

# GRAND FINALE

An appreciation of the greatest final episodes of all time



## M\*A\*S\*H

### GOODBYE, FAREWELL AND AMEN (SEASON 11, EPISODE 16)

"SAY GOODBYE. WHAT'S the big deal?" Captain Benjamin Franklin 'Hawkeye' Pierce (Alan Alda) clearly wasn't speaking for the weeping 105.9 million Americans who tuned in to CBS on 28 February 1983 to see how it would all end for the the personnel of the 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (*M\*A\*S\*H*) serving in the Korean War. 'Goodbye, Farewell and Amen' remains the most-watched scripted episode in the history of American television — that's 25 million more than second-place *Cheers* and 87 million ahead of *Game Of Thrones*.

Directed and co-written by Alda in collaboration with the show's seven other writers, the episode begins smartly by sticking its lead (Alda again) in his most emotionally vulnerable situation of the whole

series while underlining its central theme: the struggle to maintain sanity amidst the insanity of war.

Hawkeye undergoes treatment at a psychiatric hospital after running amok in camp. What caused the normally unflappable chief surgeon to drive a jeep through the wall of the officers' club and attempt to operate in the OR without anaesthetic is the dramatic impetus for the first half of the show. The revelation that it was the sight of a mother smothering to death her crying baby to stop it alerting a nearby Chinese patrol is even more shocking than the offscreen death of Lt Col Henry Blake (McLean Stevenson) that poleaxed fans at the end of Season 3.

Hawkeye's return to camp and the countdown to armistice then

allows the rest of the ensemble cast to have their moments. Creator Larry Gelbart pioneered dual plot lines with *M\*A\*S\*H*, one dramatic, one comedic, and there are multiples here. BJ Hunnicutt (Mike Farrell) tries to get home for his daughter's birthday; a quintet of Chinese musicians surrender to Major Charles Winchester (David Ogden Stiers), Father Mulcahy (William Christopher) copes with tinnitus after a mortar attack and Klinger (Jamie Farr) plans to marry Korean refugee Soon Lee Han (Rosalind Chao).

The final farewells of all the principal characters are perfectly weighted, imbued with that sense of genuine community which would pave the way for shows as diverse as *Cheers* and *Northern Exposure*. Col.

Potter just about keeps it together as he takes one last ride on Sophie, his beloved horse. Major Houlihan (Loretta Swit) gives Hawkeye a passionate snog, acknowledging her old 'Hotlips' moniker but only after delivering a heartfelt tribute to her nursing staff. Charles Winchester leaves for a prestigious post as Chief of Thoracic Surgery, while Klinger donates one of his trademark dresses to his bride. And B.J. gets that difficult goodbye out by spelling it with rocks as best pal Hawkeye's chopper lifts him over those familiar hills.

Call it anti-war, pro-humanity or both, this was a show as classy as its exit. **PAUL SIMPER**

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