

**“SCREENING THE PAST”**

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**“RESPONSES TO WAR: WAR FILMS AND THE TEACHING OF HISTORY”**

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**(30 MINS)**

ABSTRACT

I would like to compare the responses to war of those filmmakers who have had personal experience of war and those who have not. In the case of Oliver Stone and Jean Renoir their films come directly out of the directors' personal experience of war (Stone's experience in Vietnam resulted in *Platoon*; Renoir drew upon his experience in the French Air Force in WW1 for *The Great Illusion*). For Milestone the autobiographical novel of Remarque provides the framework for *All Quiet on the Western Front*, to which he can contribute his own experience of war in the US Army Signal Corps photography section. The situation is more complex with Stanley Kubrick. He has an obvious fascination with the reasons why men go to war and the impact on recruits of military authority (*Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*), but has no direct experience of combat himself. Perhaps only in *Dr Strangelove* can one argue that the experience of living through the Cold War, especially the Cuban Missile Crisis, provides the impetus for the pessimistic analysis of accidental nuclear war.

The range of responses to the phenomenon of war is diverse - Kubrick's clinical examination of the uncaring hierarchy of military command in *Paths of Glory* and the brutal dehumanisation of recruits in *Full Metal Jacket*; Milestone's heartwrenching plea for peace in *All Quiet*; Stone's crude religious parable of the struggle between good and evil in the heart of American soldiers in Vietnam in *Platoon*; and John Wayne's equally crude celebration of American involvement in Vietnam as an exercise in "constitution building" in *The Green Berets*, are just some examples to draw upon. The most common response to war and combat in film is a very negative one, with the striking exception of Wayne's *Green Berets*. Those filmmakers who directly experienced war overwhelmingly conclude that war is destructive and pointless. Those who stayed at home, like Wayne, perpetuate the myth of the heroism and glory of war.

# "RESPONSES TO WAR": WAR FILMS AND THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

## OUTLINE

1. Introduction
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For the past 4 years I have taught a popular course in the Department of History called "Responses to War: An Intellectual History of War from Machiavelli to M.A.D." I thought I was the first to come up with this catchy title with its linking of the Machiavellian tradition of "realism" in international affairs to the nuclear armed stand-off between the superpowers during the Cold War. But I was beaten (unawares) to the punch by the American political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain who coined the expression in a paper "From Machiavelli to Mutual Assured Destruction: Reflection on War and Political Discourse" which she gave in 1984.<sup>1</sup> As the course has developed over the years I have changed the subtitle to accommodate my changing interests. It has variously been called "Machiavelli to M.A.D.", "Machiavelli to Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*," and (to return to the original alliteration) "Machiavelli to the Marx Brothers"

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Bethke Elshtain, "From Machiavelli to Mutual Assured Destruction: Reflections on War and Political Discourse" in *Occasional Papers II* (The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1985), pp. 16-34. I have benefited considerably from this paper and her other works, most notably her book on *Women and War* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987).

which is a reference to a different kind of “MADness”, namely the Marx Brothers’ classic satire of international relations and war in the mid-1930s: *Duck Soup*.

The aim of the course is to examine a selection of the extraordinary variety of intellectual and cultural responses to war from the late 15th century to the present. Although I deal with a variety of source material (such as art, literature, political philosophy, music, memoirs, oral histories) a substantial component of the course is war movies. The underlying assumption of the course is that **the experience of war, whether directly or indirectly, has had a profound impact on the way many individuals think** and that this change in thinking has been reflected in their work in such diverse media as novels, plays, art, music, political philosophy, and film making. A common response to war is the horror, destructiveness, and sheer waste of war in terms of human life and property. Yet at the same time it also becomes obvious that many individuals counterbalance their horror of war with the view that war also provides an opportunity for some positive and even noble human attributes to be shown. For example, war allows the development of the very close feeling of comradeship, the opportunity for sacrifice and individual heroism, and the spur to reform society after the war is over. This tension between the horror of war and its usefulness or necessity is just one aspect of the complexity of these responses.

In my selection of material (including films about war) I have tried, wherever possible, to include the work of those who directly experienced war in some way, such as actual participants in fighting (such as Grimmelshausen, Clausewitz, Tolstoy, Remarque, Hitler, Orwell, Böll, Stone), or who were contemporary civilian eyewitnesses (Callot, Voltaire, Goya, Nightingale, Dunant, Kipling, Brittain, Hersey, Herr), and those who were just influenced generally by the wars of their time (Shakespeare, Grotius, Knox, Beethoven, Zola, Picasso, Kubrick, Baez).

## 2. “WAR IS CINEMA AND CINEMA IS WAR”: THE PLACE OF WAR IN THE HISTORY OF CINEMA

The French film critic Paul Virilio’s claim that “*War is cinema and cinema is war*” has been supported by a number of historians of the war film genre. For example, the Roumanian film historian Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat has pointed out that the earliest pioneers of the art of filmmaking, Lumière and Méliès, were attracted for aesthetic and political reasons to the “photogenic quality of military uniforms and ceremonial.”<sup>2</sup> From filming military parades they progressed to the creation of “reconstructed” newsreels of the contemporary wars taking place in the Transvaal and Cuba, but filmed in the suburbs of Paris. Eventually newsreels actually filmed at the frontline (such as the Boxer Rebellion in China, the Balkan wars of 1903, and the Russo-

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<sup>2</sup>Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat, *Arms and the Film: War and Peace in European Films* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1983), p. 57.

Japanese War) were made. The next step in the evolution of the war film was the celebration of the anniversaries of great historical battles, such as *The Siege of Sebastopol* (1911) made by the Russian filmmakers Khanzhonkov and Goncharov, and then the production of official instruction films for the military.<sup>3</sup> As we can see from this short historical account, from the very beginning of the history of cinema filmmakers have served a number of important functions for the state which they continue to fulfill to this day - reporting ongoing wars, celebrating past wars, making training films for future or current wars, and mobilising popular opinion for and participation in war. It seems that only rarely do filmmakers use their talents for opposing war, and when they do it is often years after the war in question. A number of cinema's greatest directors have been closely connected to the political and military establishments of their day and their films have espoused very conservative, even reactionary, points of view. Gilbert Adair notes this connection among great American directors. In a discussion of Wayne's *The Green Berets* Adair argues:

... it would be silly to write off John Wayne, as some apologists have managed to do, as a political innocent. The ignorance of these so-called 'innocents' has a habit of steering them straight into the camp of extreme reaction; and, for a hard-liner, almost all of the American cinema must be accounted as reactionary, with a few of its greatest directors - Griffith, Ford, Vidor, Capra, Fuller - flagrantly so.<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to the close ideological ties between filmmakers and the military are the equally close technological ties between war and cinema. In one of the most provocative examinations of the deep historical and strategic relationship between war and cinema, Virilio, in *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (1984/1989), argues that cinema in general and the genre of war film in particular has benefited from the "systematic use of cinema techniques in the conflicts of the twentieth century."<sup>5</sup> The technology of modern filmmaking has evolved from the military photography of the American Civil War, to aerial reconnaissance developed in the First World War, and now to the video surveillance of smart missiles in the Persian Gulf War. The camera of the feature war film is a close relative (in more ways than one) of the military's "sight machine":

Thus, alongside the 'war machine', there has always existed an ocular (and later optical and electro-optical) 'watching machine' capable of providing soldiers, and particularly commanders, with a visual perspective on the military action under way. From the original watch-tower through the anchored balloon to the

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<sup>3</sup>Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat, *Arms and the Film*, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket* (London: Heinemann, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), p.1.

reconnaissance aircraft and remote-sensing satellites, one and the same function has been indefinitely repeated, the eye's function being the function of a weapon.<sup>6</sup>

As war has become total in the twentieth century, the “war of pictures and sound”<sup>7</sup> has become total as well, with a battle-field and a home front dimension. Military commanders require an accurate perception of the forces arrayed on the battlefield. Politicians on the homefront want the civilian population (who send their young men off to fight and who work in the munitions factories) to perceive the war in a way which will maximise their willingness to participate in and make sacrifices for the war effort. The important part war movies could play in war propaganda was realised very early on. For example, in the First World War D.W. Griffith was the only American director granted permission to visit the battlefields of Europe to film propaganda material; Frank Capra was given unlimited access to documentary war footage in the creation of the Army training films *Why We Fight* during World War Two; the controlled release to the TV networks of only the successful “shots” of the smart missiles in the Gulf War. With control over access to documentary footage and censorship of what could be shown at home in the cinemas, the state rapidly hitched the film industry (and now TV) to the wagon of the war effort.

Thus Virilio's claim that “*War is cinema and cinema is war*” is not as ludicrous as it first may appear.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. "ARE WAR FILMS EVER TRUE?": WAR FILMS AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY

When one reflects upon the relationship between war films and the study of history one needs to keep in mind the question Norman Kagan posed in his history of *The War Film* (1974): “are war films ever true?” Before answering this difficult question Kagan poses a series of related questions “true to what?”

- *True to war?* What do their depictions of characters and events have to do with the real ones? What is the difference between Sergeant York and *Sergeant York*, and what does it mean? Can we ever film “courage” or “strategy”?
- *True to history?* History is not just the “facts” but principles, explanations, causes and effects. What does *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *The Dirty Dozen* suggest, omit, or falsify about the history of war?
- *True to film?* Are there special techniques and conventions for war movies? Are there approaches that lend themselves to such films? What are the tricks, shortcuts and conventions behind the cameras?

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<sup>6</sup>Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 26.

- *True to their time?* How do these films reflect the beliefs current when they were made? How do their stories suggest underlying social ideas, motives, and emotions?

- *True to art?* Do the war films' conventions relate to other arts, e.g., the young hero or old warrior types in Renaissance portraiture? In general, how does adaptation reshape a war novel into a war film?

- *True to themselves?* The most treacherous truth of all. Does the war film, by its very subject, straightjacket itself into saying only certain things? What happens when filmmakers set out to "break the rules"?<sup>9</sup>

I would add a question of my own to Kagan's useful list - are war films true to humanity? Do war films increase our understanding of the human condition. Do they contribute to the creation of a tolerant, peaceful and prosperous human community? Or do they excite intolerance, promote violence, and inspire hatred of others?

I have neither the time nor the competence to attempt to answer all of Kagan's stimulating questions, although my remarks will be relevant to at least three of them: are the films I use in my course true to war? are they true to history? are they true to their time? I use war films for four main purposes in my teaching of war and modern European history. The first purpose is to assist in the visualisation of historical events or historical conditions. I would like to discuss three examples of films which create vivid and largely historically accurate depictions of historical events or conditions: Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930); Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* (1964); and Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986); and one film which does not: John Wayne's *Green Berets* (1968).

The second use of films is to study the history of the prevailing attitudes or mentalités of the time in which the film was made. In some cases the film tells us more about the time of its making than the events it sets out to depict. The assumption behind this approach is that the ideas of the filmmakers which are transferred to the screen reflect in some way the "climate of opinion" of the broader society in which they work. Since films from their inception have been made to make profits at the box office, most popular films have been made to appeal to the tastes and interests of the audiences, thus reflecting commonly held views back to the audience for their enjoyment. Other films, not made for popular taste but to further a particular political cause, tell us about the ideas of important sub-groups or classes within society. Examples I would like to mention include the humanitarian pacifism of Remarque/Milestone's *All Quiet* (1930) and the left-wing pacifism of Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930) in the late Weimar Republic; the officially sanctioned or supported war propaganda of Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) and Frank Capra's series on *Why We*

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<sup>9</sup>Norman Kagan, *The War Film: A Pyramid History of the Movies* (New York: Pyramid Publications, 1974), pp. 10-11.

*Fight* (1942); the paranoia and fear of communist infiltration and invasion at the height of the Cold War in Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956); and the anti-authoritarianism, even anarchism, of the swinging sixties depicted in Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H\** (1970) and Nichols' *Catch-22* (1970).

The third use to which I put film in my teaching is to study the ideas of individual filmmakers who were war veterans, of which there are a surprising number. But we should not be surprised given the research by Kevin Brownlow for the First World War and Paul Virilio for the twentieth century as a whole, on the striking connection between war service and filmmaking.<sup>10</sup> As an historian of ideas I am concerned with the view of war presented to us by filmmakers who directly experienced war or combat in some form. In many cases filmmakers served in the armed forces in sections which enabled them to draw upon their skill as filmmakers - in the signal corps, intelligence, or propaganda or documentary services. Two examples of films made by directors who were engaged as official filmmakers during war include John Ford's *They Were Expendable* (1945) and William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). Less frequently though, we can find examples of filmmakers who served at the front and experienced combat directly as footsoldiers, rather than from the more privileged position of Army cameramen or official propagandists. I am especially interested in these soldier filmmakers as a rather different view of war comes from those future filmmakers who sighted along the barrel of a rifle instead of through an army signal corps camera. Three examples of filmmakers who personally experienced combat include Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1936), Masaki Kobayashi's *The Human Condition* (1959-61), and Oliver Stone's (again) *Platoon* and *Born on the 4th of July* (1989).

The fourth use of films in the teaching of history is to reflect upon the nature of war and the human condition in a general, philosophical way. The concern here is less with the exactitude of the historical depiction of the events depicted (although this is always important), than with the view of the world offered by the director. The topic of war offers filmmakers enormous scope for an examination of the moral dilemmas posed by violent conflict, the ties that bind men who go to war, the nature of political authority, and the effect on men of violence both directly and indirectly. In other words, war can be viewed as a microcosm of the human condition in general and films about war can serve as philosophical texts which explore this domain. Whether or not the filmmaker has had any personal or direct experience of war or combat is less important. What is important is that they have something interesting to say. I include in this section the following films: Laurence Olivier's and Kenneth Branagh's versions of Shakespeare's *Henry V*

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<sup>10</sup>Kevin Brownlow, *The War, the West and the Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989).

(1944/1989); Sergei Bondarchuk's version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1968); Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1936); Kon Ichikawa's *Fires on the Plain* (1962) and *Harp of Burma* (1967); Stanley Kubrick's oeuvre of war films; Masaki Kobayashi's *The Human Condition* (1958-61).

In this paper I would like to analyse in more detail only the first category of uses for war films in the study of history, i.e. the visualisation of historical events or historical conditions, and to examine some of the consequences of such visualisation, namely the image of heroism.

#### 4. "RESTAGING THE PAST": THE VISUALISATION OF HISTORY

The visualisation of historical events or historical conditions is the most elementary function of film in the teaching of history. It is simply an attempt, in Pierre Sorlin's words, to "restage the past" in a manner which captures the imagination of viewers.<sup>11</sup> Where once words on a page were sufficient to create images in the reader's mind, in the TV age images on a screen are needed to achieve the same result. To a literate reader, Voltaire's few sentences in *Candide* (1759) describing the innocent victims of war and the sanctimonious behaviour of the French and Prussian military leaders are sufficient to transmit his profound hatred of war which emerged during the Seven Years War. The power of Tolstoy's prose to describe the French summary executions of Russian civilians who opposed the occupation of Moscow by Napoleon's troops in 1812 is as impressive as one can find anywhere in literature. Likewise, the passages in Émile Zola's novel *The Debacle* (1892) describing the horrors of a makeshift field hospital and the human consequences of the new Prussian needle gun in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 require no pictures to make their point. I think Zola does a much better job of showing the horror of production line amputations than Kevin Costner does in the opening of *Dances with Wolves*. However, when it comes to twentieth century wars our mental picture of them is just that - mind "pictures" which have their origins in film, photographs and TV. Twentieth century war is "visual" like no other period of warfare in human history. Thus, we must be able to "read" a film in a critical and historically informed manner if we are to deal adequately with the nature of war in our century.

I would like to discuss three examples of films which create vivid and largely historically accurate depictions of historical events or conditions: Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930); Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* (1964); and Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986); and one film which does not: John Wayne's *Green Berets* (1968).

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<sup>11</sup>Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980).

#### 4.1. "NO MAN'S LAND AND THE ELOQUENCE OF OBSCENITY": LEWIS MILESTONE'S *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930)

Lewis Milestone's version of Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) has rightly become the classic (anti-)war film about the First World War. Milestone had some limited experience in the US Army during World War One, serving in the Army Signal Corps photography section between 1917-19. But according to Brownlow, Milestone was based in Washington where his job was assistant cameraman in the filming of medical operations and army training films on good posture and teeth cleaning.<sup>12</sup> This is surely an inauspicious beginning for a director of the famous battle sequences in *All Quiet*, though it might be of some use in the hospital scenes. The source of the film's authority as a depiction of trench warfare comes from another source, from the author of the best-selling novel upon which the film is based, Erich Maria Remarque. Remarque was called up with his entire high school class on 26 November 1916 at the age of 18 1/2 years. He did his basic training at the Caprivi Barracks at the Westerberg (the Klosterberg in film) before being sent to the Western Front on 12 June 1917. He twice courageously rescued a number of injured comrades (like Paul Bäumer rescued Kat in the film) but did not win the Iron Cross as he falsely claimed later. He was eventually injured by grenade splinters and was sent to a military hospital in Duisberg where he took 14 months to recover. The war ended before he had recovered and so he was spared being sent back to the front as Bäumer was in the film.<sup>13</sup> At most Remarque spent only 3-4 months on the front (although this fact is disputed by Barker and Last) and whether this was enough time for Remarque to know what trench warfare was like was bitterly disputed after the appearance of his novel after 1928.

Even after 63 years, during which time the genre of war film has become hackneyed and intellectually stale, there is nothing clichéd about this film. It is valuable for its accurate and dramatically powerful images of a number of aspects of the war: the stalemate of trench warfare, the desolation of No Man's Land, the continued use of bayonettes and the newly discovered use for trenching tools in hand-to-hand combat, the psychological terror of an extended artillery attack on a group of soldiers in a bunker, the futility of going over the top in waves to cross No Man's Land, and the importance of the machine gun in preventing these attacks from succeeding,<sup>14</sup> the boredom of the troops between episodes of fighting, the squalor of rat- and lice-

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<sup>12</sup>Kevin Brownlow, *The War, the West and the Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979)p. 126.

<sup>13</sup>Christine Barker and R.W. Last, *Erich Maria Remarque* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1979), pp. 7-9.

<sup>14</sup>See John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (London: Cresset Library, 1987). Part V "The Trauma: 1914-18," pp. 111-47

infested clothes and trenches, the effect of snipers, and so on. The reception by war veterans to Remarque's novel when it appeared in the late 1920s was a mixed one, with some claiming it gave a misleading and negative picture of conditions on the trenches, and others, equally fervent, arguing that it was the most accurate and honest depiction to date. Many read it because of its indecencies and improprieties of language and its infamous latrine scenes.<sup>15</sup> With the hindsight of 60 odd years, when either Remarque's novel or Milestone's film is subjected to a comparison with standard historical works on the nature of trench warfare, such as Denis Winter's book *Death's Men*, the conclusion one must reach is that the overall depiction of war is an accurate one.<sup>16</sup>

Yet there is one area in which the film is not as accurate as the novel, namely, the speech of the soldiers. As Paul Fussell has noted with reference to a later war, it seems it is an essential part of military argot to swear, to make as many scatological and gynaecological references as possible.<sup>17</sup> A common complaint of the time was that the "latrine" language Remarque put into the mouths of the soldiers was crude, unnecessary, and demeaning to veterans. By revealing the overwhelming interest of footsoldiers in eating and defecating Remarque for the first time gave some idea of the speech and everyday life of trench soldiers (something removed from the film, thus lowering its generally high level of historical accuracy). But some audiences were not ready for such realism. British critics denounced the novel as belonging to the "lavatory school" of war novels.<sup>18</sup> The publishers of Frederic Manning's novel *Her Privates We* (1930) exercised a similar censorial role by bowdlerising the text to remove all trace of swearing or earthy language, thus severing the connection between what Paul Fussell describes as "the proximity of obscenity to eloquence in the talk of these soldiers."<sup>19</sup> Nowadays of course, we are not so squeamish when it comes to hearing soldiers swear in a war movie - indeed, we have come to expect it. Although I'm sure the fluency and "eloquence" of Sgt Hartman's tour de force of swearing in the first part of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* took many viewers by surprise. Gilbert Adair says that Hartman's "chronic verbal incontinence" was the invention of the non-professional actor and ex-Marine Lee Ermy who supplied Kubrick with about 20 hours of recordings of such military eloquence.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Brian A. Rowley, "Journalism into Fiction: *Im Western nichts Neues*," *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Holger Klein (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 104.

<sup>16</sup>Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

<sup>17</sup>Paul Fussell, "Fresh Idiom," in *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 251-67.

<sup>18</sup>Modris Ecksteins, "All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, April 1980, Vol. 15, no. 2, p. 355.

<sup>19</sup>Paul Fussell, "Introduction," Frederic Manning, *The Middle Pars of Fortune. Somme and Ancre, 1916* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. xvi.

<sup>20</sup>Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket* (London: Heinemann, 1989), p. 171.

#### 4.2. "SHOOTING THE COKE MACHINE": STANLEY KUBRICK'S *DR STRANGELOVE* (1964)

Stanley Kubrick has had no direct experience of war or service in the army that I have been able to find, yet the problem of war is pervasive in his filmography.<sup>21</sup> He has made five films directly about war: *Fear and Desire* (1950); *Paths of Glory* (1957); *Spartacus* (1960); *Dr. Strangelove* (1964); and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987); and at least one indirectly about war: *Barry Lyndon* (1975).<sup>22</sup> Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) (where the problems of language and sex are all pervasive and essential to Kubrick's understanding why men fight) may seem a strange choice in a discussion of the accurate visualisation of historical events. It is a satirical piece of black humour which is spiced with episodes of the most outrageous exaggeration and distortion to great comic effect. Yet, as one has come to expect with Kubrick, it is the result of a prodigious amount of reading and research in the literature of nuclear deterrence theory and the technical aspects of nuclear weaponry. Norman Kagan writes that Kubrick read over seventy books on the subject and subscribed to *Aviation Week* and the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* in preparation for making the film.<sup>23</sup>

One example of Kubrick's striving for historical accuracy is his meticulous recreation of the interior of a B52 bomber which he based upon a picture he found publicly available in a British flying magazine.<sup>24</sup> The accuracy was such that the US Air Force was convinced he must have had access to classified documents and proceeded to investigate him. Also, Kubrick's impressive "Big Board" in the War Room under the Pentagon, where much of the "action" of the film takes place, serves both a dramatic as well as an informative purpose. Viewers are made aware of how much (or how little information) would be available to military leaders in a crisis such as a nuclear attack or the recent Cuban Missile Crisis. One of the more farcical episodes in the film occurs when Colonel "Bat" Guano objects to Captain Mandrake's request to shoot a Coke machine in order to get small change for a phone call to the President (whose receptionist would not accept a reverse charge call). This is in fact a serious attempt to criticise the dependence of

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<sup>21</sup>Alexander Walker, *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1972); Robert Phillip Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press); Michel Ciment, *Kubrick*, trans. Gilbert Adair (London: Collins, 1983).

<sup>22</sup>Jackson Burgess, "The 'Anti-Militarism' of Stanley Kubrick," *Film Quarterly*, Fall 1964, vol. xviii, no. 1, pp. 4-11.

<sup>23</sup>Norman Kagan, *The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick. New Expanded Edition* (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 111.

<sup>24</sup>Kagan, *The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick*, p. 112.

the US military on leased private telephone lines for military communication which had been the situation since the creation of the National Communications System (NCS) in 1963. Even as late as 1983 communication between the National Military Command Centre in the Pentagon (the real-world equivalent of the “Big Board”) and Strategic Air Command in Omaha, Nebraska was by means of lines leased from the private telephone companies.<sup>25</sup> This dependence explains why the US military opposed the break up of the national phone monopoly into regional “Baby Bells”.

#### 4.3. "AN OSCAR FOR FOLIAGE": OLIVER STONE'S *PLATOON* (1986)

The alleged “realism” of Oliver Stone’s depiction of jungle warfare in *Platoon* (1986) has been much remarked upon by critics thus prompting Gilbert Adair to remark unkindly that “(i)f there had been an Oscar going for foliage, no question but that Stone would have carried it off.”<sup>26</sup> A typical example notes that *Platoon* “has no equal when it comes to capturing the reality of men in combat” and attributes this realism to the authority of Stone’s personal experience in Vietnam:

PLATOON’s success lies in the mass of detail Stone brings to the screen, bombarding the senses with vivid sights and sounds that have the feel of actual experience. Stone captures the heat, the dampness, the bugs, the jungle rot, and, most important, the confusion and fear experienced by the average soldier.<sup>27</sup>

Stone came to be in Vietnam via a torturous route of alienation and self-discovery like his alter ego Chris Taylor in *Platoon*. He dropped out of the ivy league (yet more foliage!) Yale University to teach English at a school in Saigon, then served as a wiper in the merchant marine before joining the army to fight in Vietnam in 1967. Stone drew upon his own experience of 15 months spent in Vietnam in writing the screenplay and used a veteran officer to train his actors in a gruelling 2 week combat course in the Philippine jungle prior to filming. The US Defense Dept refused Stone the use of any of their facilities in Philippines because it deemed the script “totally unrealistic.” However, nearly 20 years previously they were very willing to provide considerable support with equipment for the filming of John Wayne's *The Green Berets* which they apparently did regard as realistic. But I will come to John Wayne in a moment.

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<sup>25</sup>Daniel Ford, *The Button. The Nuclear Trigger - Does It Work?* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1985), pp. 28-9. See also Paul Bracken, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 217.

<sup>26</sup>Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam*, p. 146.

<sup>27</sup>*War Movies: A Guide to More Than 500 Films on Videocassette* (Evanston, Illinois: CineBooks, 1989), p. 119.

What is remarkable about *Platoon* is that Stone, the Vietnam veteran, has focussed on some of the mundane and trivial discomforts the footsoldiers in Vietnam had to suffer (like the similar concern of the novelist Erich Maria Remarque) and I would argue that only some one who had been there would do this. There is a palpable sense of wet foliage, oppressive heat, dangerous rivers and streams, threatening snakes and insects, the danger of malaria and fungal infections, the presence of the shadowy figures of a faceless enemy, all of which contributed to the throat-choking fear of the unexperienced soldiers. In an effort to show us the war from the perspective of the ordinary footsoldier Stone situates the camera just inside the jungle to give the impression of a scared individual surrounded by a hostile environment. As Adair has noted, we get no privileged overview from an officer's perspective - only what the ordinary soldier himself can see and hear.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the historically accurate and powerfully moving anti-war aspects of *Platoon* are severely undercut by the heavy-handed, overblown narration and religious symbolism.

#### 4.4. "THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICAN IDEALS": JOHN WAYNE'S *THE GREEN BERETS* (1968)

In marked contrast to Stone's *Platoon* stands John Wayne's *The Green Berets* (1968). Unlike Stone, Wayne did not serve in the army or see action in any war. He spent the years of World War Two making a radio series, although he did find time to co-found in 1944 the "Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals". There is a profound irony in the fact that the figure who came to represent the quintessential American war hero (such as Sgt Stryker), who filled the minds of young soldiers in Vietnam with their movie-derived images of glory and valour, stayed at home. It is very appropriate that John Wayne should direct this film. He starred in a number of heroic war movies in late 1940s and 1950s in which the US opposed oriental enemies ("Japs" and Koreans). Most noteworthy is *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) in which Wayne plays Sgt Stryker whose toughness creates an undefeatable army out of weak enlisted men in the war against the Japanese. It is also noteworthy for the fact that it is the only war film in which Wayne is killed by the enemy. Sgt Stryker is killed taking Mount Suribachi upon which the US flag is placed (US Marines lent the filmmakers the actual flag used in the battle, thus raising the iconic level of the film to a high level). His death is "Christ-like" in that in the film his sacrifice leads his men on to courageous and heroic deeds. However, in real life, Wayne's heroic sacrifice lead many young American soldiers to needless deaths in Vietnam. When Wayne made his early war movies it was clear exactly who the enemy was, it was Asian and it wore a uniform, and it was clear what "victory" was, it the the taking of clearly defined territory such as the Pacific islands held by the Japanese. When it came time for Wayne to make a film about the

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<sup>28</sup>Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam*, p. 148.

Vietnam war these certainties from the 1940s and 1950s were no longer relevant. In Vietnam territory counted for nothing, as it was a war of attrition “for hearts and minds,” and the enemy was more often than not the Viet Cong who did not wear uniforms (unlike the NVA).

Wayne’s film is set in Vietnam but filmed in on location in Monument Valley, Arizona (a western, desert state). No attempt is made to "realistically" portray conditions in Vietnam. There is no jungle, the climate is not humid, the men do not sweat, and the trees are obviously pine trees. Wayne does this both because he is a bad filmmaker and because his concerns are independent of the nature of the physical place in which the war takes place. He wants to portray the manly heroism, the patriotism, the grim determination which overcomes all odds, and the glory of war which he believed had been shown by Americans in their westward expansion along the frontier and in the Second World War. The army camp in *The Green Berets* is called "Dodge City", therefore clearly linking America's involvement in Vietnam with the dispossession of the American Indians in the previous century. In 1968 Wayne was visibly aging, overweight, and ill with the cancer which was later to kill him. He made the film in the hope that it would be viewed as his "Personal Testament of Honour" or, as the film's publicity would have it, "A Forceful Statement on the Nature of Duty and Courage." Wayne's son Patrick, who assisted in the making of the film and appears in it as well, said at the time the film was made that his father was very patriotic and supported the US role in Vietnam. His father had taken the unusual step of visiting Vietnam in 1967-8 (at the very time Oliver Stone was there in the army) and came to the conclusion that the US combat units in Vietnam were the best the US had ever fielded. Wayne père believed that the media and the anti-war movement hid this fact from the American people, thus the aim of the film was to redress this imbalance. The film is unusual for being one of the handful of films about Vietnam made during the conflict and also for getting the full cooperation of the State and the Defence Departments in its making. In fact, the army was criticised for the amount of men and equipment it made available to the filmmakers at a time when the war was going badly after the Tet offensive in January 1968 and when the US was badly stretched financially. In spite of or perhaps because of the official support the film received, it was not well reviewed by the critics, who rejected its simple-minded political viewpoint and its apparent praise of violence. Typical is the view of Gilbert Adair:

What is so repugnant about "The Green Berets" is not its politics (nor even, politics apart, its total ineptitude purely as an adventure war movie) but the fact that, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, evidence that by the late 1960s had already filtered through to the US, its makers were still determined to reduce Vietnam to simple-minded Manichean antitheses: good guys vs bad guys, cowboys vs Indians, white men vs "natives."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam*, p. 21.

To his credit Wayne did attempt to offer a political justification for the American presence in Vietnam. In the opening sequence Sgt Muldoon explains to a group of left-leaning journalists why the US is fighting in Vietnam. When asked why the US is waging "this useless war?" he offers the standard response of unquestioning obedience: that "A soldier goes where he is told to go; fights where he is told to fight." Sgt. Muldoon is then confronted with the apparently embarrassing and damning question why the democratic US will not allow a free election to be held in Vietnam. He answers simply that the communist VC would win. What follows is a very interesting and unusual comparison of US and Vietnamese history in the form of a high school civics lesson along the following lines: since it took many years after the beginning of the US war of independence (interestingly he does not call it a "revolution") before a constitution and stable government was created (1776-1787), it would take a similarly long time for political stability and democratic institutions to emerge in Vietnam. This is the only Hollywood movie then or since to tackle these important and interesting questions head on and raises the very important problem of how to create a liberal democracy in post-colonial, post-revolutionary societies.

#### 5. "MAKING WAR MOVIES IN THEIR HEADS": JOHN WAYNE, WAR HEROES, AND WAR FILMS

The powerful image of the heroic US soldier created by Wayne was influential in shaping the thinking of young US troops in Vietnam, who had been brought up with John Wayne movies on TV. As one soldier observed to Mark Baker - "I was seduced by World War II and John Wayne movies."<sup>30</sup> Many imagined themselves to be Wayne-like heroes and the tragically inappropriate attempt by 19 year old soldiers to mimic John Wayne no doubt led to too many unnecessary deaths. The confusion of identity created by these myths of heroism is expressed by the character Cowboy in Gustav Hasford's novel *The Short-Timers* but which which was made by Joker in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*: "Is that you, John Wayne? Is this me?"<sup>31</sup> The American journalist Michael Herr reflects on the impact of movie-made heroism in the minds of the young soldiers he observed in Vietnam in 1968:

I keep thinking about all the kids who got wiped out by seventeen years of war movies before coming to Vietnam to get wiped out for good. You don't know what a media freak is until you've seen the way a few of those grunts would run

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<sup>30</sup>Mark Baker, *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (London: Abacus, 1982), p. 12.

<sup>31</sup>Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers* New York: Bantam, 1987), p. 4. *Full Metal Jacket. The Screenplay by Stanley Kubrick, Michael Herr and Gustav Hasford* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), p. 4.

around during a fight when they knew there was a television crew nearby;<sup>32</sup> they were actually making war movies in their heads, doing little guts-and-glory Leatherneck tap dances under fire, getting their pimples shot off for the networks.<sup>33</sup>

The journalists as well interpreted what they saw in Vietnam through the lens of the cinema or TV camera. Michael Herr (who also wrote the screenplay for Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*) noted in the style of the "New Journalism":

"...Wow I love it in the movies when they say like,"Okay Jim, where do you want it?""

'Right! Right! Yeah, beautiful, I don't want it at all! haw, shit... where do you fucking want it?'

Mythopathic moment; *Fort Apache*, where Henry Fonda as the new colonel says to John Wayne, the old hand, 'We saw some Apache as we neared the Fort,' and John Wayne says, 'If you saw them, sir, they weren't Apache.' But this colonel is obsessed, brave like a maniac, not very bright, a West Point aristo wounded in his career and his pride, posted out to some Arizona shithole with only marginal consolation: he is a professional and this is a war, the only war we've got. So he gives the John Wayne information a pass and he and half his command get wiped out. More a war movie than a Western, Nam paradigm, Vietnam, not a movie, no jive cartoon either where the characters get smacked around and electrocuted and dropped from heights, flattened out and frizzed black and broken like a dish, then up again and whole and back in the game, "Nobody dies,' as someone said in another war movie.<sup>34</sup>

For Herr, the Vietnam war *was* a movie<sup>35</sup>. Not *The Green Berets* ("That really wasn't about Vietnam, it was about Santa Monica") but *The Quiet American* or better still *Catch-22*. For those brought up on the powerful images of John Wayne's mythic heroism there was much that had to be unlearned if one was to understand what the war was about and thus stay alive:

A lot of things had to be unlearned before you could learn anything at all, and even after you knew better you couldn't avoid the ways things got mixed, the war itself with those parts of the war that were just like the movies, just like *The Quiet American* or *Catch-22* (a Nam standard because it said that in a war everybody thinks that everybody else is crazy), just like all that combat footage from television ... , your vision blurring, images jumping and falling as though they were being received by a dropped camera...<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Hasford coined the expression "to do a John Wayne" to describe this behaviour in *The Short-Timers*, p. 107.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Picador, 1978), p. 169.

<sup>34</sup>Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Picador, 1978), p. 44.

<sup>35</sup>Herr, *Dispatches*, p. 153.

<sup>36</sup>Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Picador, 1978), pp. 169-70.

## 6. "SORRY, THEY'RE ALL DEAD": THE MYTH OF THE "BEAUTIFUL SOULS AND JUST WARRIORS".

The image of the war hero personified by John Wayne's Sgt. Stryker should be seen in a broader context of the indoctrination of young males and the sexual division of labour. After all, the apparent absurdity of a Marianne figure in battle fatigues storming the beaches of Iwo Jima to plant the American flag says a great deal about western ideas of masculinity and war heroism. A.A. Milne has pinpointed the origins of war heroism in the romantic tradition of mothers' sacrificing their sons for a noble cause:

But of course one can't just say to a million mothers: "I want your sons," and then six months later: "Sorry, they're all dead." If war is to be made tolerable, the romantic tradition must be handed on. "Madam, I took away your son, but I give you back the memory of a hero. Each year we will celebrate together this immortal passing."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the essentially anti-female culture of the military is no accident, but reflects the aristocratic, pre-capitalist, and patriarchal society in which modern armies emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The institutions and culture forged by 300 years of male aggression and bonding definitely excludes any place for females or homosexuals in the roster of war heroes. The Tailhook incident, in which American servicewomen were sexually harrassed by the male "Top Guns," is no accident and the spirited resistance of the military to President Clinton's attempted reform of the military's treatment of gays is only to be expected. The equal treatment and acceptance of gays in the military would cut to the very core of the military's image of the warrior and the hero.

Jean Bethke Elshtain has written on the widespread dichotomy in Western thought between what she calls the "Beautiful Souls and Just Warriors"<sup>38</sup> which produces sexual stereotypes which are useful in legitimising war. On the one hand, we have the warrior male who is the life taker. On the other hand, there is the defenceless female who is the life giver. The personal sacrifice of the young male in battle is justified in order to defend "hearth and home" and to prevent the rape of mothers and sisters by the enemy. A classic statement of heroism is the speech given by Henry V as he urges his men to surge forth once again into the breach made in the wall of the defences of the French channel town of Harfleur. Henry reminds his men of their heroic English ancestry, of the guilt they would feel in failing, how they should not so dishonour their mothers, and the need to be "worth their breeding":

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<sup>37</sup>Quoted in Robert L. Holmes, *On War and Morality* (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 183.

<sup>38</sup>Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987).

Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more;  
 Or close the wall up with our English dead!  
 In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
 As modest stillness and humility:  
 But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
 Then initiate the action of the tiger;  
 Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
 Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage:  
 Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;  
 Let it pry through the portage of the head  
 Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it  
 As fearfully as a galled rock  
 O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
 Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.  
 Now set the teeth, and stretch the nostril wide;  
 Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit  
 To his full height! - On, oh you noble English,  
 Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof! -  
 Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,  
 Have in these parts from morn till even fought,  
 And sheathed their swords for lack of argument: -  
 Dishonour not your mothers; now attest  
 That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you!  
 Be copy now to men of grosser blood,  
 And teach them how to war! - And you, good yeoman  
 Whose limbs were made in England, show us here  
 The mettle of your pasture; let us swear  
 That you are worth your breeding: which I doubt not;  
 For there is none of you so mean and base,  
 That hath not noble lustre in your eyes,  
 I see you stand there like greyhounds in the slips,  
 Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:  
 Follow your spirit; and, upon this charge,  
 Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' <sup>39</sup>

For this idea of heroism to operate effectively there has to be a sharp demarcation between male and female occupations. Given this division between the sexes, it is a short step to the offering of sexual rewards for bravery and successful combat and the perpetuation of the myth that women prefer a man in uniform (treated brilliantly in a vignette in Milestone's *All Quiet*). In recruiting young men, a particular ideal of manhood which is linked to sexual prowess is suggested. There is also the idea of needing to prove oneself, to become a man, by engaging in glorious battle. Another piece of evidence is the vocabulary of the army's language of swearing. Fussell regards

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<sup>39</sup>William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, III, i, 1-34

the obscenity of army language as a form of eloquence. Perhaps it is when used by Frederic Manning. Kubrick takes the opposite point of view. The obscenities which we hear in such profusion in the first part of *Full Metal Jacket* suggest a lack of eloquence and dearth of things to communicate. What is not at issue is the sexual nature of that language.

A number of filmmakers have explored the sexual politics of the male warrior and heroism. In *Dr Strangelove* Kubrick has given us an essay on the sexual impulse to kill our fellow human beings. The characters's are revealing: Dr Stangelove, Gen. **Jack D. Ripper**, Gen **Buck Turgidson**, President **Muffley**, Ambassador **de Sadesky**, and Lt. **Mandrake** (a love philter). We see B52 bombers coupling in mid-air to refuel, Gen. Ripper's neurotic concern about his sexual impotence caused by the contamination of our "precious bodily fluids" by the flouridation of drinking water, Dr. Strangelove's plan to establish an underground breeding program with 10 beautiful women per man, and phallic symbols abound (Ripper's cigar, Capt. King Kong's astride his nuclear bomb). In a later film, *Full Metal Jacket*, Kubrick explores the idea of the weapon as an extension of the penis. The recruits chant a Marine marching cadence which says "I don't want no high school queen, only ... my M14". They are forced to sleep with their rifle and to give it a girl's name (Pyle's is Sharlene). They are "married to their piece." The drill Sgt Hartmann parades them back and forth in the barracks room in their underwear clutching their crotch and chanting "This is my rifle, this is my gun. This is for fighting, this is for fun." Joker's "fuck fantasy" comes to a climax with the sniper's shooting of Eightball. In a previous scene Eightball was refused the services of a Vietnamese prostitute because she feared his black penis was "too beaucoup," but after showing it to her she relents. It is Eightball who is shot in the groin by the female sniper in the city of Hué during the uprising known as the Tet offensive. Joker attempts to shoot the sniper but his rifle jams. He has his chance to kill her when he administers the coup de grace with his revolver. The sexual politics of these scenes is quite extraordinary. Kubrick goes to the heart of what it means to be a warrior and a hero when he uses a female as the sniper. In killing the sniper Joker realises and completes his training as a Marine and validates his transition to a soldier and a man. One of his companions (Animal Mother) describes what Joker has done as "Hard core man, fucking hard core." But the irony remains that Joker has killed a women and not another warrior male. If his misogynous basic training has any worth, if his rifle is an extension of his penis, then how can a women be a worthy opponent in battle? Kubrick leaves us with this dilemma as the Marines march off into the sunset singing the Mickey Mouse Song.

I would suggest that there is serious problem in the traditional attempt to define what a true hero is. Is it male or female, is it the user of violence or the opponent of violence? Is it the life giver or the life taker? The prevailing view of heroism commits what I would like to call "The Top Gun Fallacy", namely that heroism consists of the ability to control sophisticated military hardware

and to use this hardware to kill individuals you have never seen and to destroy property at will. What about the quiet heroism of endurance and survival of say, the peasant farmer or the urban worker and taxpayer?

## 7. THE FALL OF YANKEE DOODLE DANDY: HEROINES AND ANTI-HEROES IN WAR FILMS

There are a number of ways whereby the myth of the male warrior hero can be challenged or undermined. One way is to show the connection between chivalry, sacrifice, and heroic acts on the battlefield and the inevitable brutality, suffering, and death which are the result. Far from being the chivalrous fighter who spares the lives of their enemies if they can, the warrior can be shown as a human being who is transformed by war into an unthinking instrument of violence. This is the approach taken by Simone Weil in her essay "The Iliad: A Poem of Force":

(T)he conquering soldier is like a scourge of nature. Possessed by war, he, like the slave, becomes a thing... Such is the nature of force. Its power of converting a man into a thing is a double one, and in its application double-edged. To the same degree, though in different fashions, those who use it and those who endure it are turned to stone... battles are fought and decided by men... who have undergone a transformation, who have dropped either to the level of inert matter, which is pure passivity, or to the level of blind force, which is pure momentum. Herein lies the secret of war, a secret revealed by the *Iliad* in its similes, which like the warriors either to fire, flood, wind, wild beasts, or God knows what blind causes of disaster, or else to frightened animals, trees, water, sand, to anything in nature that is set into motion by the violence of external forces... The art of war is simply the art of producing such transformations, and its equipment, its processes, even the casualties it inflicts on the enemy, are means directed towards this end - its true object is the warrior's soul.<sup>40</sup>

Weil's very bleak and pessimistic view of war is shared by a number of anti-war filmmakers who offer a corrective to the view of the war hero presented by Wayne in his westerns and war films and more recently by Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* (although to his credit Cruise has undone some of the damage with his portrayal of the disabled veteran Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989)). Running parallel to the mainstream of filmmaking, with its close ties to the political and military establishments, is a counter-current of anti-war films with a very different view of the nature of war heroism. Many of these films were made by filmmakers with war experience, others are based upon novels or memoirs by veterans, and therefore fall into my net for study. I would mention: Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930); John Ford's *They Were Expendable* (1945); Stone's *Platoon* (1986) and *Born of the Fourth of July* (1989); Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Holmes, *On War*, p. 48.

As in so many other areas, Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) defines the genre of the anti-war film. At the beginning of the film we are clearly told that the state school system has perverted the humanitarianism and liberalism of German culture (that of Goethe and Schiller) by instilling in "The Iron Youth of Germany" the values of chauvinistic nationalism and self-sacrifice for the State and Emperor. On his return to the class room Paul Bäumer rejects the maxim that "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country" (*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*). Remarque/Milestone show that the heroic "Iron Youth" are scared schoolboys who shit in their pants and prefer life over death. No wonder the Nazis thought this film was "politically and morally un-German" and burned copies of Remarque's novel at the infamous book-burning at the University of Berlin on 11 May, 1933. Interestingly, after 1949 the novel was also banned in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries for reasons that are easy to guess.

My second example is John Ford's *They Were Expendable* (1945). Although not an anti-war film per se the very title seems to convey an anti-war message, yet this is undercut by Ford's respectful attitude to authority. Ford was pressured into making the film soon after seeing action in South Pacific as documentary filmmaker in the US Navy.<sup>41</sup> It is based upon the wartime activity of Lt. John Bulkeley who was a commander of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron No. 3. Ford's view of war is frustratingly ambiguous. On the one hand he admires the passivity and unquestioning obedience to authority of the ordinary PT boat sailors. In one memorable scene he practically deifies the Supreme Commander Gen. MacArthur by playing "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Coming of the Glory of the Lord" as MacArthur is chauffeured into view. In spite of all of its uncritical respect for military authority (quite unlike Milestone's attack on every figure of state authority) there is a considerable amount of implied criticism of the unpreparedness of the American military to counter the Japanese attack and the refusal of the Navy to recognise the usefulness of the PT boats in sinking Japanese ships as the US was driven out of the Philippines. Ford shows us few heroic acts and little glory as the American defense of the Philippines collapses into total chaos and the sullen and bedraggled men are left behind by the officers to face certain capture and probably death.

I believe Oliver Stone has made a conscious effort to demythologise the war hero in his two films on the Vietnam War: *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). In the case of *Platoon* it is not clear that this is his purpose. To some extent we have the ingredients for a traditional war movie in which the young man, Chris Taylor, comes of age and enters manhood as a result of his war experience. Where the film departs from the traditional formula is in its

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<sup>41</sup>"They Were Expendable", *War Movies: A Guide to More Than 500 Films on Videocassette* (Evanston, Illinois: CineBooks, 1989), pp. 147-48.

identification of the enemy the young man has to overcome. Unlike Sgt. Stryker Chris Taylor has no "Japs" to kill. Stone tells us that the real enemy was not in the jungle but in the hearts of Americans who went to Vietnam to fight an unjust war. If there is a hero he has the face of Janus, with one side the face of Sgt. Barnes and the other Sgt. Elias. Both are courageous, skilled fighters, and have the trust of some of the men. Stone seems to be saying that the traditional image of the war hero has a benign as well as an evil aspect to it. Stone's rejection of the hero is much more explicit in *Born on the Fourth of July*. Ron Kovic is the "Yankee Doodle Dandy" brought up to love his country so much that he yearns to fight for it in a war - "his war." Kovic's disillusionment with the myth starts with the massacre of civilians he witnesses, progresses with his accidental killing of a fellow American soldier, and is complete when he enters the "world of shit" of the veterans hospital as a paraplegic. In a moving scene he confronts his parents to accuse them of making him into their "Yankee Doodle Dandy" at the price of losing his manhood. Stone deliberately shows us copies of the books which assist Kovic's transformation: Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got his Gun*.

Kubrick too has offered his exploration into the myth of the warrior hero. In *Paths of Glory* (1957) there is no scope for heroism in the desolation of No Man's Land as the French soldiers endeavour to carry out the impossible orders to take the Anthill. Heroism has become meaningless when soldiers are used like pawns on a chess board to further the military and political careers of the generals. In Kubrick's bleak vision all paths of glory lead to the grave. A thoroughly clinical dissection of the John Wayne myth of the war hero is provided by Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) on the basis of the material provided by the work of Hasford and Herr. Kubrick first identifies and then methodically demolishes the movie-inspired image of war heroism with the many references to John Wayne, the parallels he draws between the war in Indochina and the war against the American Indians in the development of the American West, and the behaviour of the soldiers when confronted by a TV camera. As Joker concludes the movie, the end result is "a world of shit"<sup>42</sup> and the soldiers have reverted to childhood songs learnt from watching Disney shows on TV.

### 7.1. MARIANNE INTO BATTLE

The second way to challenge the myth of male warrior heroes is to undermine it by showing aggressive and war-like Marianne heroines. Recently there have been a handful of movies where this has been done quite successfully, such as the *Alien* trilogy and *The Terminator* series. The question remains however, whether these films, with their warrior women heroines, have coopted

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<sup>42</sup>*Full Metal Jacket. The Screenplay*, p. 120.

or undermined the myth of the warrior hero. Do they refute the myth or expand it to now include women? *Alien* and *Aliens* are interesting because they show a heroic warrior woman. Ripley is a “mother” (by adoption) who is forced to fight another mother (the queen bee of the aliens). The tragedy is that both are acting to protect what they value, i.e. their children. In the sequel there is the character of the female Hispanic Marine, who swears, flexes her muscles and jokes with the boys. She is a mirror image of the traditional aggressive, male marine who dies to protect his/her buddies. The *Terminator* movies have a female guerrilla fighter, Connor, who blames the future nuclear war on the male scientists who invent the computer chips and the military bureaucracy (also male) for using the computers to plan for war. Connor trains to become a skilled warrior and guerrilla fighter in order to protect her son from the "terminator" but ultimately she pulls back from the brink of violence and murder when she confronts her black male computer engineer foe face to face. Would a male warrior have done such a thing?

## 7.2. THE CROSSDRESSER AS HERO(INE)

A third way to challenge the myth of the warrior hero is to create an anti-hero who is the negation of all the attributes of Wayne's Sgt. Stryker. Such an anti-hero is the deserter who runs away, the coward or refuses to fight, and the pacifist who resists conscription into the army (not the *Sgt. York* who learns the error of his pacifist Quaker traditions). These anti-heroes choose to follow the call of Albert Camus to be “neither victims nor executioners”. Camus urges his fellows to refuse to participate in war's cycle of violence in either an active or a passive manner since the ends never justifies the means. He warned that today’s victims can easily turn into tomorrow’s executioners. The true hero/heroine according to Camus is one who:

“... resolve(s) that they will consistently oppose to power the force of example; to authority, exhortation; to insult, friendly reasoning; to trickery, simple honor...  
And, having chosen, I think that I must speak out, that I must state that I will never again be one of those, whoever they be, who compromise with murder, and that I must take the consequences of such a decision.<sup>43</sup>

There are some excellent examples of the "deviant" as hero. My favourite is the character of Yossarian the hero/deserter in *Catch-22*. Yossarian's overwhelming desire to remain sane and to survive intact in an impossible situation is surely heroic. Yossarian identifies the army as the main threat to his ambitions - "Those bastards are trying to kill me". His plan is to escape from the army and he pretends to be crazy in order to do so (compare Corp. Klinger in "MASH" TV series who dresses like a women in order to get out of the army - the cross-dresser as hero). Yet, as Doc Daneeka keeps telling Yossarian it is impossible for him to certify that Yossarian is crazy

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<sup>43</sup>Continuum edition, pp. 55-6, 59.

because to ask the doctor to do this is proof of his sanity. When faced with the option of accepting Col. Cathcart's offer to be allowed to return to the US in order to promote the colonel's career, Yossarian refuses to play the "game" and so takes the rational and heroic decision to desert. Nichols also gives us an argument in favour of "rational surrender." The old Italian man who is 107 years old offends the American Nately (Arthur Garfunkel) by saying that surrender is a rational strategy for survival which has been perfected by the Italians over the centuries. He asks if America will survive for ever and asserts that all empires have fallen and been replaced by others. The American empire will inevitably pass away like the Persian and the Roman empires. To ensure one's survival in the face of rising and declining empires one must surrender to whatever is the more powerful group. "It is better to be red than dead" one might say.

One of the best examples of heroism I know of has not yet been made into a film. The female ambulance driver in Helen Zenna Smith's *Not So Quiet* (written as a female version of Remarque's *All Quiet*) quietly and heroically endures the horror of war in spite of her disillusionment, personal loss and cowardice. She admits that:

If the War goes on and on and on and I stay out here for the duration, I shall never be able to meet a train-load of casualties without the same ghastly nausea stealing over me as on that first never-to-be-forgotten night. Most of the drivers grow hardened after the first week. They fortify themselves with thoughts of how they are helping to alleviate the sufferings of wretched men, and find consolation in so thinking. But I cannot. I am not the type that breeds warriors. I am the type that should have stayed at home, that shrinks from blood and filth, and is completely devoid of pluck. In other words, I am a coward.... A rank coward. I have no guts. It takes every ounce of will-power I possess to stick to my post when I see the train rounding the bend. I choke my sickness back into my throat, and grip the wheel, and tell myself it is all a horrible nightmare... soon I shall awaken in my satin-covered bed on Wimbledon Common ... what I can picture with such awful vividness doesn't really exist...

I have schooled myself to stop fainting at the sight of blood. I have schooled myself not to vomit at the smell of wounds and stale blood, but view these sad bodies with professional calm I shall never be able to. I may be helping to alleviate the sufferings of wretched men, but commonsense rises up and insists that the necessity should never have arisen. I become savage at the futility. A war to end war, my mother writes. Never. In twenty years (written in 1930) it will repeat itself. And twenty years after that. Again and again, as long as we keep breeding women like my mother...<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Helen Zenna Smith's *Not So Quiet* (Virago), pp. 89-90.

The natural fear of injury and death are rarely acknowledged by the Sgt. Strykers of war films. Perhaps if they were there might be fewer war films and fewer examples of men foolishly going to war with "mobile images" of glorious and heroic death in the heads.

#### 8. "A PEDAGOGY OF PEACE OR A SCHOOL OF VIOLENCE?": THE MORAL PROBLEM OF SHOWING WAR FILMS

In closing I would like to address the challenging question posed by Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat about the educational function of war films - are they a pedagogy of peace or a school of violence?<sup>45</sup> Perhaps Fritz Lang is correct when he asks (in a 1958 interview): "Could anything new be possibly said on war?... No. But, it is essential for us to repeat over and over again, the things previously uttered."<sup>46</sup> Lang's unstated assumption is that in the 20th century film is to be the medium through which this restatement of the horrors and evil of war can and should be made. We need to ask ourselves whether film, rather than the written word, is the proper medium for this dialogue. Or perhaps Georges Duhamel is closer to the mark with his prediction: "I shall no longer be able to think what I want. My thoughts will be replaced by mobile images."<sup>47</sup> The American soldiers in Vietnam who had watched John Wayne westerns and war movies had such mobile images in their minds - images of heroic actions, self-sacrifice for the state, and glorious death on the battlefield. The great power cinema has is the capacity to offer such "mobile images", with their associated political and moral meanings, for the purposes of distraction, excitement, amusement, and the political control of audiences. Thus educators have a special responsibility to use this medium carefully.

What I try to do in my use of film in the teaching of history is to make explicit what is implicit in the mobile images on the screen, to place in historical context what might appear at first sight timeless and "normal" to the viewer, to discuss the moral beliefs and the political orientation of filmmakers and the impact these ideas have on their filmmaking, and to examine the reception of the films by the audiences of their day. To return to Kagan's useful list of questions I quoted earlier, I try to answer the following: are the films true to war, are they true to history, are they true to their time? I also attempt to answer my own question: are the films true to humanity? In many cases they are and the discussions and essays they provoke are the proof.

An anecdote about one student's reaction to a film I showed might be instructive. The film is Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* and the student had attended high school with a group of young men

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<sup>45</sup>Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat, *Arms and the Film*, pp. 303-23.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted in Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat, *Arms and the Film*, p. 304.

<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Manuela Gheorghiu-Cernat, *Arms and the Film*, p. 305.

who held the military in high regard. They had elevated Kubrick's film to cult status and had watched it so many times they knew most of the dialogue off by heart. They admired the brutality of the drill sergeant's language, they cheered the bastardisation of the scapegoat recruit Pyle, they revelled in the slow motion sequences of the shooting of Eightball by the sniper, and cheered the "hard core" act of Joker killing her in turn. I found all this out from the student who came to see me after I showed the movie in my course "Responses to War." After seeing the other films in the course and having heard me lecture on the films and on Kubrick (we also saw *Paths of Glory* and *Dr Strangelove*) he approached me to let me know that he had come to see *Full Metal Jacket* in a completely new light. The mobile images in his head had taken on an opposite meaning to what they had been before. Instead of seeing the film as a glorification of violence and war, he now recognised that Kubrick had composed a powerful anti-war statement. Instead of identifying with what he thought were strong, masculine and assertive characters, he now saw them as pathetic products of a brutal military indoctrination process which had stripped them of the humanity and individual identity. He was visibly shaking as he told me this and I realised that I had turned part of his world completely upside down. I concluded that violent and brutal films can have an enlightening effect in a pedagogy of peace. It all depends on how you read them.