

Discerning the Heroes is Tough in ‘Megan Leavey’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 9, 2017 - 7:40am

- [Annie Mumolo](#) [2]
- [Blackfish](#) [3]
- [Bleecker Street Media](#) [4]
- [Bradley Whitford](#) [5]
- [Common](#) [6]
- [Edie Falco](#) [7]
- [Gabriela Cowperwaite](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Kate Mara](#) [10]
- [Megan Leavey](#) [11]
- [Movie Review](#) [12]
- [Pamela Gray](#) [13]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [14]
- [Rex](#) [15]
- [Tom Felton](#) [16]
- [Tom Lovestadt](#) [17]
- [Will Patton](#) [18]



Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The poster is what gives away “Megan Leavey” the most. The titular soldier, and her bomb-sniffing dog, below a billowing American flag. So which war is it? Why, it’s the Iraq invasion, where the U.S. military and the politicians at home “freed” the Iraqi citizens from a peaceful life. Making a dog story out of that boondoggle doesn’t make it any more palatable, except to “support the troops.”

Eventually the film feels like propaganda, because it takes away all the nastiness of war – and its heinous injuries – and reduces it to platitudes about a girl and her dog. This is based-on-truth, as they say, and adding in uncomfortable working class scenarios about the soldier’s family can’t save the observation that the film is exploitative regarding the real Megan’s life. Surprisingly, there was a similar film about a bomb-sniffing dog in Iraq called “Max” (2015), but that was more of a family fable, and never showed the scenes of war. The in-country stuff in “Megan” seems so inauthentic that they shouldn’t have bothered, and any reference to a “Hadjji” (as American soldiers referred to their Iraqi “enemies”) is downright unbearable. Have you become comfortably numb to that war?

Megan Leavey (Kate Mara) leaves behind a difficult family life to join the Marines during the Iraq conflict era. She finds her home in the service, but after doing some clean up duty in the dog pens on Camp Pendleton – they trained dogs there for bomb sniffing duties in Iraq – she desires to be added to the Military Police K9 unit. She succeeds in that goal, but is given the hardest-to-train dog in the collective, a German Shepard named Rex.



The Soldier (Kate Mara) and Her Dog in ‘Megan Leavey’

Photo credit: Bleecker Street Media

The two are determined to work together, and form an unshakeable bond. The dog’s duties begin when Corporal Megan and Rex are shipped to Iraq, while she and fellow soldier Matt Morales (Ramón Rodríguez) develop a romance. Meanwhile, Rex sniffs out some danger on a routine patrol, but the dog and his handler are injured in the subsequent blast. Shipped back home, Megan wants to adopt the Shepard that shepherded her.

This is as notable for the supporting roles as anything else. Megan has two powerhouse TV parents, Edie Falco (“The Sopranos,” “Nurse Jackie”) and Bradley Whitford (“The West Wing”) and both are great actors. However, the dialogue they have is mush and only Whitford can make some hay of it – he did seem to enjoy portraying a working class mechanic with an antique truck he’s eternally working on. Falco shrieks a lot, for no reason, you’d think she would be proud of her Marine daughter. Semper Fi.

The Marine camp is so un-Marine-like that it’s great for some unintentional laughs. Common (yes, THAT Common) portrays a drill sergeant like he just got a root canal. The four screenwriters obviously spent no time researching the military part, save for watching the basic training scenes in “Full Metal Jacket.” It’s like everyone portraying a Marine is dressing up to go to a Marine-themed costume party. Kate Mara tries hard, and has a pretty sincere performance, but looks silly in the dress blues.



The Dynamic Duo Go In Country in ‘Megan Leavey’
Photo credit: Bleecker Street Media

Most annoying is the notion of the story. If not doing a film on the frustration and needless killing in the Iraq War (see the recent and far superior “The Wall”), then there is no justice being presented, especially for the troops. Their assignment was based on a lie, and the overall mission was to essentially steal resources from a dictator-weakened country. George Dubya gets a pass now that Old 45 is in office, but some of us won’t forget that Treasury wrecking folly. Making movies about the bomb-sniffing dogs and their adopters is still about the war.

But let us leave on a pleasant note. Brad Whitford got to portray a patch-with-his-name-on-it regular guy, the chemistry between Ramón and Kate was pretty good, and the heart-tugging last scene was ripe for some emotional manipulation. Dog-gone-it, why does it have to be about Iraq?

“Megan Leavey” opens nationwide on June 9th. Featuring Kate Mara, Tom Felton, Bradley Whitford, Common, Edie Falco, Will Patton and Ramón Rodríguez. Written by Pamela Gray, Annie Mumolo, Jordan Roberts and Tom Lovestadt. Directed by Gabriela Cowperwaite. Rated “PG-13”



[19]

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Links:

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/blackfish>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/bleecker-street-media>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/bradley-whitford>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/common>
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- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/kate-mara>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/megan-leavey>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
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