

## Land of Mine

A worthy nominee for the Best Foreign Language Film of 2016, this post-WWII story of young German POWs under Danish command defusing seaside bombs is an excellent combination of the idyllic and the taut: idyllic when showing the gorgeous sweep of Danish landscape and intensely taut in scenes when callow youngsters must defuse mines

Written and directed by Danish filmmaker Martin Zandvliet, “Land of Mine” (a cute English pun; the Danish title is *Under Sandet*) shows a piece of immediate postwar activity little treated in film: vanquished POWs serving the victors, in this case, given the diabolical chance to defuse their country’s own ordnance for a chance at freedom. The Danish sergeant in charge, Carl Rasmussen (Roland Møller), has a bunch of green German teenagers to extract bombs (tens of thousands of them, mostly hidden in seaside sand) on a most beautiful stretch of Denmark’s western coast. The closest thing the youths have to a leader is young Sebastian Schumann (Louis Hoffman), an intelligent and no-nonsense lad who is all about German efficiency, because it means they could get the nasty job done earlier so they all can go home.

Is this movie tension packed? Of course it is, and you anxiously wait for the inevitable explosions that occur, but the film shows taste and restraint throughout, with almost all of the explosions judiciously handled off camera or at a distance. An early one comes as a real surprise, as a boy is killed (off camera) in a training session. Another blast on the beach is the worst, with an aftermath of gore, dismemberment, and death. One of the worst comes at a distance, killing Rasmussen’s beloved dog, an incident that helps turn this harsh disciplinarian into a more paternal figure, who gradually softens towards his (pardon the expression) youthful charges. The film ends with both a most disheartening sequence, followed by one of relief and escape.

Zandvliet’s direction throughout is assured and his handling of his actors is admirable. For his part, Møller is very fine, first seen as a vicious taskmaster beating German prisoners for violating his country, then talking and acting tough when in command, but progressively warming to the needy and demoralized children under him. Those children, led by young Hoffman, form a pack of understandably frightened kids out of their depth in the wake of a terrible conflict, but with enough character and quirks to earn your sympathy. Again, a worthy nominee.

*(Rated “R” for violence, it runs 100 minutes; in Danish and German.)*

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