



presents

THE RECRUITS

Training America's Child Soldiers



A Film by: Carl D. Brown & Sean Donnelly





LOGLINE:

THE RECRUITS is a feature-length documentary about a group of young children who enter an obscure Marine-style training program designed to train them to think and behave like soldiers. The film profiles each child as they learn the Marine way of life and are confronted with the personal decision of whether or not to conform under the weight of a powerful institution.



SYNOPSIS:

Who are we? What makes us, us? How much of our character and personality is genetically programmed and how much of it is created over time, learned from personal experiences? When do we develop our personalities that define our true character?... When do we decide which tools we are going to use throughout our lives to help us deal with ... life?

THE RECRUITS follows a group of children as young as 8 as they learn how to see life through the eyes of a soldier. Enrolled in a boot camp style training program, these young people learn how to survive in a military-style rank structure, how to use a firearm, and how to take orders in youth-oriented military program called the Young Marines.

The Young Marines is a seldom heard of, Department of Defense funded program consisting of 12,000 children in more than 300 units, across 46 states. This character-driven film profiles several kids in the Temecula Valley Young Marines as they go through a nine-week recruit training process modeled after Marine Corps Boot Camp Training. Told through their personal perspectives, the film explores the kids' motivations for signing up, their personal family history, home life, and cultural influences. We see how all of these aspects influence their interest in being a soldier. The film raises questions around institutional indoctrination, education, and militarization.

Set in Temecula Valley, THE RECRUITS takes place in a suburban area northeast of San Diego, close to the Marine Corps Base at Camp Pendleton. Large homes, wide freeways, strip malls and sunny skies sprinkle the valley, hearkening to the old promise of the American Dream. Yet the area was hard hit by the Great Recession and has been trademarked "foreclosure alley." For many people living in Temecula Valley, the military offers one of the only stable sources of employment.



SYNOPSIS:

The main characters of the film are 10-year-old recruit Tommy Hernandez and his soon to be guardian, John Walter. When the film begins, Tommy's mother Jennifer is terminally ill and John has taken Tommy in while his mother struggles with her treatment. As a conflicted Marine, John is a career service member who questions the effects of a military program on the psyche of these young boys. John sets up a major question: Will the Young Marines program teach Tommy discipline and keep him away from drugs, or will it turn him into a militarized child?

Other characters include 15 year-old Robbie Healey, who believes he is on a mission from God to kill America's enemies, 8 year old Brian Weaver, whose family is on the brink of homelessness, and 10 year old Joshua Oliver, who hopes the Young Marines will help him one day get into NASA.



DIRECTORS NOTE: SEAN DONNELLY

I was 15 years old when I was walking through a graveyard and discovered children smaller than me dressed as soldiers, marching through the headstones in a cloud of fog.

Documentary photography had pulled on my teenage interests and I was taking photographs of a Memorial Day Celebration at the Los Angeles National Cemetery. I was expecting to get photographs of elderly Vets saluting the flag, but as these kids marched lock step in oversized camo I was instantly taken aback- in the post 9/11 era, what better visual representation of The United States' dedication to war existed? I learned that these kids were part of an obscure, Department of Defense sponsored military youth program titled the Young Marines.

As I pursued photography in college and professionally as a photojournalist, I shot units across the country on and off for the following decade. I got to know the children and families involved in this program, the urban Bay Area, to the mountain peaks of Colorado, to the Deep South. Through this exploration I learned more of the nuances of these family motivations, and of the U.S. itself.

When I met Carl Brown, my co-director on the project, I was transitioning into filmmaking from still photography. I always knew a film on the Young Marines would be a moving story, and Carl's experience as a documentary filmmaker, values as a storyteller, and dedicated personality made us a great team to take on an independent film production.

We wanted to tell the story of the kids going through the training process of the Young Marines, and also explore the sociological connection between the military industrial complex, economics, and education. Temecula Valley in Southern California ended up being a perfect setting. The area harkens to an era of the American Dream that seems to be fading; tract homes and mini-malls dot the valley, yet the area was hit hard in The Great Recession, and for many, the only economic opportunity is to join the military. Camp Pendleton, one of the largest Marine Bases in the U.S, is also one of the area's largest employers.

Through our exploration of the Young Marines we not only filmed close order drill, firearms training, and kids learning the Marine way of life. We explored the rich tapestry of home life and familial motivations that shape these children's opinions and personalities for life. We learned, that like many issues, the Young Marines is a more complex story than meets the eye.



TOPIC SUMMARY:

THE RECRUITS addresses issues raised by an escalating culture of warfare and nationalism in the U.S. and the challenges that presents both here and abroad. This includes military indoctrination, youth education, U.S. gun culture, and the larger role of America's foreign policy in the shaping of our youth. The United States maintains the world's largest fighting force and spends more money on defense than any other nation on earth, more than the next top 17 countries combined.

Bogged down in two foreign wars while simultaneously facing a grim economic outlook, it is vital to examine how our country prepares its citizens to support warfare – and to go to war. At such a crucial crossroads for the country, is the Young Marines program the best way to prepare our children to adapt to the next generation of challenges?

There has been ample media coverage of child soldiers in Africa, the Middle East, and Colombia. Rebel armies and zealous dictators force weapons into the arms of their nation's children and send them into battle. While the Young Marines are not fighting America's wars, the organization's practices do bear similarities to the recruitment of child-soldiers across the world. A child's brain is like clay; it is still malleable and impressionable. The values of military culture include following the chain of command in fighting the enemy no matter the cost. Critical thinking and questioning the status quo are discouraged. Child-soldiers and Young Marines alike are taught to subsume their own ideas to those of higher rank without question.

In addition to interviews with the kids and their families, the film also features interviews with people who serve as expository narrators and commentators. Seth Marlin is a former Young Marine, retired Army Specialist, and member of the Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). Mr. Marlin serves as a contradictory voice to the many adults in the film who see the Young Marines as a positive program for children. Mike Kessler, former Executive Director of the Young Marines explains how the program works and the mission of the organization.



TOPIC SUMMARY:

Carl Brown and Sean Donnelly have a combined 20 years of filmmaking and photography experience between them. With a roster of outlets such as MTV, VH1, Current TV, TIME, and MSNBC, as well as numerous independent projects, the duo has the proficiency and the sensitivity necessary to tell the stories of the families featured in THE RECRUITS. Brown's first feature-length documentary, 2nd Verse: The Rebirth of Poetry, won four 'Best of' awards in three festivals, both domestic and international. Donnelly's still photography of the Young Marines program (which he has gathered across the country over the course of the past five years) has been published at home and abroad. The duo's unique and intimate access into the lives of the characters featured in THE RECRUITS allows them to paint a moving picture of contemporary American culture.



CHARACTERS:



TOMMY HERNANDEZ

10-year-old Tommy Hernandez is a playful boy whose mother Jennifer is battling cancer.

The family that has taken them in include John Walter, a U.S. Marine and Afghanistan veteran. Tommy was influenced to join the Young Marines based on John's experience.

"I decided to be a young marine because John's a marine, and he's just family."

JOHN WALTER

John Walter is Tommy Hernandez's caretaker and main influence on the boy's decision to join the Young Marines. While John is a career U.S. Marine, he questions the effects a military-based youth program will have on the 10-year-old child.

"What I don't want it to do is turn him into this little rigid...toy soldier... I guess that's one of my concerns."



CHARACTERS:



THE GUILLES FAMILY

The Commanding Officer of the unit, Michael Guiles, is an ex U.S. Marine who has served in Somalia and Desert Storm. His sons, Joshua, 19, and Nick, 17, are the senior Young Marines who teach the recruits and plan on entering The U.S. Marines following their graduation from high School.

“You’re up in front of these Young Marines, and they see you, and their like “... I want to be like him...I want to be that someday”

JOSHUA OLIVER

At 12yrs old, Josh is a quiet, sensitive boy with a strong interest in NASA. He is homeschooled and his mother, Tanya, enrolled him in The Young Marines with the hopes it would help him work for NASA one day. With an absent father Tanya also hoped that her son would find a strong male role model in the Commanding Officer Michael Guiles.

“All those space camps cost a lot of money...so we do Young Marines because it’s a lot cheaper.”



CHARACTERS:



ROBBIE HEALEY

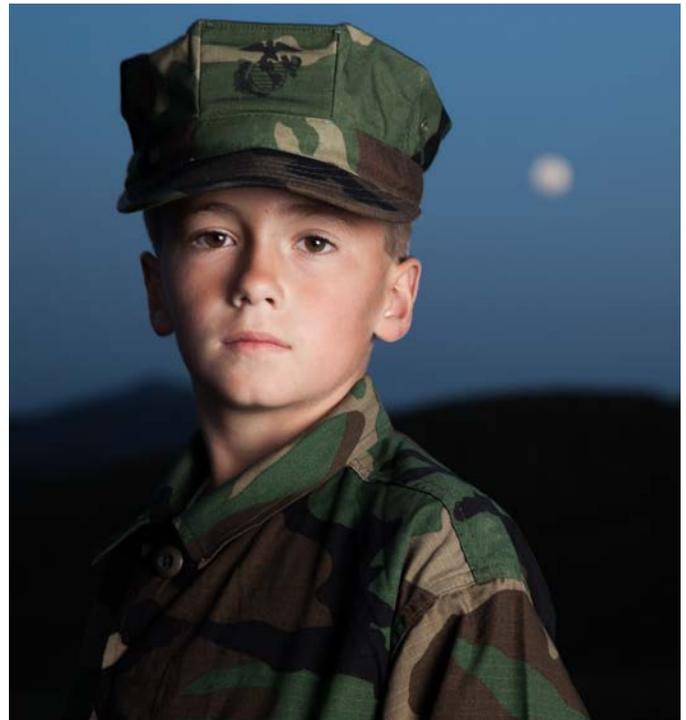
15-year-old Robbie Healey is the leader of the recruit class. Selected as Platoon Guide, it is his job to look after all the recruits. Robbie is very excited about the Young Marines, looks forward to joining the Marine Corps right out of high school, and believes God selected him to defend America against her enemies.

“Fighting against America’s enemies, that’s just what I want...I’m here for that reason.”

BRIAN WEAVER

8-year-old Brian Weaver is one of the youngest recruits. His mother, Sally Weaver signed him up because his two older brothers are already Young Marines. He is indifferent to the program, as he does not enjoy being yelled at or the strain of marching in boots.

“I didn’t want to go at first because my brothers came home crying.”



FILMMAKERS:



CARL D. BROWN
CO-DIRECTOR
PRODUCER
CINEMATOGRAPHER

As an Oakland-based documentary filmmaker and creative director, Carl works with clients from Left to Right Coast and beyond; the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York City and the world. As a director, producer, director of photography and editor, Carl started his own freelance production company, Corduroy Media, in 2003. His interest in digital storytelling, cinematography, and creating compelling narratives, motivates his projects with independent artists, non-profit foundations, educational groups and corporate and commercial clients. In 2008, Corduroy released 2nd Verse: The Rebirth of Poetry, awarded best documentary at San Francisco Independent, Santa Cruz, and London Independent Film Festivals. In 2008, Carl completed a ten month project with MTV producing segments for their Emmy Award winning Choose or Lose campaign. His broadcast work has been aired on MTV, VH1, and Current TV as well as distributed on-line by the Associated Press.



FILMMAKERS:



SEAN DONNELLY
CO-DIRECTOR
PRODUCER
CINEMATOGRAPHER
STILL PHOTOGRAPHER
EDITOR

Sean Donnelly is a director of photography, still photographer, and visual storyteller based in Oakland, CA. Sean is guided by imagery that combines moment and meaning. Sean is a partner at Corduroy Media, a San Francisco Bay Area based creative agency, whose clients include Google, Salesforce, The Red Cross, Microsoft, and UCSF. Before working with Corduroy Media Sean was a producer for TIME.com, MSNBC, and a freelance photojournalist for a number of news organizations across the country. He was also selected as one of the 25 under 25: Up and Coming American Photographers by The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. THE RECRUITS is Sean's first feature length documentary.



THE RECRUITS

TRAINING AMERICA'S CHILD SOLDIERS



A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY CORDUROY MEDIA

EDITED BY CHRIS FABER, SEAN DONNELLY, CRESCENT DIAMOND, ANDREW KALUZYNSKI

DIRECTED BY CARL BROWN, SEAN DONNELLY PRODUCED BY CARL BROWN, SEAN DONNELLY,

CRESCENT DIAMOND MOTION GRAPHICS BY EVAN OLDS

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“THE RECRUITS” Documentary World Premiere at SF DocFest

Film exploring the militarization of American youth will debut on Saturday, June 8th, 2019

San Francisco, CA May 1st, 2019 — The feature-length documentary film, *THE RECRUITS: Training America’s Child Soldiers* will make its world premiere at San Francisco’s Documentary Film Festival on June 8th at 4:45 pm followed by a second screening on June 12th at 7:00 pm. This relevant and timely film explores the militarization of American youth through a national program partially funded by the Department of Defense.

Written and directed by Carl D. Brown and Sean Donnelly, *THE RECRUITS* follows a group of children ages 8 and up through their initiation to and participation in The Young Marines, a \$3 million government and weapons industry funded, youth-oriented military program. Through a combination of personal interviews and cinema verité style filmmaking, *THE RECRUITS* weaves together the individual stories of children as they each navigate the family pressures, cultural beliefs, and societal issues that drive their sometimes eager, sometimes conflicted participation in the program.

The film takes place in Temecula Valley, an area in Southern California that was known as “foreclosure alley” during the Great Recession, and where the nearby Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton serves as one of the few stable sources of employment. Poverty, behavioral issues, tradition, and ambition drive the children and their families to seek the guidance, structure, and discipline promised by The Young Marines Program. But at what cost? And why is firearms training mandatory even for those children who are terrified of guns?

THE RECRUITS explores a variety of societal issues affecting children during times of war and economic turmoil and raises questions about institutional indoctrination and the militarization of American youth.

San Francisco DocFest takes place at the Roxie Theater and Brava Theater from May 29th to June 13th. *THE RECRUITS* will premiere on June 8th at 4:45 pm, and the screening will include a panel discussion with directors Carl Brown and Sean Donnelly and characters from the film (TBD). Additional screenings of *THE RECRUITS* during the festival include:
Wednesday, June 12th at 7:00 pm.

A trailer for the film is available for preview at <http://therecruitsfilm.com>.

Online and Social Media

Facebook: @therecruitsfilm | Instagram: @therecruitsfilm | Official film hashtag: #therecruits

About the filmmakers

Oakland-based filmmakers and video producers, Carl Brown and Sean Donnelly run Corduroy Media, a Bay Area creative agency. In 2008, Brown’s first feature-length documentary, 2nd VERSE: THE REBIRTH OF POETRY, was awarded best documentary at San Francisco Independent, Santa Cruz, and London Independent Film Festivals. This is Donnelly’s first feature-length documentary.

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RESOURCES:

FILM WEBSITE

WWW.THERECRUITSFILM.COM

TRAILER LINK

WWW.THERECRUITSFILM.COM/#TRAILER

PHOTO ASSET DOWNLOAD

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Y5MA8MVF](https://tinyurl.com/y5ma8mvf)

CORDUROY MEDIA WEBSITE

WWW.CORDUROYMEDIA.COM

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FILM SCREENING:

WORLD PREMIERE AT SF DOCFEST

JUNE 8TH @ 4:45 PM & JUNE 12TH @ 7PM ROXIE

THEATRE, 3117 16TH ST, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT [BIT.LY/THERECRUITS](https://bit.ly/therecruits)

