"Heartbreak": More muck, more macho from Eastwood

By KAREN KRENIS
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One of the worst things about Clint Eastwood's new movie "Heartbreak Ridge" is the preview they show on TV.

Army green camouflage paint covers his face, a foot-long cigar hangs out of his mouth, and there's gunfire in the background. You think "bomb" before you even set foot in the theater.

Maybe it's because you're bracing yourself for such a mess that "Ridge" escapes the bottom of the trash bin. It's a no Oscar winner, but at least there's a coherent storyline.

Eastwood is Gunnery Sergeant Tom Highway, a tough-talking, traditionalist Marine who won a chestful of medals for his heroics in Korea and Vietnam. When he's assigned to a flaky platoon that seems to have graduated from Gabe Kotter's class of sweathogs, his mission is to whip them into competent U.S. Marines — Louis Gossett Jr. style.

And like most graduates from Hollywood's School of the Armed Forces, Highway has a deep-down heart of gold. He gets attached to his fumbling platoon, and they in turn realize he's only trying to make them better soldiers — which the pack admits even before their new skills are tested in real battle.

Marsha Mason supplies the romantic sub-plot as Highway's ex-wife, Aggie, and Highway spends his free time reading "Woman" magazine articles, intent on learning to be the man she wants. The sweet, comic tone is unexpected in such a predictable romance.

But most of "Heartbreak Ridge" — and there's more than two hours of it — focuses on the Marines: warhorses like Highway vs. both lazy soldiers and a new wave of young, college-educated superiors who've never seen war.

"Heartbreak Ridge" offers little, if any, depth or artistry, and Eastwood, who served as director and producer, becomes tiresome with his endless gutter-mouth wit.

But "Ridge" is more than a macho flick, and while it doesn't make you think, at least it's entertaining.

MOVIE REVIEW

"Heartbreak Ridge" is playing at Westmar Plaza, Louis Ridge Road and The Marketplace (Rated R). With 10 representing the highest score, this movie rates 5.

Clint Eastwood, breaking hearts and bodies in Heartbreak Ridge.