



# Through the Hollywood Lens: The Vietnam War

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4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment  
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Tay Ninh, Vietnam (1969-70)



## Questions or comments from last week?

1Lt Langhorst at  
FSB Rhode Island





## Born on the Fourth of July (1989)

- Directed by Oliver Stone (2<sup>nd</sup> of three Viet Nam movies)
- Won 2 Oscars (Best Director, Film Editing)
- Nominated for 6 other Oscars, including Best Picture
- Portrayed a real character/person in Vietnam – Ron Kovic
- Vietnam sequences filmed in the Philippines
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0ladY1kwco>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsRDr3miUyc>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhZ3H18ynTA&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B&feature=i v&src\\_vid=ZsRDr3miUyc&annotation\\_id=annotation\\_698003](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhZ3H18ynTA&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B&feature=i v&src_vid=ZsRDr3miUyc&annotation_id=annotation_698003)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8\\_4uckfT8I&index=4&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8_4uckfT8I&index=4&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBADjCeFnuU&index=5&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xk5epHF844w&index=7&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UephHvStdWw&index=8&list=PL1A7A05102E6E878B>



## What the movie got right

- Early 1960's (President Kennedy) aura and feeling of patriotism and sense of innocence (“...ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”)
- Strong motivation to be a soldier just like Dad and Uncle Bob (WW II)
- The “before” – “during” – “after” for one individual in the war
- (Horrible) conditions in many V.A. hospitals for returning Vietnam vets
- Vets tend to open up only with other vets (...no one else seems to understand)
- Fervor of anti-war movement
- The war changed individual lives – for Ron Kovic, from patriot to anti-war activist





## What the movie got wrong

- Marine boot camp was only 8 weeks in 1964 (not “13 weeks of hell” as stated by Marine recruiter, Tom Berenger)
- Many song, T.V., sports, automobile, and other chronology errors during the movie timeframe – items/events before they actually happened (Kennedy inauguration actually on TV in January – Maasapequa looks like Fall)
- [Too much dramatic license with actual historical events, including:]
  - No visit to family of KIA son in Georgia?
  - Syracuse University anti-war rally was not as harsh as depicted (no police intervention?)
  - 1972 Republican Convention Hall confrontation not as dramatic as depicted?
- Questions? Observations? Comments?



## Forrest Gump (1994)

- Directed by Robert Zemeckis
- Won 6 Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Actor
- Nominated for 7 other Oscars
- Vietnam sequences filmed on Fripp Island, SC
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkLHBXPYWuI>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh2DzGccvJc>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3eLJdb2ZN4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPPaZU18rUg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuQZJHfWf9U>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcOTZeZ3\\_40](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcOTZeZ3_40)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnpnYAl6dU>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Jt-bxV1gW0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqAbjHKO5jM>





## What the movie got right

- (Why “Forrest Gump” in a course about the Vietnam War?)
  - One film segment *is* about Forrest as a soldier in Vietnam (2/47 Inf. Reg., 9<sup>th</sup> Div.)
  - Other film segments depict stateside life context during Vietnam era
  - Vietnam is central experience for Forrest, even after return home (e.g., Lt. Dan)
- Rain (and the rainy season) in Vietnam
- Sound of incoming mortar rounds, RPG’s, during ambush
- Steaks and beer (and lobster) for unit stand-downs
- Extended friendships of war buddies (e.g., Lt. Dan)
- Context of stateside activities during war years
- Forrest came home pretty much the same person he was before the war



## What the movie got wrong

- 2<sup>nd</sup> /47<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regiment was a “mechanized infantry” battalion in Vietnam, which would have used armored personnel carriers (APC’s) to move troops (APC’s should have been visible in battalion area)
- (Chinese) Karst mountains in the Delta?
- Palmetto trees (in S.C.) instead of Vietnam (South Asia) palm trees
- Beer cans had pop-tops, before pop-tops
- During patrol, platoon would not have walked on a road, and not in a tight formation
- Forrest’s ribbon rack missing the Medal of Honor ribbon (even though he sometimes wore the neck medal)
- Questions? Observations? Comments?





## We Were Soldiers (2002)

- Directed by Randall Wallace
- (Book) written by LTC Hal Moore and Joe Galloway (Vietnam veterans)
- Real Vietnam battle, unit, and characters  
(Battle of Ia Drang Valley, LZ Xray, 1/7th Cav. Reg., 1st CAV Div., Nov. 14-16, 1965)
- Vietnam sequences filmed in California
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu77LGPAIPA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M6cpjP7GIo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VglR1HaNIV8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK1GIUR8D-M>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctnK7wdJmAo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuaSi-H0oGY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyZw9DoU00c>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMsryQSdT\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMsryQSdT_k)



## What the movie got right

- (LTG/Col. Hal Moore was a technical advisor on the film)
- Straight-forward presentation of U.S. soldiers as ordinary young men, in very stressful surroundings, mindful of their duties  
(...and not portrayed as crazed killers, dope addicts, or goof-offs)
- Balanced portrayal of U.S. and (North) Vietnamese soldiers
- The “fog of war” during a battle
- Leadership under fire
- Significance of air mobility and use of the helicopter in Vietnam
- Look and feel of Army base life for wives in 1960’s
- Early Vietnam battle (1965) was a relatively large scale engagement for the Vietnamese --- later combat encounters by the Vietnamese tended to be more mindful of U.S. air and firepower superiority





## What the movie got wrong

- Col. Moore's wife did NOT deliver telegrams --- Yellow cab drivers did deliver the telegrams notifying next-of-kin at Ft Benning (Mrs. Moore did follow-up visits with all affected wives and families *after* notification)
- Officer's Club party before deployment would not have included NCO's
- Final, third-day, assault on NVA positions by 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Cav was not as dramatic or theatrical as movie (...no charge up the hill with helicopter gunships, etc.)
- (Error of omission) Battle of LZ Xray was part of a larger U.S. Army operation in the Ia Drang Valley that included several other units (2<sup>nd</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> Air Cav, 2<sup>nd</sup> / 5<sup>th</sup> Air Cav), landing zones (LZ Albany), and combat movements
- Questions? Observations? Comments?



## Misc. Notes about Vietnam War Films

- Philippines most frequent Vietnam stand-in location (Thailand, 2<sup>nd</sup>)
- (Marine Cpt.) Dale Dye and "Warriors, Inc." used as technical advisors to train actors to be soldiers (Platoon, Born on the Fourth of July, Casualties of War, Heaven and Earth, Saving Private Ryan, Band of Brothers)
- PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) officially diagnosed by American Psychological Association in 1980
- The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall) was dedicated on November 13, 1982
- Agent Orange officially acknowledged by V.A. as a presumptive cause of several diseases in 1991
- Normal U.S. relations with Vietnam restored on July 11, 1995 (Current U.S. and Vietnam relations are very friendly --- little U.S. hostility among populace)





## Recurring themes/lessons from Vietnam films

- The sheer will of the grunt to survive, endure, overcome, and sacrifice (the bond between Vietnam War veterans, and unit buddies, is still very strong)
- Emotional trauma of vets upon return to States (as contrasted with actual majority of Vietnam veterans [85%] being well-integrated back into society)
- Stereotyped many Vietnamese soldiers and VC as cruel and inhuman
- In later years (1969-1975), how lack of stateside support for the war impacted soldiers → disillusionment → the war became more about survival than mission →
- The soldier as victim
- Despite widespread media coverage of the war, and despite an active anti-war movement, most of the (stateside) general public was largely apathetic about Vietnam, the war, and indifferent to veterans



## Your rating/ranking of the films?

- My “most authentic” Vietnam War movie list:

- 1) Hamburger Hill
- 2) Platoon
- 3) We Were Soldiers

- Which film would you rate as the “top” Vietnam War movie?

Why?





## Course evaluation

- **Thank you for attending!**  
Hope the course was interesting and useful.
- Continue watching PBS's Ken Burns "Vietnam War" series
- Please complete the online course evaluation
- If you prefer, the class host also has a printed evaluation to complete



## Contact Information

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Thanks for attending!

