

The Hornets Nest (2014)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 33 min.

Our content ratings (0-10): Violence 4 ; Language 6;
Sex/Nudity 0.

Our star rating (0-5): 3.5

*Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.*

*I am for peace;
but when I speak,
they are for war.*

Psalms 120:6-7

This documentary film was put together by directors David Salzberg and Christian Tureaud, most of the footage shot by helmet cameras worn by ABC correspondent Mike Boettcher and his adult son, Carlos. Also interspersed throughout is captured footage showing Taliban insurgents training and launching attacks

The film covers the almost two years that they were embedded with American troops in Afghanistan. They shared the dangers, the boredom, and the camaraderie of the soldiers. Mike, a veteran of 34 years of traveling around the world covering conflicts, knew that he had missed out on much of his son's life, so when Carlos insisted on going with him on this trip, the father saw this assignment as a chance to rebond with his neglected son. The soldiers they met and photographed are an amazing group of men, dedicated to taking care of one another more than fighting for democracy and the flag. They do rush to save a young boy injured by a Taliban IED, but the filmmakers make no attempt to discover the background of the boy or his family. Nor do they spend a lot of time profiling the

individual soldiers. The great bits of interviews they do provide suggest that this was a missed opportunity.

The film is thus limited in its focus, viewers having to go elsewhere if they want to uncover the pros and cons of this, the longest war in our history. The film's title refers to the intense fighting in the Ganjgal Valley in eastern Afghanistan where insurgent leader Qari Ziaur is headquartered. The battle to rout him was expected to take a day, but requires nine instead, with the outcome in doubt at times because of lack of air support. The intense fire from the insurgents made any rescue flight into a suicide mission. Indeed, the Americans discover that they are surrounded at times, some of them pinned down and unable to get medical help. One young medic, fatally wounded, apologizes that his dying prevents him from helping his wounded comrades. The men marvel at this.

Mike and Carlos Boettcher won an Emmy for their news story covering this battle, the only father-son team to do so. Their film gives us at home a good idea of what is happening to our troops over there, but not much as to why they are there. This apolitical stance might allow the film to be viewed by both those who support the war and those who oppose it. Whatever we might think of those at the top of the chain of command in Washington, we are led to admire the courage and compassion for those on the ground who have to worry about IEDs and snipers.