"TIGERLAND"

When I watch movies it is generally for entertainment only. The exception to this is when I watch movies relating to the military. I watch these movies with a critical eye because I feel a great attachment to the military, and a gratitude to those that sacrifice themselves for our safety. When I stepped foot into the Marine Corps recruiting office over twelve years ago, the staff sergeant talked about how crucial leadership is in the Marine Corps, and how they would make a leader out of me. Serving four years in the Corps gave me a chance to be exposed to a lot of different leadership qualities, some good, some bad. Knowing that the movie "Tigerland" was about a soldier with unconventional leadership qualities I watched the movie with an open mind trying not to be judgmental but in the end I thought the character of Private Bozz used his leadership in the wrong way. I think the character of Private Bozz was a natural leader, but he failed to lead those that needed him in the right direction. The commanding officer of the infantry school accused Bozz of being scared to be a leader, and I would agree. Bozz is not going to be able to get everyone out on a hardship discharge, and every time someone leaves that puts thoughts into others heads about how they can get out of the Army instead of thinking about how to be a better soldier.

Knowing that the characters in the movie "Tigerland" are not real, I would like us to agree that these characters have real life qualities and flaws like real soldiers that can enable us to dissect the character of Private Bozz."Tigerland", released
in 2000, stars Colin Farrell as Private Bozz, Cole Hauser as Staff Sergeant Cota, Clifton Collins Jr. as Private Miter, Matthew Davis as Private Paxton and Thomas Guiry as Private Cantwell. It was directed by Joel Schumacher. This movie is not your typical Vietnam movie that tries in some way to avenge our loss of the war, or glamorize events or fictional soldiers. This movie relates more to the everyday soldier and his emotions about heading to war. This was a low budget movie. Director, Joel Schumacher, said that he wanted to get away from the "summer blockbuster" types of movies and concentrate on the story of the individuals. The movie is set in the year 1971 when the nation was divided about the growing war in Vietnam. It appears in the movie that this same division has made its way into the Army also. The movie focuses on Alpha Company, second platoon. This platoon has just graduated boot camp and is now entering infantry school located at Fort Polk, Louisiana. The main character, Private Bozz, has just been assigned to the platoon after doing time in the stockade. After completing infantry school, the platoon will be sent to their final phase of training at Tigerland. Tigerland has been designed to acclimate the young soldiers to the Vietnam War. While at Tigerland, the platoon is no longer assigned to their original drill instructors, but instead will spend time with Staff Sergeant Cota, who has just returned from Vietnam after serving two tours of duty.

Knowing nothing about how the Marine Corps operated, I entered boot camp on February 5, 1989. After one month of being in boot camp and learning how things operated, I was selected to be a squad leader. I spent the next two months learning how to listen to guys in my squad and getting them to do things that they did not want to do. I was promoted to Private First Class as I graduated from boot camp. Ten days later I found myself at Camp Pendleton for secondary training. The first day there our new drill instructors asked who were leaders in boot camp; I raised
my hand and found myself as squad leader again. I was faced with similar problems as before, but this time being a leader was even more challenging as before. This was because the Marines didn't have drill instructors watching over them all the time; they had me. Ten days after graduating school I was promoted to Lance Corporal and found myself in Twenty-Nine Palms Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center. While there I had the chance of serving under a very good Master Sergeant. A lot of what I learned in being a leader in the Marine Corps I learned from this Master Sergeant. After a year of serving with him I was promoted to Corporal. My final duty station was at Treasure Island Naval Base. I spent a year there under some of the worst leaders I have ever worked with. Although I had poor examples of leaders in my unit, the knowledge I had gained from my previous Master Sergeant helped me be able to teach younger Marines how to be good leaders. Not long before my time ended, I was promoted to Sergeant. Although I wasn't enlisted in the Army during the Vietnam era, I would like to give an opinion on what it is like to be a leader in boot camp and in military school.

I think the character of Private Bozz was a natural leader. But he failed to lead those that needed him in the right direction. Some people are born natural leaders and others need training. Leaders have the ability to get people to do things that they at first reject. When the platoon was under fire in the trench and Private Miter tried to get the platoon out but Bozz told them to stay in, the other privates listened to him, and he wasn't even their platoon guide. The other privates wanted to listen to him, but instead of communicating with his drill instructor he ran away and was disrespectful in front of the other men. Leaders listen to their subordinates and try to help them. And most importantly, when a leader acts their subordinates follow. I think that the director of the film wanted
me to believe that because Boz helped men get out of the Army that he was being a good leader. I beg to differ; those soldiers were going to Vietnam, and they needed to listen to every word spoken to them by those that had just been there. Many times through the movie, the CO or drill instructors were giving the privates information on how to stay alive. They said things like, "out flank your enemy", "when you hear something at night shoot", or "keep the lights out at night". By Bozz joking, or being disrespectful at these teaching moments it distracted from the privates learning what might keep them alive. These privates were drafted; they didn't want to be there, but they had no choice, so why not learn something to stay alive.

One basic law of being a leader in the military is not to question authority in front of others. Even as a parent, you would never question your spouse in front of your children, because it makes the children question that parent's decision making abilities. As a leader you do what you are told, and then if you have a problem with your superior you go and question him about it later. The military is full of "secrets". Rarely do you know exactly why you are told to do something in the military. Military discipline is based on obedience to authority. Completing the mission is the number one goal in war; to complete the mission men must obey commands. There is not time for questioning authority during combat. If you do, you die or your friends die.

The commanding officer of the infantry school accused Bozz of being scared to be a leader. I would have to agree. (Ag 2) I think that he was scared about having the responsibility of being the guide. When he was first made the leader of his platoon he tells his platoon that he doesn't take it serious and he just wants everyone to get along. He laughs at it and makes being the platoon guide position
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It seems stupid. This is not a good example to his men. I think the director was trying to show us that Bozz wanted the men to feel at ease around him and just treat him like normal. It is ok to have the other privates feel at ease around him, but they can't treat him like normal. At some time in being a leader you are going to have to command your troops, and if they have been treating you like normal, it is likely they won't listen. Before he even becomes the guide, he gets very upset with Private Cantwell. He gets mad because Cantwell tells him the sad story about his life and then Bozz gets mad because he feels bad for him and now feels he should help him. Bozz would have like to have not even gotten involved, because it would be easier.

When I was first called to be a squad leader my first reaction was to play it off and act like it was no big deal, and I felt that way because I was afraid to fail in front of my peers. I had the thought if I play this like I don't really care and then if I screw up it won't be a big deal because I didn't care anyway. I was put into the position of squad leader as we were marching out into the field for the first time. After humping hills all day, my fellow privates and I were not in the best of moods as we pitched our tents the first night. I was immediately bombarded with needs from men in my squad and commands from my drill instructors. I had privates not knowing how to put up their tents, one misplaced his weapon and I had to deal with a lot of whining. On top of that, I had my drill instructors yelling at me to keep my squad in line. At that moment I thought that it would be a lot easier to quit and fall back in the ranks with the other guys and not have to deal with others' problems. This is the one area that someone might say that Bozz was a true leader; again I would disagree.

Bozz is not going to be able to get everyone out on a hardship discharge. and
every time someone leaves that puts thoughts into others' heads about how they can get out of the Army instead of thinking about how to be a better soldier. (Ag 3) The first time Bozz comes across someone with a difficult situation, as he does with Private Cantwell, his first instinct is to help that person get out of the military. Cantwell had a difficult situation at home, and instead of trying to solve the problem, he gets him out. It is true that Bozz spent time listening to Private Miter, the night Miter was trying to go AWOL, but what was Bozz's answer? Help Miter get out of the Army. When Bozz helps someone get kicked out of the Army he is helping one person and hurting a lot of others in his platoon, or maybe that individual. At the end of the show, Private Bozz crosses the line in helping people out of the service. When he finds the barrel of his M-16 near Private Paxton's face, he pulls the trigger. Now there wasn't a bullet coming out, but the gas shoot into his friend's eye, and it is possible that it could have blinded him. At the end of the movie Paxton thanks Bozz for shooting gas in his eye, I have a hard time believing that Paxton would risk losing an eye to get out of the service. Now I know that these men were not necessarily feeling very patriotic about the war in Vietnam, however, a lot of them felt a sense of duty to serve their country. During the Gulf War my unit stayed behind, and I didn't want to go, but I volunteered to go because of a sense of duty. The movie showed this mood in Private Paxton. One night Bozz and Paxton were talking about the war and Bozz asks him if he had the opportunity to go to Mexico would he. Private Paxton said he would not because if he didn't go then someone else would have to take his place. He wasn't thirsty for war, but he had a sense that it was something he needed to do.

After I had spent some time as a leader in boot camp things started to settle down, not that things became easier, but that I was learning how to deal with people
more. Still the hardest thing about being a leader is being the "bad guy". As a leader sometimes you have to make the tough decisions. Bozz was more interested in being a good guy. It's easy to be the good guy and not make decisions that will make someone mad at you. Look at all the decisions Bozz made; it was all about doing nice things for others that broke the rules, and at the same time he didn't have to put his neck on the line. When he tells his platoon that if they are going to go AWOL just let him know they are leaving. Again, all this does is further erode the moral of those left behind, so in the long run he is hurting others so he doesn't have to deal with the tough decisions.

The director would have us believe that drill instructors are crazed mad men who don't care about their men. I would disagree. I think this was a convenient way for the director to get us to buy the line about Bozz being a good leader. I think the director dwelt on the uncommon drill instructor and not on a good instructor such as Staff Sergeant Cota. I think the director wanted us to believe that SSgt Cota was a good leader. I would tend to believe based on my experiences that the drill instructors shown in this film are uncommon. If the film portrayed drill instructors like the ones that I had and my friends had the audience would have thought Bozz was a slacker. It is important to know why Drill Instructors yell, intimidate and act mean to the Privates. They do this to tear you down and humble you. Once they have humbled you then they build your confidence back up in the way the Army wants you to be. Just like we see on TV where there is one cop who wants to hurt the bad guy and then another cop comes in and saves the bad guy and tries to be his friend. It is the same with Drill Instructors. One guy who wants to do bad things to you and another who is there to help you. In present day Marine Corps, pulling drill instructor duty is optional. Knowing that SSgt Cota had just served two tours in Nam, it is reasonable to believe he had a
choice of duty. If we can agree on that, then we can logically come to the conclusion that he was at Tigerland to help the young privates. As I mentioned before, he played the role as the Drill Instructor that is there to build up the privates after they have been torn down. Cota talks to his men and relates what it is like in Vietnam. One night when Bozz and Paxton are laying around at night, Cota comes to them and tells them they are dead because they had their lights on at night. Bozz makes some smart remarks about how they survived the attack, hoping to get a reaction that he is used to. Instead Cota related a story about how his friend was shot in the head at night because his friend was smoking at night. He related how his friend's brains ended up in Cota's lap. Cota didn't over react but simply relayed his knowledge onto the young men. Although he was not crazed DI, he wasn't easy on the privates either. He knew what they were facing, and he knew it was his job to prepare them to stay alive.

In conclusion I would like to say that I don't think that Private Bozz was a bad guy, but I believe he was misguided in his leadership qualities. This is based on his lack of leading, being scared to lead and concentrating on getting his men discharged. Over all I enjoyed the movie "Tigerland", but I just had questions relating to the leadership qualities of Bozz.