

Comedy crash lands; Turner thrives in 'V.I.'

By Geri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — Hollywood's traditional patriotic flyboy movies take a shellacking in the goofy spoof, *Hot Shots!* (20th Century Fox).

Charlie Sheen plays the critical hot shot Navy pilot, Topper Harley, who is lured back into the service to head a risky mission being secretly sabotaged by Lt. Cmdr. Block (Kevin Dunn). This isn't difficult because the admiral in command (Lloyd Bridges) has a screw loose and then some after losing assorted body parts to various wars.

After he saves the day Topper gallantly leaves his love interest (Valeria Golino) behind to return to his more meaningful tribal existence with a sage Native American who has solemnly renamed him Fluffy Bunnyfeet.

Flights of fancy galore occur throughout co-writer/director Jim Abrahams' lightweight effort but they generally crash land.

This is especially true with a leaden Sheen in the cockpit. He was fine as the dramatic lead in "Wall Street," but he seems ill-suited for comedy. Bridges is the only cast member whose breezy delivery is funny.

The other problem with the movie is its scattershot approach. It's a hodgepodge of



Lloyd Bridges (right) plays Admiral "Tug" Benson and Jon Cryer (center) portrays Jim "Wash Out" Pfaffenbach, whose flying days are definitely over in Twentieth Century Fox' outrageous send-up of fly-boy films, *Hot Shots!*

Marsha Blackburn



Marsha Blackburn

Actor Cary Elwes plays perfect pilot Kent Gregory in *Hot Shots!*

unrelated jokes spliced helter-skelter throughout the movie. The off-the-wall flying sequences are a lark, but the film doesn't stay aloft, weighed down as it is by inside jokes.

It's easy to recognize scenes that parody *Dances With Wolves*, *Top Gun*, *Rocky* and *Gone With the Wind*, but audiences may draw a blank on send-ups of *9 1/2 Weeks*, *Fire Birds*, *The Great Santini* and *Marathon Man*.

Most of all, the movie should have a sense of self-mocking fun. But since it doesn't, it's easy to take pot shots at *Hot Shots!*

Due to intermittent sexual innuendo, minor cartoonish violence and an instance of rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'V.I. Warshawski'

Kathleen Turner proves men haven't got a lock on being tough private eyes when she plays the title role as steely Chicago investigator *V.I. Warshawski* (Hollywood).

In this updated version of the brittle 1940s detective movies, the hard-boiled P.I. is a no-nonsense woman. Her reporter boyfriend, Murray (Jay O. Sanders), is an inveterate skirt-chaser. Fed-up, V.I. flirts with ex-hockey player Boom-Boom Grafalk (Stephen Meadows). Boom-Boom's having family problems — his brothers (Frederick Coffin and Charles McCaughan) are pressuring him to sell the family business, and his ex-wife (Nancy Paul) suddenly wants custody of their feisty 13-year-old Kat (Angela Goethals).

After putting Kat in V.I.'s care for a few hours, Boom-Boom leaves to settle things and turns up dead. From then on it's up to V.I. to unravel a devious plan of murder for big bucks that is closing in on its next target — the very vulnerable Kat.

Based on the feminist distaff detective in Sara Paretsky's mystery novels, V.I. comes aggressively to life in Turner's capable hands. Indeed, under Jeff Kanew's fast-paced direction, she is ever center-stage and his shallow direction seems to suggest it's no matter if the plot segues confusingly — it's the star in action that counts.

Turner does the title character justice,

playing her with such sassy confidence and raging physicality that she actually broke her nose during a fight scene. And there are several — V.I. asks for no special handling as a woman and gets punched out as often as she takes on the bad guys. It's debatable whether this equal treatment can be seen as progress, or a shame that it's just another avenue to showcase a violent occupation.

Charles Durning does a minor turn as the jaded cop who's an exasperated surrogate father to V.I., but the one to watch is Paul in a small but showy role as Kat's mercurial mom.

Much of the movie is just a cut above standard TV private detective series, but the flavor of its Chicago setting is nicely captured. From a speedboat chase on the Chicago River to V.I.'s messy apartment across the street from Wrigley Field to the sinister nighttime docks she haunts, the city helps to flesh out her tart, street-smart character.

Because of mostly stylized violence, recurring sexual references and intermittent rough language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

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