

Long Distance in *Full Metal Jacket*



5. Ext. - Parade Deck - Day



5. Ext. - Parade Deck - Day



8. Ext. - Parade Field - Dawn



16. Ext. - "Confidence Climb" - Day



20. Ext. - Training Field - Day

In *Full Metal Jacket*, Stanley Kubrick uses 'long-distance views', the background to the primary action in the film frame, in a striking and innovative way. Background action in films is used primarily to enhance the verisimilitude of the foreground action. The more real a filmic environment looks, the easier it is for the spectator to 'go along' with, and get 'wrapped up in', the story line ('willing suspension of disbelief'). Kubrick's use of the background action in Part I of *Full Metal Jacket* is, I believe, different from the usual strategy of background clutter seen in films of all kinds. The background action in various scenes of Part I not only fulfills the ordinary filmic function of lending realism to the frames, but it also has at least three thematic roles to play. Simply put, the background action in Part I of *Full Metal Jacket* is not *merely so*.

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First of all, consider the three images at the top of the page. The dissolve uniting these two scenes of *Full Metal Jacket* (scenes 26 and 27) suggests a thematic correspondence between the bodies of the U.S. Marine recruits and the targets set up for a "300 meters rapid" rifle firing exercise.

Now consider the other images on these two pages. The column of images on the far left are screen shots from eight scenes of *Full Metal Jacket*. Each screen shot is accompanied by a smaller image, which is a photographic enlargement of the frame.

The enlargements pinpoint the background action that Kubrick has designed for these scenes. Look closely and you will see that Kubrick has Marine recruits moving around in the background. In many of these scenes, the Marines in the background are marching in formation. In some scenes the background soldiers are so far away, these jpegs were unable to reproduce them properly, as in scenes 20 (Marines in the far distance doing squat thrusts, visible beneath the drill instructor's upraised rifle), 34 (Marines negotiating the obstacle course behind Hartman), and 40 (running soldiers visible in gap between Hartman and Joker).

In one sense, the background action is simply background action, included to contribute visual activity to the frame and realism to the drama. But the background action has further roles to play.



31. Ext. - Training Field - Day



33. Ext. - Parade Deck - Day



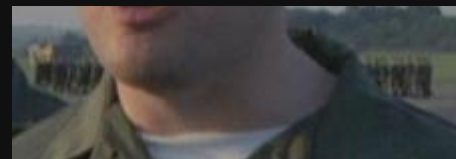
34. Ext. - Bleachers - Day



34. Ext. - Bleachers - Day



40. Ext. - Parade Deck - Day



40. Ext. - Parade Deck - Day

1. Kubrick gives the audience a 'sniper's eye view' of the moving targets that are all able-bodied soldiers 'out in the field'. The way I see it, Kubrick is training the audience for the "thousand-yard stare" that is alluded to later in the film, by Payback in scene 56. For example, in scene 34, in which Gunnery Sergeant Hartman lectures the recruits on infamous ex-Marines Lee Harvey Oswald and Charles Whitman, it is apt that as he speaks of expert long-distance riflemen, we see soldiers (moving targets) moving around far in the distance. (While Kubrick in *The Shining* focused on a *claustrophobic* setting, in Part I of *Full Metal Jacket* he turns his gaze to *open distance*.) Watching *Full Metal Jacket*, the audience is receiving basic training in a soldier's sharp eyesight and battlespace circumspection.

2. The background activity can correspond to an emotional state. In scene 14 (not shown here), Private Pyle is unable to get up and over the so-called "dirty name" obstacle, and the mood of his bumbling movements and increasing frustration is accented by the action of a group of recruits performing jumping jacks behind him.

3. The background activity of Marines marching in formation acts as a visual shorthand for a foreground character's sense of power. Consider the 'in-your-face' Hartman, the relentless, pushy, endlessly overbearing Hartman. While he addresses his recruits ("maggots") in his inimitable imposing style, in scenes 5 (first image), 33, and 40 (first image), we see, in the background of each shot, a line of Marines in the distance moving from his direction toward the recruits of Platoon 3092. This reminds me of a cartoonist drawing squiggly lines to represent heat rising from hot food. The marching soldiers in the background intensify Hartman's 'in-your-face' presentation, by serving as a visible representation of his aggressive, 'thrusting' personality.

3b. When Private Joker acts as Private Pyle's drill instructor, working with him on the manual of arms [in scene 24 (see below)], Joker has a line of Marines marching along on the parade deck behind *him*.

3c. When Private Pyle is finally 'squared away', in scene 40, the marching recruits are now behind *him*; and they even do an about face, in order to remain behind Pyle for the entire shot.

The way I see it, the overall feeling of the motif of background action in Part I looks forward to the climactic sequence of *Full Metal Jacket* - the Lusthog Squad versus the lone sniper girl.

The image of Marines marching in formation in the manner of a clockwork mechanism is also a resonant symbol of the War Machine.

