

Print This Article

Tuesday, Sep 9, 2008

Posted on Tue, Sep. 09, 2008

## 'Defiance' smartly delves into military moral dilemma

By MARK LOWRY

mlowry@star-telegram.com

DALLAS — In the first two of John Patrick Shanley's plays in a projected trilogy, *Doubt* and *Defiance*, the playwright tackles profound moral questions about once-unassailable institutions.

In *Doubt* (which will be staged in October at WaterTower Theatre), it's the Roman Catholic church in the 1960s. In *Defiance*, which opened in an astutely acted production at Theatre Three on Monday, it's the U.S. military during the Vietnam War.

The scene is Camp Lejeune, N.C., in 1971. In the fourth of seven scenes, Lt. Col. Littlefield (Steven Pounders) has promoted Capt. Lee King (Bryan Pitts), saying that King is the right man for the job but mostly because Littlefield knows he could make history by appointing a black man to such a high military post. Soon after, King is told about an indiscretion by Littlefield by Pfc. Davis (Drew Wall). The only other military person who knows is a Lutheran chaplain (David Fluitt).

The story could easily unfold in courtroom-movie-of-the-week style, but Shanley is too smart for that. The audience knows just enough to stay on seat's edge. Dialogue about Bible stories, Martin Luther King Jr., an unseen draft dodger and the reading habits of Littlefield's wife, Margaret (Diane Worman), offer insight. But somehow, nothing is overly complicated.

Directed by TCU theater professor T.J. Walsh, Pitts, Fluitt and Wall give stirring performances. Pounders creates a likeable human out of a stern military ladder-climber and hero whom others are afraid to challenge. We also honestly believe he is head-over-heels for his wife.

Speaking of which, Worman might be the star here. She gives us a smart woman whose heartbreaking final scene drives home what has already been a riveting production.

---

Defiance Through Oct. 5

7:30 p.m. Thursdays; 8 p.m. Fridays; 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturdays; 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays

Theatre Three, 2800 Routh St., Dallas

\$10-\$40

214-871-3300; [www.theatre3dallas.com](http://www.theatre3dallas.com)

**Be advised:** Some strong language

**Runtime:** 90 minutes with no intermission

**Best reason to go:** Pounders and Worman