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THE TRAMA OF BEING A KUBRICK MARINE

By LESLIE BENNETTS

BEFORE being cast in Stanley Kubrick's new movie, "Full Metal Jacket," Vincent D'Onofrio was a trim, good-looking athlete, a rugged 6 feet 3 inches tall and - with his full head of curly dark hair - the kind of man who makes women's heads turn. But after winning the part of Leonard, the fat, inept and increasingly disturbed Marine recruit who serves as the dramatic fulcrum for the first half of the film, Mr. D'Onofrio was obliged to put on nearly 70 pounds and shave his head - a physical transformation that had a shocking effect. "It changed my life," he said. "Women didn't look at me; most of the time I was looking at their backs as they were running away. People used to say things to me twice, because they thought I was stupid." The psychic toll of spending months inside Leonard's body was compounded by the grueling physical demands of the movie's boot-camp sequences, which were particularly rigorous for someone weighing in at 280 pounds; on one obstacle course Mr. D'Onofrio injured his knee so badly it required surgical reconstruction. One year later, however, Mr. D'Onofrio is back down to his normal weight, his hair has grown in again, his knee has healed, he runs six miles a day and - most gratifying of all - he has won admiring reviews for his impressive screen debut as Leonard.

A hopelessly incompetent recruit, Leonard is undone by the traumas of boot camp, a humiliating ordeal with a gruesome denouement. The pivotal role was won by Mr. D'Onofrio at a distance of thousands of miles; Mr. Kubrick cast him on the basis of several videotaped auditions and a taped interview that Mr. D'Onofrio mailed to the director in England. A Change in Perceptions

The 27-year-old actor originally learned that the part was available from Matthew Modine, an old friend and the star of "Full Metal Jacket." "I rented a home video camera, found a green stoop that resembled an Army barracks, put on an Army cap and green fatigues and did a monologue about a rookie cop, except that I left out all the lines about cops," Mr. D'Onofrio recalled. "I sent it off and got a call right back." The hard part was having to gain all that weight, which proved as difficult as losing it later.

"I gained weight everywhere," Mr. D'Onofrio said. "My thighs were tremendous, my arms were tremendous, even my nose was fat. I had a tough time tying my shoelaces, but this was the only way I could play Leonard, because I had to be weak-minded in the same way. Because of the weight and the fact that he was totally out of his element, Leonard's mind became weak. He was slow to start, a country bumpkin, but I don't think he was insane. What they did to Leonard was they made him into a very efficient killing machine."

Inhabiting Leonard's body had a profound effect on Mr. D'Onofrio's perceptions. "It makes you realize all those typical things about beauty being deeper than what you would think," he said. "When you look at people, you should look at more than what you see on the surface; you should try to find a soul. That was thrown in my face every day - every time I tried to hail a cab." Offbeat Roles

Mr. D'Onofrio has frequently found himself playing the handicapped or disturbed; on Broadway, he was cast as a young man with a speech impediment in "Open Admissions," and his television roles have included a 250-pound killer and, in another segment, a mentally retarded man unjustly accused of murder, on "The Equalizer."

However, Mr. D'Onofrio's potential range is suggested by another movie that recently opened; in "Adventures in Baby-Sitting," he is virtually unrecognizable as a real-life version of Thor, the comic-book Norse god complete with bulging muscles and flowing blond hair.

For the Brooklyn-born actor, who dropped out of college to try to start a career in theater, this is a heady time. "Until I got 'Full Metal Jacket' I was doing Off Off

Broadway plays with three people in the audience," he said. "I couldn't get arrested then."
