

The 15:17 To Paris use of non-actors' derails film

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 09 February 2018 08:43



Rating: « out of «««««

Running Time: 94 minutes

The 15:17 to Paris is a biopic that chronicles the actions of three US military servicemen who thwarted an assailant on a passenger train bound for Paris in 2015. Of course, the three men involved: Spenser Stone, Anthony Sadler and Alek Skarlatos acted bravely and showed incredible heroism under great duress.

However, their real-life exploits would have been served much better by a documentary. As a narrative feature, this movie is dramatically flat and completely ineffective.

Director Clint Eastwood chooses to focus on the three men, beginning with their childhoods and how they became friends, before detailing their adult career path and the trip that preceded the notable event. The filmmaker has the men portraying themselves onscreen for much of the movie (and taking part behind the scenes in order to get the details right). Unfortunately, it leads to all sorts of problems from which the feature never recovers.

Whether this was a casting experiment or just an attempt to pay homage to the persons involved, the director mistakes his leads for professional actors. Sadly, these guys aren't used to being on camera, leading to some remarkably stiff performances ... although to be fair, the time spent with the characters as children feels no less phony (even if the events themselves might be accurate).

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Over the course of events, viewers don't feel like they're getting to know anything about these people. There's no insight, internal struggle or turmoil. Stone is one who is emphasized, as sections of the film present him as a well-meaning kid who loves the military, but tends to act before he thinks. Stone has no arc or change in his personal perceptions and there is no detail or nuance in the storytelling.

There is an attempt to add some drama into the proceedings via brief shots of the confrontation on the train. However, the clips are so short and infrequent that they do little to build tension. Instead, the film focuses on the men's holiday across Europe. In doing so, it feels like watching home movies or photos from a relative's vacation. None of this is relevant story-wise, with many of the scenes having little to no purpose.

And the semi-scripted discussions aren't compelling. Early parts of the movie see the guys talking about college basketball. Later, the trip, we see them visit places like Venice, only to simply look around and enjoy the scenery. Viewers must endure the characters ordering food, or going to a gelato shop, making their dessert selections and then leaving the establishment with little else in the way of conversation. It's just the guys going about their business and frankly it gets tedious.

The movie breaks away from the food orders periodically so that Stone can repeat his feelings that, "... life is pushing us towards some greater purpose." An A-list actor would have difficulty selling these lines. While the serviceman may have really felt this, the blunt screenwriting doesn't do him any favors. It just comes across in a forced, eye-rolling manner. Again, these are probably very nice people, but they have nothing to work with and performing on the big screen is something they're just not up to.

When the confrontation finally occurs, it is effectively shot and disturbing to witness. It's also less than five minutes in length. That means that viewers will have to endure nearly 90 minutes of stilted conversations that one wouldn't take the time to overhear at the table next to you in a restaurant.

Again, these men are all heroes for what they did, but the material here isn't nearly enough to justify a feature film. Ultimately, *The 15:17 to Paris* doesn't offer anything new and isn't worth your time.

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