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Unclaimed unveils a legacy of shame, denial: review

Unclaimed tells the story of two men: Tom Faunce, a Vietnam War vet and the man he believes is John Hartley Robinson, a Green Beret left behind who surfaces after more than 40 years.



Is this man John Hartley Robinson, a Green Beret who disappeared in 1968 during the Vietnam War? Or, as U.S. defence officials allege, an imposter?

By: Bruce DeMara Entertainment, Published on Thu Sep 19 2013
The Toronto Star / TheStar.com

Unclaimed

3.5 stars out of 4

Written and directed by Michael Jorgensen. 77 minutes.

In 1973, late president Richard Nixon solemnly declares: “For the first time in 12 years, no American military forces are in Vietnam. All of our American POW’s (prisoners of war) are on their way home.”

It’s the latter statement that ex-soldier Tom Faunce can’t quite swallow, a man who takes the oft-quoted slogan — “no-one left behind” — to heart.

And there’s where the mystery of John Hartley Robertson begins in *Unclaimed*, a documentary that sends its audience on a rollercoaster ride of emotions.

It’s a film that has become controversial, with the U.S. Department of

Defense and some Vietnam veteran groups lining up prior to its debut earlier this year to dispute Robertson's claim that he is in fact the man he says he is, a Green Beret master sergeant captured by the Vietnamese and later assimilated into their society.

Canadian filmmaker [Michael Jorgensen](#) wisely steps back and lets the compelling facts speak for themselves.

If nothing else, *Unclaimed* is an extraordinary journey, starting with Faunce, who became a Christian in the 1970s, and has made it his life mission to seek out information on missing soldiers.

In 2008, Faunce meets the man who claims to be Robertson in a remote Vietnamese village. Robertson disappeared during a classified (and illegal) mission into Laos and was declared dead. In fact, his name is engraved on Washington D.C.'s Vietnam War memorial.

The man, who no longer speaks English, has suffered serious memory loss after being tortured by the Vietnamese. Eventually, a Vietnamese woman takes him into her care, they marry and start a new family.

Jorgensen follows Faunce as he seeks to unravel the mystery of Robertson's identity. It's a David versus Goliath struggle as Faunce mounts his own investigation against the stone-walling efforts of the U.S. government.

The best evidence emerges from a test of Robertson's molar proving he was raised in the U.S. A soldier trained by Robertson declares himself "convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt" of his identity. His only surviving sister, Jean, concurs. Photos of a young Robertson and his father bear a striking resemblance.

Jorgensen also unveils disturbing information, including that one of Robertson's daughters agreed to provide a DNA sample only to withdraw consent after meeting with a U.S. military officer. Defense officials also claimed his DNA doesn't match his surviving sister, though she denied ever providing a sample.

A postscript near the film's end notes that U.S. government agencies dealing with MIA (missing in action) issues have a long record of deception and incompetence.

The subtext, Jorgensen makes clear, is that the [Vietnam War](#) is a conflict whose legacy of loss and shame for the U.S. remains firmly entrenched.

The closing scene — a reunion between Robertson and his sister, in Canada, not the U.S. — provides a powerful emotional climax to a film that will stay with its audience long after the closing credits.

http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2013/09/19/unclaimed_unveils_a_legacy_of_shame_denial_review.html