sneak peeks at Mark, I think my hus-



band might have gotten a little annoyed with me. Good thing the film is incredibly absorbing.

Afterward, guests had plenty of opportunity to meet Mark during the post-screening cocktails, and I decided that, while strange, I wanted him to sign an extra copy of my photo that I'd just happened to bring along, since we'd found a better pen. Mark obliged, and I'm amused to say I now possess one of the more unique autographs to be found....Before I go on, I must announce that this issue of the newsletter is now officially rated

PG. Because in the photo I'd asked him to sign, Mark's finger happens to be pointing at one of my...uh...womanly attributes, and so, to poke fun at his odd pose, he signed this postscript: "Cool boob!" Even my husband cracked up at that.

Even with that nice little ice-breaker, my overall shyness prevented me from doing much talking, and once again, so many things I would have

liked to say to him – such as complimenting him on his outstanding performance in the film – flew straight out of my head, rather than out of my mouth. And Mark's wife Marilou seemed to inspire a similar sort of speechlessness in me; as beautiful as she looks in photographs, in person she is even more stunning.

But by evening's end I was feeling bold enough to give Mark a goodbye hug, which he accepted most graciously, and so all I can say is: Thank you Mark, from the bottom of my heart!

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in 3-D; hearing "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" in Japanese –

Mark's huge range of roles and interests gives him a limitless supply of stories, and he was sharing them all with one delighted guest after another.

Stars, movies, music, cocktails....As if all this wasn't enough, each guest received a copy of the DVD to take home.

But drifting through the party atmosphere was the bittersweet beauty of reun-

ion; this is a cast that really seems to enjoy getting together, and if I'm not mistaken, some of the snapshots being taken that night were not by fans, but by the family members themselves. All evening I had been simply overjoyed to be there, but towards the end of the night, watching the cast pose arm-in-arm, I suddenly felt very privileged as well, because I knew I was witnessing something very special.



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## The Last Word...

*A Mark of Excellence* is the quarterly newsletter of the **International Mark Hamill Fan Club**. Yearly dues are \$15 US, and include 4 consecutive issues of the newsletter, a membership card, access to the fan club area on the website, and special mailings as appropriate.

Submissions, including photos or original artwork, are welcomed; final editing is the discretion of the editor. If you wish your photo or artwork returned please enclose a sase, and attach your name/address on the back of your submission.

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