

BUFFALO THEATRE ENSEMBLE

PRESENTS



By John Patrick Shanley

Directed by Kurt Naebig

Feb. 1 – March 3, 2019

Preview Jan. 31

The Playhouse Theatre

Time and Setting: Spring of 1971, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina

Characters:

Gunney Sergeant

Lt. Colonel Littlefield

Margaret Littlefield

Captain Lee King

Chaplain White

P.F.C. Evan Davis

Directors Note:

I expect some plays to sneak up on me and some to hit me right between the eyes. And then there are plays that defy those expectations by doing both. *Defiance* by John Patrick Shanley did (for me) exactly that.

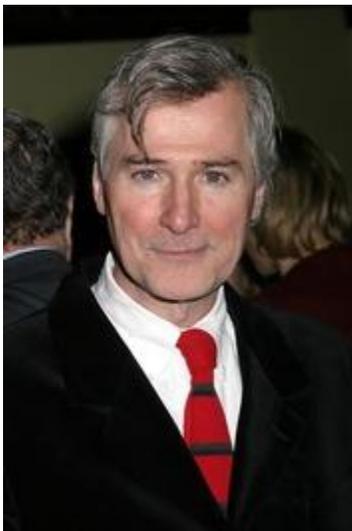
Coming right on the heels of his Pulitzer and Tony winning play *Doubt*, *Defiance* takes place in 1971 at Camp Lejeune, a military base in North Carolina.

To give you some background, in 1971...

- Disney world opened. The Attica prison riot happened. Voting age was lowered to 18 because folks who were being drafted to fight in Vietnam said "old enough to fight, old enough to vote."...and thus came the 26th amendment. Charlie Manson and his followers were found guilty and given the death penalty. AMTRAK and Federal Express were both created. Gas cost \$.40 a gallon. A new Dodge Charger cost \$3500.00. The Pentagon Papers were leaked in June; what they said was that the US was losing the war in Vietnam, and the government was keeping that knowledge from the American people. Meanwhile, 60% of those Americans were against that war.

Defiance is a play with some twists and turns, but at the center of it lies a number of questions: questions many of us are asking of ourselves, or the world at large, today. John Patrick Shanley chooses not to school us or answer those questions for us, but rather take a position like Socrates, who said, "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think"...the playwright of *Defiance* offers us that freedom. KN

The Playwright



John Patrick Shanley (1950-) is a leading American playwright who has written over twenty-three plays, and six screenplays, several of which he has directed. The success of his 1984 play, *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*,

brought Shanley to the attention of the national theatre scene and introduced the public to the themes that prevail across his work: the difficulties of communication, personal fears versus the courage to connect, and the shifting roles of gender relations. In 1988, his first screenplay, *Moonstruck*, won the Oscar, demonstrating Shanley's ability to attract audiences beyond Broadway. His greatest success to date, *Doubt: A Parable*, exemplifies Shanley's talent for creating critically demanding works that capture the concerns and imaginations of the American public through both live and film performances. *Doubt*'s 2004 theatrical debut won the New York Drama Desk Award and the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Shanley's screenplay of *Doubt*, which he also directed, was nominated for five Academy Awards in 2009. Shanley's background, growing up Irish Catholic in the Bronx's Irish-Italian working class community, influences much of his writing; however, his path to becoming a playwright was somewhat unusual. He was the youngest of five children, the only one of whom graduated college. Much of his youth was spent getting expelled from various schools, and he never attended a professional play until he was twenty-two years old. His only exposure to plays had been two productions at Cardinal Spellman High School: *The Miracle Worker* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Hodges129-30). The image of the warrior-poet in *Cyrano* shaped Shanley's young imagination as he, too, became a lover of language who joined the military.

https://www.usna.edu/BradySeries/_files/documents/Defiance-Stanlake.pdf

Interview with the Playwright

Conducted by Associate Professor Christy Stanlake, United States Naval Academy

In the portion of the interview below, Shanley discusses his years in the United States Marine Corps and the ways in which the Marines helped him develop the focus he would need as a playwright. Many of the memories he relates directly connect to the setting and characters we meet in *Defiance*.

John Patrick Shanley: I went into the United States Marine Corps when I was nineteen years old, during the last years of the Vietnam War. My brother, Tom, had been a Sergeant in the Air Wing in the Marine Corps before me, and he had been in Da Nang when Da Nang was bombed. My brother, Jim, was in the Navy before that, and basically. . . spent his time in the brig (laughter). I went into the infantry, went through Paris Island and then on to Camp Geiger for advanced infantry training. At that time, initial training was almost six months. Then we got our assignments, and I was assigned to Camp Lejeune. A couple of people were assigned to . . . Vietnam or Okinawa. But in fact, at that point, the Marines were mostly pulling out of Vietnam. They are first to fight, and—less advertised—first to leave.

Life in the Barracks

JPS: So, I was in a barracks. At that time, you lived in a communal squad bay, about eighty guys, with eight bunks to a section, separated just by lockers. Basically, you are all living in one big

room. Then in the command building, about a five minute walk up the way, was the Battalion Commander. So, I was in First Battalion, 6th Marines in the Flame Thrower Unit. There was still a Flame Thrower Unit at that time. . . . We trained: went to Jungle Warfare School in Central America, in Panama, the Panamanian Jungle. We went to Guantanamo Bay up in the hills and refurbished gun emplacements and stuff like that. Basically, we went on maneuvers and trained for knocking out tanks and everything having to do with being in infantry during the time I was in.

But it was a very particular time. It was a period of extremely low morale in the Marine Corps, as anyone who was on the Command end of things at that time will tell you. The guys had been coming back from Vietnam for a long time at that period, and a lot of them were not in good shape. There was a decent amount of drug abuse; there was an incredible amount of racial tension, specifically at Camp Lejeune.

A few months before I got there [Camp Lejeune], there was a race riot. That was very much in the air from the day that I arrived. When you went into the weekend and you had liberty, if you didn't go anywhere, by the end of the weekend, the squad bay was disgusting. There was garbage flowing out of all of the garbage cans. It's not what you think of when you think of the Marines. This is not what you think of. During the week, no question: everything was run very tightly. But whenever the supervisory grip was loosened, things fell apart pretty quickly. There was also a lot of knowledge from command, and they felt that they needed to step back from time to time because there was so much tension, and they felt these guys needed to let off some steam.

There were several murders in Camp Lejeune while I was there. I believe there was three in one week, at one point. There was male on male rape. I remember an incident of that, and the guy got caught because he took the wrong pants.

Christy Stanlake: And that's in the play, too! (Laughs)

JPS: People are in uniform: (laughs) one pair of pants looks like another. The command was really doing what they could to figure out these very serious problems. And it was really shortly after I got out that they started a massive reorganization of the Corps, and got rid of a lot of these people. When I got in, they had taken in a lot of guys who had committed minor felonies. Like, if you stole a car, the judge would say, "You can go to jail, or you can go in the Marine Corps." You get those guys, or guys with minor assault and battery, that kind of thing. So some scruffy types coming in as a result of that. And then you had all of these guys who'd been through combat and were back and saw absolutely zero point in being in the Marine Corps if you'd already fought. They just didn't get that at all. These were not people who were careerists. At that point, it was a mixture of the draft and of volunteers. It was leaning toward a volunteer group, but they were [also] drafting into the Corps because they were just running through so many men during the course of the conflict; and also because being a Marine, at that time, was to be completely flying in the opposite direction from Woodstock and that whole culture. So, there was a lot of animosity toward service people, especially in the metropolitan

areas like New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles. It wasn't necessarily a hero's welcome that you got when you got home, and it's in this atmosphere that I set the play.

Memories of Lejeune and the Cultural Setting of Defiance

First of all, I would say, 96-97% of all officers in the Marine Corps were white. So a black officer was like, "What is that?" That certainly had something to do with the racial tension that was going on. More generally, I was living in the squad bay with all these guys, eighty guys, and a lot of them were black. The black Marines were doing all of these Black Power handshakes, where they would bang their hands in a certain fashion, banging all four sides of another's fist, and sometimes this would go on for two minutes. Constantly. If you imagine what it is like on a Marine Corps base, where you're walking down the street and you pass an officer, and you salute. If you also look out and you see, like, twenty guys doing a black bonding thing that white Marines aren't doing, everywhere, everywhere you look. . . . [There was also] really aggressive behavior in the mess hall, where black Marines routinely were cutting to the front of the line and just daring you to say something, and fistfights were breaking out. . . . There was a lot of challenging going on, a lot of challenging.

Shanley's School Years and the Gift of the Corps

CS: Having come from the Bronx, were you surprised? Had you been witness to that sort of racial tension already? Or was this all new?

JPS: My neighborhood was filled with insane racists. There were no black people in my neighborhood; there were no Latino people in my neighborhood. If one came in, they were attacked. This was not my cup of tea: I was raised admiring John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, but that was the milieu. And also I was very affected by the Woodstock generation and the idea of love, peace, and happiness. So, I was very aware of the dichotomy before I ever got to the Marine Corps. When I got to the Marine Corps, what I said was, "This is the most civilized place I've ever been." Because at least there are rules, and when you do something like this, they throw you in jail, they throw you in the Brigg.

CS: I was reading your bio in *Doubt* that provides that litany of schools that you were expelled from, but ends with the note: "Then he went to the US Marine Corps. He did fine. He's still doing okay." So, I was curious, what was it that the Corps gave you that helped you find your way in life after your youth?

JPS: The Marine Corps was incredibly valuable to me in many, many ways. I have had a very fortunate life in that in fateful moments, what I needed showed up. I'd been thrown out of all these schools in the Bronx, and then I had been taken—in through, I can't call it anything but a misunderstanding—into a school in New Hampshire, a private school on top of a mountain with fifty-five kids in the whole school: all boys. So I was up there for two years. It was on 500 acres, seventeen miles to the nearest town, and I went kind of haywire up there. But what really happened was [that] I was in an environment where you would notice that I was already

haywire. That place slowly was bringing me back to some kind of better state, and it was also giving me the education—I have peculiar educational needs because I was kind of an English prodigy—and the schools I had gone to before that had no facilities to deal with someone like me and had no interest in me; whereas, in this school, they did. So they brought me along to a certain place— and I almost got thrown out of there, again and again, but I managed to graduate—and so that was a fateful and good thing.

And then I went back to New York for about a year and a half and I went to NYU for a year, but it was just too big for me and I didn't know how to be there, and so I was getting thrown out of there. So, I just wandered away and became the guy working in the deli, and I did that for maybe a year, and I was just kind of drifting. I was going to be drafted, I didn't have a low number, but I didn't have a high number in the lottery, so I was going to go eventually.

So, I decided to take matters into my own hands, to take my fate into my own hands, and I said, "So, I hear the army is boring, but the Marines are not."

And I asked a couple of the guys I knew who'd been in the Marine Corps, "Is it boring?"

They'd all laugh in this kind of odd way, and say, "No, it's not boring."

And I said, "That's all I wanted to know," and I joined. And then after I joined, but before I went, which was only a couple of weeks, I really grilled the guys I knew who'd been in the Corps: "Just tell me exactly what happens from the moment you get on the bus." That turned out to be a smart move because I was psychologically prepared. I knew everything that was coming. I knew that there would be the yellow footprints and not to look at the guy in the eyes, a lot of little tips about how to remain invisible—like CAPT King is always talking about, liking being invisible.

That is certainly one of the things that you learn in the military that is the opposite of what I learned in the culture—in the '60s the thing was, "wear as many bright colors, and stripes, and stars, and stuff as you can. Express your individuality." In the Marine Corps, they cut off your hair; they gave you the same glasses—if you wore glasses—as the other guy; they put you in uniform; you spoke in unison or not at all. This was in basic training, and the expectation was, and the thing that you basically got approval for was: fitting in, blending, doing the same thing as everybody else, acting the same way when you got a command as everybody else acted. That was something that I'd not been totally exposed to before, and I found that that was very, very soothing to me. Becoming invisible was very soothing to me, and it gave me a lot of time. When you're in formation, you're at attention, or you're standing at attention at the foot of your bunk, you have a lot of time to yourself, a lot of time to reflect. You don't have to reflect a lot to answer a command: it's, "yes, sir" or "no, sir," basically. [. . .] So it was sort of like being in some kind of religious order where you cut off your hair, and you wear the same clothes as everyone else, and you answer in unison, and you spend a lot of time in silence. It gave me the contemplative center that I needed to continue to grow as a person, and to stop worrying about expressing how individual and different I was from everybody else, and just sort of be. [. . .] When I got into the regular Corps, I was put into a barracks where it was basically a little bit like being in Vietnam, because that is all anybody talked about. All these guys had come back from Vietnam, so they talked about it nonstop. You sort of started to feel a little bit of the jungle in the barracks, and get a sense of what these guys had gone through, and what it was

like, and also, for them, the incredible pointlessness of having served, done the things, you know. . . . Some of these guys had been incredibly gung-ho and had joined the Corps for four years, and gone and fought in Vietnam, sometimes for a couple of tours and were waiting to get out. But they wouldn't let them. They [the administration] did these early outs [. . .] and they were doing a few doing a few waves of those, but not enough for these very, very disenchanted guys who just didn't see the point anymore. You spent a lot of time with those people: a lot of idle time during hours of liberty, and the supercharged atmosphere, and these fights and stuff. But the thing was for me: "Can I do this? Can I go through basic training? Can I physically do it? Can I follow the rules, or am I just going to get thrown out of everything for the rest of my life?" And I discovered that I could do it, and actually make decent rank, and get off with an E-4 (which is a Corporal) by the time my enlistment was up in two years, and get off as Sergeant, if I would reenlist, which I didn't want to do. But I was like, "Wow!" So, I did it. And I was eligible, if I stayed in for one more year, for the good conduct medal, which is hilarious. (Laughter) Then I got out, and the GI bill was very good back then. It was the old GI bill. So, after many months of bouncing around—maybe even a year—I want back to NYU, and I said to someone, somebody who was a friend of mine, a teacher there, "You know, when I left, I wasn't doing well; they were going to throw me out." And he said, "You go in the military: all sins are forgiven." So, I went and I met with the Dean there, and I brought a notebook of things I'd written and really made my case. She barely looked at the notebook. She just got brighter and brighter the more she realized that she had a guy here that, if she let him back in, would treat the educational experience as an incredible opportunity, rather than the usual thing when you leave your parents' house, go to college, and you're just sort of clueless—and maybe you figure out what you want to do in two years. She knew that out of the gate I was going to work hard and I was going to be focused. So she let me back in, and I had a 4.0 for the next four years. I was her poster boy to say, "I let this guy back in NYU." [...] I became valedictorian of all the schools at New York University. And I was impoverished. They wouldn't give you any sort of financial aid if you were a certain age, like still young, claiming you were getting no support from your parents. They figured you were getting money from your parents; you just weren't claiming it. So, I had to pay for my whole education and to make that even possible, the good news was, the GI bill gave me several hundred dollars a month to go to school. They did it for nine months a year for four years, and that made it possible.

CS: And that allowed you to focus at school, too?

JPS: Yeah

CS: I read somewhere that you said, as a young man, you were inspired by the concept of a warrior poet, and I think that that is also an idea that often resonates with many of our Midshipmen. Yet, it is also a contested image in that, both inside and outside the military, people sometimes discredit it. In your experiences—joining the military when you also had that love of language, and then finding within the military the focus to come back to embrace the freedom education can give you—if you were to help shape our nation's understanding of a warrior poet, how would you do that? JPS: The place where I first saw that was when I was thirteen years old and I saw *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which is about a military guy in France who's

got a very long nose, and he is a poet; he's brilliant, and he's the toughest guy in the barracks, and they're all terrified of him. They never mention his nose because if they did, he'd kill them. I thought, "Wow, there's a poet, and he's the toughest guy in the room." Certainly, you know, William Styron was in the Marine Corps and wrote about it. . . and became one of the premiere novelists of our country. And Harvey Keitel, who will never tire of saying "Simpes Fi" to me, was in the Marine Corps, and goes to the Marine Corps Ball; anything to do with the Marine Corps, he is right there. My most influential teacher at New York University is still teaching. He was my teacher when I was 17: Professor Terence Moran. He's an ex-Marine, and celebrates the Marine Corps Birthday every year, and goes to the Marine Corps Ball and all of that. These guys, clearly Moran and Styron and others, these are scholars who not only were in the Marine Corps but carry that distinction as a great achievement of theirs. If you were in the Marine Corps and you go in the direction of the fine arts, those people are blown away by the fact you were in the Marine Corps. It's incredibly impressive to them because many of these people went to college, and then graduate school, and post graduate work, and that's all they know. They never went out into the other world, and wore a uniform, and went overseas and bonded with people, and had these experiences; and they are openly envious. I realized the first time people were envious of me—and I came from the Bronx, I fell down laughing. Whatever experiences you have in life that are intense and specific, and not generally shared: they are great badges in society, and they are also tremendously useful to draw on in whatever line of work or occupation you choose to pursue after that.

https://www.usna.edu/BradySeries/_files/documents/Defiance-Stanlake.pdf

Characters:

Gunney Sergeant - A military lifer from Florida

Lt. Colonel Littlefield - From Maryland. He's tough, intelligent, well-educated and private. Fought in Korea.

Margaret Littlefield – Upbeat, from a good family in Florida.

Captain Lee King – From Washington D.C., Serious, reserved, physically powerful man who has worked hard all his life. He's done two tours of Vietnam.

Chaplain White – From Alabama. First Lieutenant, Junior Grade. Wears a Naval uniform. Has not seen battle.

P.F.C. Evan Davis – Poor Southern man, 20 years old from Beaufort, South Carolina. He's had a rough life.

Things to think about prior to the performance:

- Why do you think the play is called *Defiance*?
- Why do you think the set is so close to the audience? Why are all the locations shown immediately, when you look at the set?

Things to think about during the performance:

- What are your first assumptions about the following characters: Colonel Littlefield, Margaret Littlefield, Chaplain White, and Captain King? By the end of the play, how would you describe each of these characters? Do your opinions of the characters change between the first time you see them and the last time you see them on stage? If so, what scenes help you to see them differently?
- Are there heroes and villains in this play?

Things to think about/discuss after the performance:

- Shanley is an individual who experienced the racial conflicts that occurred in Camp Lejeune during his service there. Comparing his reflections of his time at Camp Lejeune (above) to the many ways in which his characters in the play talk about the racial conflicts, does Shanley succeed in providing *Defiance's* audience with multiple/differing perspectives of racial tensions on the base? If so, how? If not, why not?
- In what way do you see our world today in this play?
- Define what “moral authority” motivates each of the play’s main characters (Colonel Littlefield, Margaret Littlefield, Chaplain White, and Captain King). Is each character truly motivated by what he or she claims motivates him or her? How or how not?

Other Analysis “Tools”:

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is ‘about?’ In a nutshell, how do the playwrights drive their point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwrights decide that this was the most quintessential title for their work?

The running time for this production is approximately one hour and thirty minutes with no intermission

Please join us for a **pre-show discussion Thursday, January 31st from 6:45 – 7:15 pm MAC 140** preceding the preview performance. Note that pre-show discussions will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production.

There will be a **post-show discussion** following the **Friday, February 8th** performance. The post-show will be with director, cast and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

Please join us!