

Through the Hollywood Lens: The Vietnam War



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First Lieutenant
4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment

25th Division
Tay Ninh, Vietnam (1969-70)

Using Zoom tools - reminder

- Use the menu bar (mouse over bottom/top of screen) to appear
- Use icons to on menu bar open tools (click “on” click “off”)
- Use “chat box” to ask questions or make comments
- Use “participant” list for raising hand or other gestures
- Make the session interactive by using the Zoom tools

Questions or comments from last week?

1Lt Langhorst at
FSB Rhode Island



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
- Storyline: After many 1960's adventures, Forrest joins the Army and goes to Vietnam. He makes a new friend, Bubba, who dies in his arms after a violent ambush. Forrest is able to save the rest of his squad and a reluctant Lt. Dan. Forrest comes home to an America that is divided, and saves a paraplegic Lt. Dan once again. He is a witness to the aftermath of Vietnam and the healing of America.



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., 9th 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

- 2nd /47th 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
- Storyline: A true story of the first major engagement of the Vietnam war, as told by the commanding officer and an AP reporter, Joe Galloway. The battle is the first test of “air mobility” by the 1st Cavalry Division, and shows the battle from both American and North Vietnamese perspectives.



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 1st/7th 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 (2nd / 7th Air Cav, 2nd / 5th Air Cav), landing zones (LZ Albany), and combat movements
- Questions? Observations? Comments?



Special thank you to:

- **(Captain) Tony Nadal** – “A” Company commander during the actual LZ Xray battle
- Current Williamsburg/JCC resident at Patriots Colony
- Technical advisor on the film
- Helped me review this entire course, and provided especially insightful information about “We Were Soldiers”
- A guest speaker during the first offering of this CWA course in Spring 2016





Misc. Notes about Vietnam War Films

- Philippines most frequent Vietnam stand-in location (Thailand, 2nd)
- (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



Misc. Notes about Vietnam War Films

- 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**



Recurring themes/lessons from Vietnam films

- **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?



Comments ? Questions?

- You can send text questions through the chat box,
OR,
- You can “raise you hand” and we will try an
audio/video interaction





Course evaluation

- **Thank you for attending!**
Hope the course was interesting and useful.
- **Please complete the online course evaluation**



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Thanks for attending!