

University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire

*Perception of American Enemies: Analyzing Film
Representation for 1940s Japan & 1980s Vietnam*

Capstone

History 489

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Abstract

The depictions of the enemy are always an important part of war. It is important for the soldier to be able have distance from the enemy. Being able to associate the enemy as an animal or something less than human makes it easier for the soldier slashing the sword or pulling the trigger to kill another human. Films have been a modern way to depict the enemy to a large audience. In WWII the Japanese were subject of many propaganda films that pushed the idea that they had a lack of humanity. This paper examines those representations of the Japanese and compares them to the depictions of the enemy in Vietnam War. After the end of the conflict in Vietnam movies began to be made about the war. A large difference between the films of two time periods is the change in the representation of how U.S. forces are represented killing the enemy. The killing of Japanese was portrayed in films during wartime as part of a victorious quest. Killing the Vietcong in films that came out years after the unpopular Vietnam War ended were portrayed in a darker way. These differences change how the viewer will look at the enemy in these past conflicts.

Introduction

Films have been used in many ways to affect perceptions of reality and ideas. Films can be used to display national sentiments as well as help create them. They have been successful at entertaining millions of Americans for the last century. The characters in any movie are representations to the audience. The use of heroes and villains is a perfect tool for moving the audience towards empathy towards a protagonist while reviling the antagonist.

In 1915 a movie of heroism came out that became a part of U.S. history. It was one of the longest movies created that played nationwide. The movie continuously played on twelve screens in New York for twenty-four hours a day for weeks. The movie was *Birth of a Nation* by D.W. Griffith. It was based off a book called *The Clansman* by Thomas F. Dixon, Jr. It was a film that villanized African Americans in a subordinate role and celebrated white Reconstruction in the South. The plot unfolds so well that even today it can be easy to get wrapped up in the story and forget that the heroes of the movie have a goal of returning African Americans to a submissive role in society. The movie is still used as a Ku Klux Klan recruitment tool because of its ability to affect an audience.

Patriotism that used to be spread through the use of pamphlets that reached thousands changed to movies that reached millions. Hundreds of movies have been made on WWII alone in the United States since the 1940's. Viewers of these movies have been influenced in their perception of German and Japanese enemies. This is true for other films for different wars. Audiences that watch these movies are being influenced on how they perceive the enemy and how U.S. forces are killing them. The relationship is important to realize. If the audience can understand that the heroes of the war movie are not just killing enemy soldiers but subhuman characters that are truly evil then they will support the violence more.

In this paper I will analyze the representation of Japanese and Vietnamese forces. Then I will examine how the U.S. forces are represented in killing their different enemies. There are stark differences between the two selections of enemies. In every movie enemy casualties occur. How the enemy is represented in death and how the protagonist is portrayed in the act of killing can give a good insight to the viewer of the overall representation of enemy forces. The audience learns how the films would like to portray enemy forces and the valor or horrors of the heroes killing them.

During WWII, the American public had a great deal of support for the war and animosity towards Japan after Pearl Harbor. There was a great deal of racism towards the Japanese that was represented in films, comics, and cartoons. The mistrust of Japanese Americans was displayed through Executive Order 9066 that moved many Japanese families to internment camps. Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote an entry in his diary about his views on the Japanese American citizen that even second generation citizens were dangerous and not to be trusted “on the ground that their racial characteristics are such that we cannot understand or trust” This racism and the dehumanization of the Japanese carried over into the films discussed in this paper.¹

The Vietnam War did not carry all the positivity and clarity that WWII had. While the goals and propaganda behind WWII were thoroughly accepted by the American public the Vietnam War was not. Besides the release of *The Green Berets* in 1968, a film that was strongly supported and funded by the Department of Defense, most war films that came out during the Vietnam War had to do with WWII in order to associate war in general as a positive thing. Popular movies like *The Dirty Dozen* about the Battle of Normandy came out in 1968. Movies

¹ Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books 1986) 80

actually about the Vietnam War started coming out in the late 1970's through the 1980's. These movies are darker and less about heroism than surviving.

In the first section this paper will analyze the movies *Bataan* (1943), *Back to Bataan* (1945), *30 Seconds over Tokyo* (1944) and *Destination Tokyo* (1943). The movies selected represent the enemy in an inhuman or evil way and are meant to glorify the American soldier for the victory over the Japanese enemy. For the second section this paper will analyze *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). The movies, with the exception of *The Green Berets*, were chosen because of the emphasis the film makers put horrors, not the glory of war. The protagonists in these movies were no longer the proud soldiers that were seen in WWII movies during the 1940's and 1950's. These movies represent the Vietcong soldier still as an enemy but the act of killing the enemy was not as celebrated. The audience is more aware of the fear that the American soldiers have and their fight to survive the war and not to win the war. When the protagonist kills a soldier it is for a chance to return home.

The goal of this paper is to show the different representations of Japanese and Vietnamese soldiers during (two very different times in American history), are use these representations to discuss the portrayal of American forces in these various films. The stereotypes and representations of the Japanese were present in films during WWII. The focus was on what the soldiers were accomplishing in the war to build support. While the films that came out after the Vietnam War focused on the effects of war on the soldiers.

The number of films on WWII and Vietnam is numerous. The amount of scholarship on WWII and Vietnam is also quite vast. But the number of books that deal with films and Asian representations are not so large. I was able to find some books on the use of propaganda in Hollywood and books that looked at the use of media in promoting anti-Japanese sentiment. *War without Mercy* by John Dower was an extensive look at the Japanese enemy that was very helpful to my paper. My secondary sources helped me analyze the eight movies I chose by giving me some knowledge about the history of Asian representation in the media in general.

The biggest challenge was choosing the correct movies out of the many options. I had to first choose a scope for the WWII movies. I wanted to keep the films within the 1940's and early 1950's in order to keep the focus on movies that would have been seen by an American public that had animosity towards the Japanese after Pearl Harbor and that also held a lot of patriotism. I chose movies that were made with big stars such as John Wayne, Anthony Quinn, Robert Taylor, and Robert Walker. These stars of these movies were very popular which resulted in high numbers of viewers. The Vietnam movies I have selected are also classic movies, also with major celebrities, that have been widely viewed. The box office for the first two Vietnam movies for 1978 and 1979 was over 130 million. It is important to the paper that the movies selected were popular with audiences during their release as I often discuss the influence of the movie on the audience.

Stereotypes

Many Asian representations in these films selections sprout from very old stereotypes that began in the early twentieth century. Films released in the early twentieth century depicted Asians to an audience that was mostly ignorant to Asian culture and history. Eugene Franklin Wong discusses the stereotypes that were introduced to an ignorant audience quite thoroughly with the early stages of Asian representation in films. The sinister character that developed is known as The Fu Manchu. The character began with movies that depicted a demonic antagonist that was Japanese at first and then Chinese. The character grew in a series of movies focusing on a Chinese villain known as Dr. Fu Manchu that was featured in films from 1923 and developed in different variations still seen today.²

In the movies selected in the paper many of the Japanese military leaders hold these stereotypes. In *Back to Bataan* the main villain is often soft spoken, wearing glasses, and relishes his evil acts. The character evolved into movies about the Vietnam War where soldiers reveled in torturing prisoners of war. This sinister villain stereotype will appear throughout the paper.

Another stereotype seen in these films was that started began to emerge thanks to the Charlie Chan film series. The films started in the 1930's although the character originated from novels in the 1920's. The character, later to be known as just Chan, was a helpful and unaggressive one. In his early movies he would use Chinese wisdom sometimes prefaced by "Confucius say..." This character is the more harmless but still racist packaging of an Asian

² Eugene F. Wong, "The Early Years: Asians in the American Films Prior to WWII in Screening Asian Americans" Ed. Peter X. Feng (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 56-59

stereotype. The character, like Dr. Fu Manchu, also progressed over time to fit different needs in media.³

This character is also prevalent in some of the films used in this paper. Sometimes Chinese or Filipino, the character is in a couple of the WWII movies as a helpful, not always harmless, ally of the American forces. The characters show a deep respect to their American allies which is a part of the Chan stereotype.

³ Wong. "The Early Years: Asians in the American Films Prior to WWII" 60-61

WWII

This section of the paper deals with the movies that came out during WWII that focused on the Pacific Theater. The movies have release dates ranging from 1943-1945. During this time there were many media tools to promote the war and anti-Japanese feelings. Even Bugs Bunny in a controversial cartoon called *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*, comically escapes and defeats a stereotypical bucktoothed and glasses wearing Japanese soldier with ice cream hand grenades. This cartoon for children Bugs calls the soldiers “slant-eyes” and “monkey-face.” This dehumanization is used in every movie used in this section of the paper. In some instances the character will simply call the enemy a Jap or a Nip but often will go deeper specifying that the enemy is a monkey or baboon.

The racism is characteristic for the times. Although references like these may seem very offensive now, they were common then. Furthermore, during wartime distancing “us from them” was important. But journalist Ernie Pile, who wrote for *Stars and Stripes* and was especially popular among the troops, stated clearly that the enemy in Europe, although terrible, was still human. He did not feel the same about his observations of the Japanese enemy comparing them to “cockroaches or mice.”⁴ This difference was not just present in journalism but also was present in the films used in this section.

⁴ Dower, *War Without Mercy* 82.

Bataan

This movie came out in 1943. The plot is driven by the U.S. withdrawal out of the Philippines as Japan continues to hold control much of Dutch East Indies in 1942. The main task of the movie centers around thirteen volunteer soldiers from different squads needing to slow Japanese progress by keeping a bridge destroyed. This is essentially a suicide mission as they will have no way off the Bataan Peninsula or any means of support. The movie progresses with each character dying by either sniper fire or in the finally push of overwhelming enemy forces. A full synopsis and character write up is on Figure 1.

Bataan is unique for its time due to the multiracial cast of protagonists. The thirteen men that consist of the volunteer squad had an African American, a native Filipino, and a Hispanic American, played by Desi Arnaz. All of the minorities are respected in the squad as equals and carry responsibilities that display this equality. The role of Wesley Epps, the African American demolitions expert was the most important distinction. Epps was not only respected in the squad but had the expertise needed to complete the mission.

The overall representation of the Japanese forces in this movie is animalistic, yet as well trained, vicious soldiers. The remaining American forces constantly refer to the enemy as Japs, monkeys, or baboons. Sergeant Bill Dane describes the enemy as “no tailed baboons out there...climb trees better than monkeys...they can live and fight on a month what wouldn’t last you guys two days”⁵ The enemy is ruthless and is portrayed as such from beginning to end of the movie. The movie begins with gaining the audiences understanding of this cruelty when Japanese airplanes bomb retreating American forces. All of the carnage shown was of young and

⁵ *Bataan*, Dir Tay Garnett, 23 min, MGM 1943

injured civilians dying.⁶ This initial scene would already cause the viewer to begin growing animosity towards the Japanese forces but also causes empathy for the men who stayed behind to stop the murderous invading Japanese forces. After Sergeant Dane arrived at the base camp, the viewer met all of the different men in the squad.

One of the last men introduced was a very young Robert Walker playing the role of Leonard Purckett, a young navy boy. He looked only nineteen but was actually thirty-four. He had a higher voice that was sweet but still had a sound of American determination to it. This determination was evident in the beginning of the film where he modestly describes his swim to shore from the sinking ship. It is persistent to the end of the film when he holds the high energy of American patriotism to fight against the slanderous Japanese forces even at the cost of his life. It was a voice that could have belonged to Wally Cleaver from *Leave it to Beaver*. There is a sweet innocence but acknowledgment of a growing man.

This character is common in many war movies that came out during this time. It can be used to help the audience identify with the young soldiers that were actually in combat at the time. The movie progresses and the innocence in Leonard's voice changes with more desperation beginning to show as he speaks about really wanting to get to shoot a "Jap." He finally sees one to exclaim "first Jap I've seen. He's just standing there, right out in the open. Okay Mr. Monkey you're gonna get it." As he tries to open fire he is stopped by corporal. Barney Todd, a veteran of Philippines, informing him that it is Salazar, the Filipino native soldier, who was captured and "worked over" by Japanese forces then hung on a tree.⁷

⁶ *Bataan*, 4 min

⁷ *Bataan* 63 min

The movie concludes with a last stand situation where the remaining men fight off charging Japanese forces. This is the clearest point in the entire movie where actual Japanese soldiers were seen. They were in heavy camouflage initially which made it hard to see their faces. At first the men gunned down around twenty Japanese camouflage soldiers before the remaining squad was in different screen shots handling two or three soldiers at a time. These soldiers were in regular uniforms and were clearly supposed to represent Japanese soldiers. The remaining men fought the Japanese forces up close choosing to finish some off with knives and hand to hand combat before switching to hand guns. The killing was somewhat over the top but heroic none the less as each man was finally overwhelmed by Japanese forces until only Sergeant Dane and Corporal Todd remained. Corporal Todd was mortally wounded after saving Sergeant Dane's life from "one of the monkeys" that was playing opossum.⁸

Sergeant Dane, the brave and last American hero on Bataan set up a couple gun stations in his pre-dug grave. The movie ends with him not dying but constantly shooting incoming Japanese forces as writing appears on the screen thanking all of the courageous heroes of Bataan. These last few seconds in this scene really show that the movie was about portraying American valor in killing Japanese troops. This movie was released in 1943 and during heavy combat and the American audience needed to see heroism to gain support for the war.

⁸ *Bataan*, 96 min

Back to Bataan

Back to Bataan came out in 1945 and was one of the many war movies that starred John Wayne. John Wayne was already a big enough star that he could bank role a movie with his name alone due to his popularity. He worked in propaganda movies during WWII and during the Vietnam War. This movie focuses on the fighting that occurred in the Philippines from 1941 and 1942. During this period American troops were forced to withdraw leaving Colonel Joseph Madden to organize guerrilla warfare with Captain Andres Bonifacio, played by popular actor Anthony Quinn, of the Philippine army.

This warfare was to be carried out by the Filipino people against the Japanese. As the Japanese get a stronghold in the country the Filipino people suffer from Japanese presence and continue fighting against them. It is important to point out that in the film John Wayne was the American leader that really enabled the Filipinos to organize and fight. During the movie he was the American hero the Philippines needed and the American hero that audiences wanted to see.

Back to Bataan pulled in its audience right away by showing a reenactment of the recently freed American POWs and showed the actual American soldiers that were freed marching while their names were announced. The use of the actual POWs returning home safely after Japanese captivity was a great way to instantly gain audience understanding for the purpose of fighting this war. It was to free captured Americans. The next scene showed the Filipino people who also fought back against the Japanese. The European campaign was already won earlier so this movie came out at a great time of American pride as the Pacific theater was on the verge of victory as well.⁹

⁹ *Back to Bataan*, dir. Edward Dmytryk, 6 min, RKO Radio Pictures, 1945

Along with its bold heroes this movie had a sinister villain. Japanese General Homma was in command of the Philippines and was a character that followed all the rules of Dr. Fu Manchu. He spoke softly and smiled while he gave his orders to carry out killings on those resisting Japanese authority. The audience gains a true idea of this character's evil when a soldier under orders asks a principal to take down the American flag in front of the school. When the teacher refuses the soldier does not ask louder, just casually threatens the man's life in front of his students. When he refuses again he hangs the man on the flagpole with a smile on his face. This happens within the opening thirty minutes of the movie and gives the audience sympathy for the Filipino people fighting the evil Japanese invaders.¹⁰

The sympathy for the Filipino cause turns to anger towards the Japanese as they keep killing civilians. Towards the end of the movie the experienced young boy who has been by Colonel Madden's side during the war is used to end any thoughts of humanity that the Japanese could have. A Japanese soldier sees the boy running into the woods after helping his fellow classmates run away from gunfire. After capturing him, a Japanese commander finds an American pin that was given to him by Colonel Madden. After finding the pin the soldiers beat the child until he agrees to show them the base camp of resistance.¹¹

Overall the film represented Japanese forces as calculating and ruthless killers and they were vilified completely. This representation transitioned to a portrayal of American and Filipino soldiers that were defeating a merciless enemy. Victories were celebrated and every killed Japanese soldier was a display of valor for American forces. Instead of portraying the enemy as animalistic this movie just made the Japanese forces act so cruelly that they lost their humanity.

¹⁰ *Back to Bataan* 29 minute

¹¹ *Back to Bataan* 71 minute

Having Anthony Quinn and John Wayne as heroes made it easy for the audience to cheer for American soldiers, but pushing the enemy to these extremes finalized in the viewer's mind the need for American action against Japan.

30 Seconds over Tokyo

This film came out in 1944. It focused on the United States Air Force instead of the Army as the two previous selections did. This movie was an accurate portrayal of the Doolittle Raid that were conducted in 1942. The movie was intertwined with a love story between Captain Lawson and his wife, Ellen. This took up a large part of the plot that assisted the audience to relate to the protagonist. Doolittle not only trained the sixteen crews that took part in this high risk flight, but he also led them off the aircraft carriers. The plan was to fly over Tokyo and bomb manufacturing targets identified by coordinates given by the Navy. After dropping the bombs the planes were to fly to eastern China to land out of Japanese control.¹²

The attack had minimal physical damage but the psychological benefits were two-fold. The Japanese never thought mainland Japan, let alone their capital that housed the emperor, could be bombed. Adm. Yamamoto, commanding officer in the attack to Pearl Harbor, took the failure quite personally. The second benefit to having a successful attack on Japan was the morale booster it would send throughout the American public.¹³

The movie centered on the crew of the Ruptured Duck. The characters names were the same as those who actually flied the plane. The majority of the movie was about Navy and Air Force training and comradery. The way all the men were able to joke around with each other could remind the audience of the “average joe” nature of the soldiers. The way they cheered about successes was reminiscence of a home team winning a baseball game. The viewer was able to understand that they were American men doing a job and could relate to their different hardships later on in the movie.

¹² Schultz, Duane. *The Doolittle Raids* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1988) 81

¹³ Schultz. *The Doolittle Raids* 2-3

A difference in this movie is the fact that in the film *Doolittle* informs the men that they are targeting military manufacturing factories in Tokyo that will no doubt include civilian deaths. He then asks any of the men that may have a problem with this step away from the mission. This was surprising that the film would acknowledge the cost of civilian life that was to be incurred. Captain Lawson has a second discussion the night before takeoff with a friend in which both of them say they do not hold any animosity towards the Japanese. When asked if he is getting soft he responds with “I don’t pretend to like the idea of killing a bunch of people. But it’s a case of drop a bomb on them or pretty soon they’ll be dropping one on Ellen.”¹⁴ This is a clearer example of the “us or them” mentality that is prevalent in many war movies.

Two scenes later the crew of the *Ruptured Duck* drops bombs on Tokyo and escapes without any damage. The rest of the movie follows their crashing into China where Lt. Clever sustained fatal injuries. The rest of the men were injured but survived by being secretly transported by Chinese allies. Many of the characters helping the crew showed deference towards the Americans in a way that was similar to the Chan stereotype of being harmless and helpful. Although it was accurate that the men were heroes to some of the Chinese, who were also fleeing Japanese forces, the amount of deference shown in the movie was exaggerated according to the descriptions in *The Doolittle Raids* by Duane Schultz.

The representation of the enemy was not direct. The crew of the *Ruptured Duck* was fortunate enough to not fall into Japanese hands after the raid. Two other crews were not so lucky and would have told a different story of how they perceive the Japanese. The movie represented the enemy as human but still an enemy that had to be stopped more for defending American lives in the future than stopping cruelty in areas of their control.

¹⁴ *30 Seconds over Tokyo*, Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 66 min., MGM 1944.

Destination Tokyo

This film came out in 1943 and was the story of the submarine that supposedly gave land coordinates to the crews of the Doolittle raid. The plot is pretty straight forward with a crew of men, some old and some young. They were all red blooded Americans that set forth on a dangerous mission to Tokyo. The interaction with the enemy is limited as the crew spends most of their time submerged. They make their way through the Pacific Ocean and arrive at Tokyo Bay where their mission is to gather data to increase the accuracy of the bombers. The movie is mainly driven by the interaction between the crew. The audience is just meant to associate with the crew on multiple levels. The first scene on the boat consists of Christmas Morning where the crew sings carols. The movie is propaganda to boost American morale and give the viewer a sense of the Navy side in the Doolittle Raid.

Overall the Japanese are set straight as the enemy that deserves defeat. The actions of the heroic crew are responsible for the first strike to the heart of Japan with the Doolittle Raids. The American forces are portrayed to be the hometown heroes that the audience would know from their high school or local saloon. In a very clear representation of Japanese determination a pilot is shot down by a gunner on the submarine. After surviving the pilot gets rescued for questioning. When a sailor hoists him out of the water the Japanese pilot stabs the man before he is shot to death.¹⁵

In a scene where the three navy men are on actual Japanese soil to collect wind and weather information for the bombings they intercept a transmission of Tokyo Rose. This is a broadcast that was sent out to discourage American advancement and increase Japanese morale.

¹⁵ *Destination Tokyo*, dir. Delmer Daves, 54 min., Warner Bros Pictures, 1943

It reflects the actual sentiments of security that the Japanese people felt. Any losses that Japan suffered were snuffed from the media. The Japanese had their propaganda so did the U.S. There was some privatization in this industry unlike that in Japan. The last scene was set of evasion from the Japanese ships that culminated in a successful sinking then escape home. This is where you heard one sailor tell the dirty snipe he would pay for a depth charge that damaged the submarine. This was the only real hostility shown to the enemy. Otherwise the enemy was only on the screen to show that the American forces were winning.

Vietnam War

Unlike WWII, the Vietnam War was not being celebrated by the American public as a fight for justice. There was mass protesting and a lack of understanding of U.S. goals. It was clear it was a fight against communism but it was hard to describe successes in Vietnam when there was not a clear battlefield. One way to try and measure success was by having soldiers keep a body count. Because of the negativity during the war not many movies came out as propaganda directly about the Vietnam War. The only exception was *The Green Berets* that was released in 1968.

This movie was a straightforward propaganda. John Wayne starred as the protagonist of the movie. The movie was meant to show the evils of the enemy while displaying the valor of the U.S. soldier. This movie was heavily financed by the Department of Defense. The amount of flying hours for helicopters was around 85 hours. All guns and ammunition were provided as well as heavy machinery. Producers drastically underpaid \$18,623.64 for costs of man hours. All other costs of military equipment were covered. Despite all the Department of Defense did they did not want credit in the movie. Because the war was unpopular, having the credit to the Dept. of Defense would make it too obvious that the movie was a propaganda movie and not just a movie for entertainment purposes.¹⁶

The American public was not ready to go watch propaganda movies about a war that was so unpopular. This is why movies that were released about the Vietnam War did not start appearing until the late 1970's. There was also a stark difference in these movies in comparison

¹⁶ Robb, David L. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2004) 277-281

to WWII propaganda movies. These movies were not made with the intention of glorifying war or combat.

The movies that are in this section portray a war that both sides hate. Violence is not only is carried out by the enemy but delivered by U.S. soldiers that cannot always bare the mental pressure that comes with killing. Ally and enemy combatants carry out terrible actions due to this pressure. The films portray that not all soldiers held the strength to keep their moral compass in times of extreme fear and chaos. The scenes that portray U.S. soldiers carrying out what could be deemed a war crime are scenes intended to shock the audience and bring to light how horrific war can be. The films are also pieces of fiction that are made for profit and not propaganda which give directors the ability to take artistic license to represent the war as they see fit.

The Deer Hunter

This movie was released in 1978. The cast of Christopher Walken, Robert De Niro, and Meryl Streep brought an abundance of talent to the screen. The movie took in fifty million at the box office and was nominated for nine academy awards, winning five.¹⁷ The story centered around two men; Michael (De Niro) and Nick (Walken). After they celebrated Nick's wedding they were sent to Vietnam. Once there Michael, Nick and another soldier were captured by the Vietcong. They were tortured and then forced to play Russian roulette. This is where Michael manages to plan an escape. The two main characters are separated during their rescue. Nick stays on the helicopter while Michael and the other soldier do not. Michael is able to finish the rescue and returns to base. Nick, believing Michael to be dead, falls into severe PTSD and begins to play Russian roulette for money. Michael gets home only to return to try and bring Nick home to his wife. The movie ends with Michael finding Nick playing his last round and Nick finally dies.

The representation of the enemy in this movie is cruel and twisted. The Vietcong in the movie that controlled the prisoner camp were brutal in their treatment. The damage not only physically but mentally to the prisoners leaves the audience with empathy for the protagonist. Nick is ready to give up and it is only through Michael that he holds on. The audience would not only hold animosity towards the Vietcong but also a misunderstanding of the Vietnamese people. Even after Nick finds his way out of combat he is submerged again into the violence of Russian roulette. The viewer could make assumptions that this was some sort of national past time for Vietnam. That would be an incorrect assumption. But the depictions would lead the viewer to acknowledge that there was a difference in life from America and that in Vietnam.

¹⁷ IMDB "The Deer Hunter (1978)" <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077416/> (Accessed 18 April, 2011)

This movie has only brief period in time where the U.S. forces and Vietcong interact. The beginning of the movie is the set up of normal American men being pushed into extraordinary circumstances. It is a theme throughout many Vietnam movies. Michael and Nick were the average guys forced to bare the enormous pressure of killing and more importantly trying to survive. Nick was unable to keep sane after his ordeal. It is a similar story for many soldiers that went through a hellish war in Vietnam.

Apocalypse Now

The movie was released in 1979. The movie has a bulk of stars including: Martin Sheen, Marlon Brando, Dennis Hopper, Robert Duvall, and Lawrence Fishburne. The movie was directed by Francis Ford Coppola. The movie has grossed over \$80 million since its opening. The plot is driven by Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) who is assigned a secret mission to assassinate Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando.) Colonel Kurtz is unofficially charged with killing four South Vietnamese soldiers that he accused of being spies. Captain Willard takes a long and perilous journey up river to find and take out Colonel Kurtz.

The film is one of the darker war movies released about Vietnam. It is not just the act of killing that has an effect of the soldier. There is a discussion in the second scene of the movie that covers the confusion that happens in the bush and the overall low morale that accompanies combat. In these conditions every man will find his breaking point.¹⁸ Captain Willard has to weigh his breaking point by acknowledging the difference in the killing of Vietnamese enemy and the killing of an American Officer.¹⁹ This is a scene that identifies a difference between the enemy and U.S. forces to the audience.

The movie makes a point to represent that in war all men can be corrupted and become murderers. It also grayed the line between what was acceptable killing and what could be illegal killing. No scene is more perplexing as the Helicopter attack scene. Captain Willard needs to have aerial support to enter the river that will take him to Colonel Kurtz. Lt. Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall) is in charge of the helicopters that would give him that support. Lt. Colonel Kilgore was reluctant at first to send his men into such a hot landing zone but as an avid surfer

¹⁸ *Apocalypse Now* dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 16 min., Zoetrope Studios, 1979.

¹⁹ *Apocalypse Now* 20 min.

saw an opportunity to catch some big waves. The helicopters approach the river and Kilgore begins to play Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries because "it scares the hell outta the slopes"²⁰

The scene of the village the helicopters were approaching had a school house with children and a farming community. Then there were also gun embankments. The village was clearly controlled by the N.V.A. The chopper gunners open fire on everything. The buildings were decimated and return fire took out a helicopter. After landing a soldier gets injured at the school area. When there was a slight lull before the enemy recovered a helicopter lands to get him to safety. Any empathy for the civilians in the village is removed when a school girl runs and drops a grenade in the helicopter. Kilgore responds to this action by calling the enemy a bunch of "fucking savages" and declaring he was "going to get that dink bitch"²¹ Kilgore makes good on his word and guns her and the surrounding civilians down.

It is a complex scene that has soldiers surfing around mortar fire and an unclear definition of civilian and enemy. The audience is then further confused when they see Captain Willard who was shaken during the Helicopter Attach scene casually finish off a civilian in boat that the ship's gunny (Lawrence Fishburne) opens fire on. The audience does not get to gain a clear picture on what a true moral compass is during this film. It is evident that there is strong animosity from U.S. soldier towards Vietcong. The representation of the enemy is similar to that of the portrayal of the U.S. soldier. Both are under extreme circumstance that corrupts the sense of justice or code of conduct. The idea that all is fair in war is pushed to limits in this movie.

The end of the movie concludes with Captain Willard confronting an unstable Colonel Kurtz. After a series of discussions on war and carnage Captain Willard goes to Colonel Kurtz

²⁰ *Apocalypse Now* 38 min.

²¹ *Apocalypse Now* 45 min.

alone to finish his assignment. Colonel Kurtz has his last words, “the horror...the horror.” It was a declaration of the war that was being fought there. The enemy was not human in discussion between soldiers. The enemy was just Charlie or a gook. But the act of killing that enemy deteriorated men psyche and revealed the cost of taking life.²²

²² *Apocalypse Now* 151 min.

Platoon

This movie was released in 1986. The movie was directed by the highly acclaimed director, Oliver Stone. The cast was loaded with an all star cast consisting of a very young Charlie Sheen, Williem Dafoe, and Tom Berenger as the main actors. Secondary roles were filled with talent such as: Forest Whitaker, Keith David, John C. McGinley, and Johnny Depp. The movie has grossed \$137 million since it's released. The movie discusses many issues of the Vietnam War. Issues of race, class, background, and humanity are all present in the film.²³

The plot is driven by Chris (Charlie Sheen) who is an enlisted man in the Vietnam War. This movie follows Chris through his time in Vietnam from the beginning in his inexperience until his status as a veteran. Stone progresses the story of Chris going through a struggle to choose between his two sergeants different methods. Sergeant Elias works with Christ to maintain his morals and kill only soldiers to survive. Sergeant Barnes is a man that pushes Chris to kill all those in the way of their survival. This movie is about survival.

The movie is similar in the beginning to *Bataan*. The enemy is rarely referred to as the Vietcong or North Vietnamese Army but rather the enemy is a "gook" or a "dink". As the other soldiers inform Chris early on that (referring to a deceased N.V.A. soldier) "That's a good gook, good and dead."²⁴ This is similar to how the soldiers discussed the Japanese soldier in WWII movies. Despite how the soldiers are discussing their foe this is not how Stone is viewing the enemy. Nor is it the way he is portraying the soldier to the audience. This is a representation of the sentiment of the U.S. soldiers towards a fierce enemy. Stone takes a rather disturbing scene to show that all humans in war are subject to committing crimes beyond the scope of war.

²³ IMDB "Platoon (1986)" <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091763/> (Accessed 18 April, 2011)

²⁴ *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone, 7 min, Hemdale Film, Orion Pictures Cooperation, 1986.

The most crucial scene to pull the idea that holding onto humanity in war is difficult for all those in war comes towards the middle of the film. One of the soldiers from the platoon is missing. When he is finally found he was tortured, killed, then hung on a tree. This scene could have raised empathy for the platoon already under immense physical and mental suffering. Instead it builds towards a brutal scene where the platoon head to a village that has N.V.A. weapons. The men are already frustrated and strained from fighting a difficult enemy to fight and survive against. These frustrations, coupled with the act carried out on their fellow platoon member, ignites killing of first farm animals. Chris begins to lose it and begins beating and shooting a mentally handicapped Vietnamese civilian. A fellow soldier screams at Chris to “do the dink, let’s do the whole damn village.”²⁵ After breaking down in tears a fellow soldier goes further to kill the civilian. The shock continues when Sergeant Barnes, desperate for information on the N.V.A. kills the village leader’s wife and threatens the daughter.

Sergeant Elias steps in to stop the killing but the illegal killing has happened. The audience is now led towards seeing that there are atrocities that happen on both sides of the war. Overall the enemy is represented as a psychological wear on the platoon that evolves into a full overwhelming force of mental anguish. Every American soldier in the film was only fighting to survive. A soldier that gets out before the final battle scene yells to Chris to remember that there is “no such thing as a coward.”²⁶

The theme is present in this movie as well. American soldiers are fighting to return home alive but have their very humanity challenged while in combat. The movie ends with a dedication to all Vietnam veterans as an acknowledgment for their actions. I would assume that

²⁵ *Platoon* 51 min

²⁶ *Platoon* 93 min

some soldiers could take appreciation for the film while others could have difficulty watching it. The violence is intense and the cruelty is immense. This movie stands to me as the one of the most horrific representations to how sanity flees a soldier sucked into a gruesome battle.

Full Metal Jacket

The movie was released in 1987. The film was directed by Stanley Kubrick who also directed movies like *Dr. Strangelove* and *Clockwork Orange*. The film had a cast of lesser known stars than the other films in this section. Matthew Modine was the main star of the movie. The story takes you through his character, Pvt. Joker, from boot camp to Vietnam. Boot camp took up a majority of the movie and gave a background to what marines went through just to be called marines. This is where the audience can gain respect and associate with the protagonist before he goes to Vietnam. Once in Vietnam Pvt. Joker is a correspondent for Stars and Stripes.

Pvt. Joker rides into Hue, Vietnam next to a chopper gunner that holds little importance over the life in the sites of his gun. The following discussion is a Kubrick's portrayal of how some soldiers viewed the Vietcong enemy.

Door Gunner: Git some! Git some! Git some, yeah, yeah, yeah! Anyone who runs is a VC. Anyone who stands still is a well-disciplined VC! You guys oughta do a story about me sometime!

Private Joker: Why should we do a story about you?

Door Gunner: 'Cuz I'm so fuckin' good! I done got me 157 dead gooks killed. Plus 50 water buffalo, too! Them's all confirmed!

Private Joker: Any women or children?

Door Gunner: Sometimes!

Private Joker: How can you shoot women or children?

Door Gunner: Easy! Ya just don't lead 'em so much! Ain't war hell?²⁷

Once entering the city and meeting up with his squad they move into the crumbling streets of Hue. This is where the enemy is portrayed to be precise and cruel. An eager soldier moves forward to see if there were and snipers. He discovered there were after being shot through the leg. The Sergeant informed the men that they do this all the time. It is intentional in order to kill more marines that try and save the one injured, which is what ends up happening. The firefight ends when they flank the enemy and take out the young female sniper.

²⁷ *Full Metal Jacket* dir. Stanley Kubrick, 68 min, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1987.

The overall representation of the enemy is brief but clear. The enemy is capable and just as ready to kill as the trained marines. As in other films in the section the clearest portrayal of the enemy is done through how the U.S. soldiers talk about the enemy.

Conclusion

There are some similarities but more differences in the films from WWII and the films about Vietnam. In WWII both Japanese and American governments wanted to present a war that was being fought for national pride and freedom. The Japanese controlled their media and the United States had Hollywood pushing out tons of profitable propaganda as well.²⁸ The reason the movies were profitable was because of the popularity of the war. While the American public was behind WWII the same could not be said for the Vietnam War. As a result the movies that depict a virtuous and brave fighting force in the 1940's were not present when films came out in the late 1970's.

Neither war was actually glorious despite any depictions. Men lived in fear of losing their life and acted outside of code and creed in extreme situations. The darkness that is seen in the films I selected for Vietnam depicts this. What I understood from the movies was a loss of humanity in some of the characters of the movies. Chris in the movie *Platoon* is pushed to brink of this only to barely hold onto some ability to differentiate killing in war and committing murder.

The biggest difference in the movies I selected for the two sections was how the audience perceived American troops in killing the enemy. The four selections for the Vietnam period had protagonists that were sometimes hard to even watch. The killing of the enemy was often celebrated on screen between soldiers while the audience understood it was an act of survival pulled out of fear. The movies all displayed men pushed past the limits of dismay. Captain Willard forgot how to live in peace and only thought of fighting in the bust. Nick lost his grasp

²⁸ Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books 1986) 3

reality after the war and died uselessly. Chris was ready to kill innocent civilians when he was no longer able to grasp a moral principle. Pvt. Joker was only able to leave Vietnam with some sanity as he was only lightly exposed to what the majority of men faced daily.

Through the WWII movies there is little acknowledgment of killing a “Jap”. Japanese soldiers fell before U.S. troops and it was a victory. The audience could cheer for the home team on the big screen as they made glorious last stands or bombed Tokyo Bay. The enemy was a tool used to propel U.S. troops onto a pedestal of freedom. This changed in the recent years. Clint Eastwood’s *Letters from Iwo Jima* and *Flags of Our Fathers* give a heavier look into both sides of the battle of midway. While watching each movie I was able to see the fear and humanity that each Japanese and American soldier held.

I have never been through war and can only discuss what I have observed through these films. I am unaware of the toll that it would take on body and mind. Much of my knowledge of war comes from reading and, like many other Americans, watching war movies.

Appendix

Figure-1 *Bataan*

The film opens with Japanese bombing of withdrawing American troops and Filipino civilians. After the bombings stop Sergeant Bill Dane and Corporal Jake Feingold are called by their commanding officer for their volunteer mission. The plot is driven by this mission. Dane and Feingold along with eleven other men are to destroy a bridge that would be used by Japanese forces and then keep it from being rebuilt. Important characters of the squad:

Sergeant Bill Dane- A well liked veteran of the Philippines who takes command of the squad due to his experience. He is brave and knowledgeable.

Leonard Purckett- A young sailor who was washed ashore to join up with U.S. Army forces after his ship is destroyed. He becomes more confident and angry with Japanese forces as more of the men die.

Corporal Barney Todd- A man that Dane marks immediately as knowing. He deserted his squad and lost Dane his chance at being an officer. Dane allows Todd a second chance as long as he follows orders. Todd ends up bravely fighting with Dane as the last two survivors.

Yankee Salazar- A Filipino soldier and talented scout. He is respected in the squad as knowing the terrain. He dies after going for quinine and being captured by Japanese forces. He is presumably tortured, killed, then hung on a tree where Purckett shoots at his dead body mistaking it for a Japanese soldier.

Felix Ramirez- A Mexican American soldier that suffers silently from malaria until he can no longer hide the symptoms. He shows the dangers of Bataan in his death and the bravery of the men fighting there.

Wesley Epps- An African American soldier who sometimes sings but is known for his demolition expertise. He is a respected member of the squad and treated the same as the other soldiers. He dies in the final assault of Japanese forces after killing a large handful of Japanese soldiers.

The Japanese are re-building the bridge. Dane gets the guys into their fox holes. He tells Todd to come take a walk with him. They go check on the men. Corporal Feingold will be in charge while Dane and Todd are away. Dane and Todd get into position so they can throw hand grenades at the bridge. They find a good position and throw the hand grenades. They collapse the bridge and the truck on the bridge falls into the gorge below. A heavy fire fight begins. Todd gets a wound on the heel of his foot. Yankee sneaks out from his post to get to Gen. MacArthur. Todd told Yankee that no help is coming for those on Bataan, but Yankee went anyway. Corporal Katigbak is missing, so Dane and Lt. Bentley go to look for him. They find him dead with a samurai sword stuck in him. Ramirez gets sick with malaria. Japanese planes bomb the Americans' position. Malloy brings down a Japanese plane, but he is killed by another plane. The Japanese captured Yankee and now have hung his body up for the Americans to see it. Ramirez dies of malaria and Hardy is sick with malaria. Lt. Bentley is ready to take off in his now fixed plane. He says he thinks he can make it. Dane is going to have Hardy fly with

the lieutenant, since he needs a doctor. Todd wants to leave with Hardy and Bentley via the airplane, but Dane tells Todd he is staying with him. Bentley and Hardy go to the airplane. The remaining soldiers get into their positions. They will start firing at the Japanese to help disguise the sound of the American airplane. The Japanese set up a machine gun near the airplane and open fire. Dane throws a hand grenade and eliminates the Japanese machine gun nest. Lt. Bentley has been wounded, but he says to Dane that he is still taking off. Bentley gets the plane into the air. He then plunges the plane into the bridge construction. Hardy goes crazy saying he should have been on that plane. He grabs two hand grenades and goes after the Japanese. He is shot and wounded, but is able to throw his grenades. He is surprised and amused that he hits his targets. Hardy turns to return to camp and gets hit again and dies. Dane tries to make a deal with Todd, but Todd will not parley with Dane. The Japanese start sneaking up on the Americans.

There are only five guys left: Dane, Feingold, Purckett, Todd and Epps. The Japanese are covered in camouflage. The Americans wait until the Japanese are almost on top of them before opening fire on them. They kill all the camouflaged fighters, but other Japanese soldiers are attacking the American position. The Americans keep killing the Japanese soldiers. They get so excited by their success that they come out into the open to fight the Japanese with their rifles and bayonets. Epps is killed. Three of the men get back to the camp after killing all the Japanese soldiers. Jake comes walking slowly into the camp, but dies soon after reaching the area. Only Dane, Todd and Purckett are left now. Purckett wants to write a letter to his mother, but has been wounded in his right hand. Todd writes down what Purckett dictates, but Purckett breaks down crying over the thought of all of the men dying here. Dane takes over the dictation of the letter and he says that they are going to get out of here alive.

Purckett listens to the radio and finds a Japanese station broadcasting a call to the Americans and Filipinos to surrender. Purckett gets so angry that he stands up to tell the Japanese off and is shot and killed. Dane figures one of the wounded Japanese soldiers shot Purckett. He and Todd go looking for anyone still alive. Todd is distracted by his desire to take some cigarettes off a dead Japanese soldier giving the living soldier the opportunity to stick his bayonet in Todd's back. Dane kills the enemy soldier. He then tries to make Todd comfortable. He even gives him a cigarette. Todd admits that he is Danny Burns. He dies of his wound. Dane buries the last of the American dead. He then goes and gets himself a drink from the stream at the camp. He almost falls asleep, but is able to keep awake. Japanese soldiers are crawling through the fog in order to kill the last American alive. Dane doses off for awhile as the Japanese get very close to him. He hears some noise and wakes up. He starts mowing the Japanese down with his Tommy gun and then with the machine gun.²⁹

Figure-2 Back to Bataan

The movie opens with a rescue of U.S. prisoners from a Japanese camp. After the rescue that actual soldiers from the camp are shown marching down the screen. The plot then begins with Colonel Madden (John Wayne) meeting up with Captain Andres Bonifacio (Anthony Quinn) of the Philippine army. The men assemble a group of men to resist Japanese invasion. The Japanese respond with an order of killing ten Filipinos for every Japanese death. The Japanese use a local

²⁹ Cooney, Patrick L. "Bataan" <http://www.vernonjohns.org/snuffy1186/bataan.html> (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

celebrity woman to speak on the radio of Japanese graciousness and superiority. But their cruelty shows through when they kill a principle of a school in front of the children for not supporting Japan. The resistance increases from the people and Japanese forces decides to answer by granting the Philippines independence. The ceremony is planned by Madden's forces as an opportunity to attack. A school boy who was a spy for the Madden gets the other children to safety as Madden's forces opens fire. A Japanese soldier catches the boy. The boy is beaten until he agrees to cooperate. The boy takes them to a cliff side road and pulls the truck down the cliff killing all the accompanying soldiers and himself. In the final effort of resistance madden and his men fortify a village against Japanese forces. As the plan begins to fail American troops return to Bataan and save them.

Figure-3 *30 Seconds over Tokyo*

The film begins in February 1942 as the United States Army Air Forces plan to retaliate for the Pearl Harbor attack by bombing Tokyo and four other Japanese cities. Lt. Colonel James Doolittle (Spencer Tracy), the leader of the mission, assembles a volunteer force of aircrews that begin their top secret training by learning to take their B-25 Mitchell medium bombers off in the short distance of 500 feet or less to simulate taking off from the deck of an aircraft carrier. After depicting the squadron's month of hazardous training at Eglin Field, Florida and NAS Alameda, California the story goes on to describe the raid's aftermath.

While en route to Japan, the Hornet's task force is discovered by Japanese picket boats, and the bombers are forced to take off twelve hours early at the extreme limit of their range. After their successful attack on Japan, all but one of the B-25s run out of fuel before reaching their recovery airfields in China. As a result, their crews are forced to either bail out over China or crash land along the coast (one bomber landed safely in Russia and its crew was interned for over a year). Lawson's B-25 unexpectedly crashes in the surf while trying to land on a beach in darkness and heavy rain. He and his crew survive, but then face tremendous hardships and danger while being escorted to American lines by friendly Chinese. While still in China, Lawson has a leg amputated by the mission's flight surgeon as a result of his serious crash injuries. The film ends with Lawson being reunited with his wife Ellen in a Washington, DC, hospital.³⁰

Figure-4 *Destination Tokyo*

On Christmas Eve, the submarine USS Copperfin, under the command of Captain Cassidy (Cary Grant), departs San Francisco on a secret mission. At sea, Cassidy opens his sealed orders, which direct him to proceed first to the Aleutian Islands to pick up meteorologist Raymond then to Tokyo Bay to obtain vital weather intelligence for the upcoming Doolittle Raid.

Two Japanese planes attack; both are shot down, but one pilot manages to parachute into the water. When Mike goes to pick him up, he is stabbed to death. New recruit Tommy Adams shoots the pilot, but because he was slow to react Mike dies. Tommy blames himself for the death and volunteers to deactivate a bomb that did not explode on the deck of the ship. When Mike is buried at sea, Greek-American Tin Can does not attend the service, which angers the

³⁰ Wikipedia "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Seconds_over_Tokyo (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

other men until he explains that every Allied death causes him great pain. Meanwhile Raymond, who lived in Japan, discusses how the Japanese people were led into the war by the military faction. He hopes after victory Japanese children will be raised in peace.

As the submarine nears Tokyo Bay, the Copperfin has to somehow negotiate its way through protective minefields. When a Japanese ship enters the bay, Cassidy follows in their wake. That night, a small party goes ashore to make weather observations. Meanwhile, Tommy is diagnosed with appendicitis. Pills, the pharmacist, has to operate following instructions from a book, using improvised instruments. (There were actually a few emergency appendectomies performed in the course of wartime submarine patrols.)

Raymond broadcasts the information in Japanese in an attempt to avoid detection, but the Japanese are alerted and search the bay. Fortunately, the Copperfin remains undetected, allowing the men to watch part of the raid through the periscope. After recovering Raymond and his team, the submarine then slips out following an departing ship. Captain Cassidy is able to see his family waiting for him safely at the port.³¹

Figure-5 *The Deer Hunter*

The movie takes its time with these opening scenes, with the steel mill and the saloon and especially with the wedding and the party in the American Legion Hall. It's important not simply that we come to know the characters, but that we feel absorbed into their lives; that the wedding rituals and rhythms feel like more than just ethnic details. They do.

The opening movement is lingered over; it's like the wedding celebration in "The Godfather," but celebrated by hard-working people who have come to eat, dance and drink a lot and wish luck to the newlyweds and to say good-bye to the three young men who have enlisted in the Army. The party goes on long enough for everyone to get drunk who is ever going to, and then the newlyweds drive off and the rest of the friends go up into the mountains to shoot some deer. There is some Hemingwayesque talk about what it means to shoot deer: We are still at a point where shooting something is supposed to mean something.

Then Vietnam occupies the screen, suddenly, with a wall of noise, and the second movement of the film is about the experiences that three of the friends (Robert De Niro, John Savage and Christopher Walken) have there. At the film's center comes one of the most horrifying sequences ever created in fiction, as the three are taken prisoner and forced to play Russian roulette while their captors gamble on who will, or will not, blow out his brains.

The game of Russian roulette becomes the organizing symbol of the film: Anything you can believe about the game, about its deliberately random violence, about how it touches the sanity of men forced to play it, will apply to the war as a whole. It is a brilliant symbol because, in the context of this story, it makes any ideological statement about the war superfluous.

The De Niro character is the one who somehow finds the strength to keep going and to keep Savage and Walken going. He survives the prison camp and helps the others. Then, finally home from Vietnam, he is surrounded by a silence we can never quite penetrate. He is touched vaguely

³¹ Wikipedia "Destination Tokyo" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destination_Tokyo (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

by desire for the girl that more than one of them left behind, but does not act decisively. He is a "hero," greeted shyly, awkwardly by the hometown people.

He delays for a long time going to the VA hospital to visit Savage, who has lost his legs. While he is there he learns that Walken is still in Vietnam. He had promised Walken -- on a drunken moonlit night under a basketball hoop on a playlot, the night of the wedding -- that he would never leave him in Vietnam. They were both thinking, romantically and naively, of the deaths of heroes, but now De Niro goes back in an altogether different context to retrieve the living Walken. The promise was adolescent stuff, but there is no adolescence left when De Niro finds Walken still in Saigon, playing Russian roulette professionally.³² De Niro tries to convince Walken to leave with him. Walken refuses and De Niro begins to play Russian roulette to continue to convince him. De Niro pulls the trigger on an empty chamber. Walken finds the bullet when he picks up the gun from De Niro and dies.

Figure-6 *Apocalypse Now*

The story takes place from late 1968 through 1969. The film opens by introducing Captain Benjamin L. Willard (Martin Sheen), a deeply troubled, seasoned special operations veteran. Willard has returned to Saigon from deployment in the field. He drinks excessively and appears to be having difficulty adjusting to life in the rear-area. Two intelligence officers, Lt. General Corman (G. D. Spradlin) and Colonel Lucas (Harrison Ford), and a government man (Jerry Ziesmer) approach him with an assignment: journey up the fictitious Nung River into the remote Cambodian jungle to find Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando), a member of the US Army Special Forces feared to have gone rogue.

They tell Willard that Kurtz, once considered a model officer and future general, has gone insane and is commanding a legion of his own Montagnard troops deep inside the forest in neutral Cambodia. Their claims are supported by very disturbing radio broadcasts and recordings made by Kurtz himself. Willard is ordered to undertake a mission to find Kurtz and terminate the Colonel's command "with extreme prejudice".

Willard joins the crew of a Navy Patrol Boat, Riverine (PBR) named the "Erebus" -- radio call sign "PBR Street Gang" -- with an eclectic crew composed of: boat commander QMC George "Chief" Phillips (Albert Hall), GM3 Lance B. Johnson (Sam Bottoms), GM3 Tyrone Miller (Laurence Fishburne) a.k.a. "Mr. Clean", and EN3 Jay "Chef" Hicks (Frederic Forrest).

Willard and the PBR crew rendezvous with the First of the Ninth Air Cavalry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall) for escort to the Nung River. He initially scoffs at their request for escort until Kilgore, a keen surfer, is told by one of his men that Lance Johnson, a professional surfer, is a member of the boat's crew. Kilgore befriends Johnson, and later at a beach barbeque Willard explains that there are only a few points where they can enter the Nung River. Willard identifies an opening on the map, but Kilgore advises that the point is

³² Roger Ebert "The Deer Hunter:: rogerebert.com:: Reviews"

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?aid=/19790309/reviews/903090301/1023> (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

held by the Viet Cong and that he has lost several reconnaissance helicopters there. When one of his men advises that the beach at Vinh Dinh Drop is perfect for surfing, having a six-foot peak and a bowl section that's "tube city", Kilgore changes his mind about escorting Willard and the PBR to the river and decides to capture the village. His men advise him that it's "Charlie's point" and heavily fortified. Dismissing this concern with the explanation that "Charlie don't surf!", Kilgore orders his men to saddle up in the morning to capture the town and the beach.

Riding high above the coast in a fleet of Hueys accompanied by OH-6As, Kilgore launches his attack on the beach. The scene, famous for its use of Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries", ends with the soldiers surfing the barely secured beach amidst mortar explosions. After helicopters swoop over the village and demolish all visible signs of resistance, a giant napalm strike in the nearby jungle dramatically marks the climax of the battle. Kilgore exults to Willard, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning... The smell, you know that gasoline smell... Smells like ... victory", as he recalls a battle in which a hill was bombarded with napalm for over twelve hours.

The lighting and mood darken as the boat navigates upstream and Willard's silent obsession with Kurtz deepens. Incidents on the journey include a run-in with a tiger while Willard and Chef search for mangoes. The boat continues up river and the crew watches a USO show featuring Playboy Bunnies and a centerfold that degenerates into chaos.

Shortly after the Playmate performance, Chief spots a sampan and orders an inspection over the objections of Willard. Initially reluctant to board the boat, Chef impatiently searches it; a young woman on the boat makes a sudden movement towards a barrel, prompting Clean to open fire with his M60 and kill nearly everyone on the sampan. As the woman lies dying, Chef discovers that the barrel contains the woman's pet puppy. Chief insists on taking the woman to receive medical attention; however, Willard ends the debate by shooting her, calmly stating, "I told you not to stop", further alienating himself from the PBR's crew.

The boat moves up river to the American outpost at the Do Long bridge, the last U.S. Army outpost on the river, passing wreckage of a downed Huey helicopter. The boat arrives during a North Vietnamese attack on the bridge, which is under constant construction. Upon arrival, Willard receives the last piece of the dossier from a lieutenant named Carlson, along with mail for the boat crewmen. Willard goes ashore with Lance, who has taken LSD, and they make their way through the trenches where they encounter many panicked, leaderless soldiers. Realizing the situation has devolved into chaos, Willard and Lance return to the boat. Chief tries to convince Willard not to continue on with his mission. In response, Willard snaps at Chief to continue upriver.

The next day, Willard learns from the information he received at Do Lung that an Army Captain named Colby (Scott Glenn) was sent to find Kurtz a few months prior to Willard's assignment and is now missing. While the crew is busy reading mail, Lance pops open a purple smoke grenade, catching the attention of an unseen enemy hiding in the trees by the river, and prompting an attack on the boat. The puppy that Johnson picks up after the boat incident is no longer in the film. Clean is killed as he listens to an audio tape from his mother. Chief, who had a

close relationship with Clean, becomes increasingly hostile to Willard. As the boat continues up the river it passes under the tail of a crashed B-52D Stratofortress.

The crew carries on upstream, and come across a French outpost, presumably now in Cambodia. The soldiers perform a funeral for Clean and bury his body. The crew then has dinner with the French soldiers, where they (the French) quarrel over the current situation in Vietnam.

Later, Montagnard villagers begin shooting arrows at the boat as it approaches the camp. The crew opens fire until Chief is impaled on a spear. Willard attempts to assist the mortally wounded Chief, who tries to kill Willard by pulling him onto the spear tip protruding from his chest. Willard grapples with Chief until the latter finally dies. Afterwards, Willard confides in Chef and Lance about his mission, and the two surviving crew of the boat reluctantly agree to continue their journey upriver as they are now in Cambodia. As they draw closer, they see the coastline is littered with dead bodies.

After arriving at Kurtz' outpost, Willard leaves Chef behind with orders to call in an airstrike on the village if he does not return and takes Johnson with him to the village. They are met by a manic freelance photographer (Dennis Hopper), who explains that Kurtz's greatness and philosophical skills inspire his people to follow him. As they go into the village, there are bodies that are ignored by the villagers, as well as severed heads scattered about the nearby Buddhist temple which serves as Kurtz's living quarters. Willard also encounters the missing Captain Colby, who is in a nearly catatonic state.

Willard is brought before Kurtz in the darkened temple, where Kurtz derides him as "an errand boy, sent by grocery clerks to collect a bill". The scene changes to Chef attempting to call in the airstrike on the village as ordered by Willard. The scene cuts to Willard bound to a post outside in the pouring rain. Kurtz walks up to him and drops Chef's severed head into his lap.

After some time in captivity, Willard is released and given the freedom of the compound. Kurtz lectures him on his theories of war, humanity, and civilization, knowing that Willard would not leave. Kurtz explains his motives and philosophy in a haunting monologue in which he praises the ruthlessness of the Viet Cong which he witnessed firsthand after one of his own humanitarian missions. He recalls the incident as leaving him traumatized but also giving him a new and deeper understanding of the complexities of his enemy and the level to which the US would have to commit in order to prevail. Kurtz also asks Willard to tell his son everything about him in the event of his death. That night, as the villagers conduct a ceremonial slaughter of a water buffalo, Willard enters Kurtz's chamber as Kurtz is making a recording, and attacks him with a machete.

Lying bloody and dying on the ground, Kurtz whispers "The horror... the horror..." before dying. Willard descends the stairs from Kurtz' chamber and drops his weapon. The villagers do so as well. Willard walks through the now-silent crowd of natives and takes the last surviving crewperson, the near-catatonic Lance, by the hand. With his mission accomplished, Willard leads Lance to the PBR, and the two of them sail away as Kurtz's final words echo and the scene fades to black.³³

³³ Wikipedia "Apocalypse Now" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse_Now (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

Figure-7 *Platoon*

In the movie, Chris Taylor is a young man from a wealthy family, but while in college, chooses to help his country and do his duty in the Vietnam War. He is sent to Vietnam gets put in the 25th Infantry Division. Chris first has some rough times while over there. He gets bitten by ants while traveling through the jungle, and gets blamed for falling asleep while he was on watch. The North Vietnamese tried and were unsuccessful at ambushing them. However, it was not Chris's fault (it was a soldier named Junior who fell asleep). Chris starts to miss home after some of these events happen. After being put on light duty, he gets mixed up in what some of the other soldiers were doing to deal with their depression - drugs and alcohol. He also meets some nice people such as King and Big Harold in the process. The Platoon soon sets out again, patrolling the jungle. They discover a Vietnamese bunker complex and soon after discover something else: Manny, one of their soldiers is missing. The soldiers go through all of the fortified area, and two of them set off a mine. Lieutenant Wolfe then gets word to move his men to a nearby village, which was thought to have Vietnamese soldiers in hiding. On their way, they discover Manny dead, tied to a tree. The soldiers then made their way to the village where they take out their frustrations on the people and their belongings. Chris goes off on a Vietnamese couple that hid from him. Bunny urges Chris to kill him and later, Bunny himself kills the poor Vietnamese man. Meanwhile, Barnes has a talk with the headman of the village about the weapons the platoon has found. Barnes kills the man's wife and threatens to kill his daughter in order to get him to talk. Elias then breaks up the episode and punches Barnes. In the end, the soldiers burn the village and take the villagers with them. Chris doesn't think that it is fair and intervenes with some of the soldiers trying to rape a poor village girl. He says, "She isn't an animal."

Back at the base camp, the men discuss Barnes' behavior. Elias goes to a lieutenant and tells him of the affair. The lieutenant then tells them that if people were killed for no reason, he would take it up in court. Again, the men are patrolling through the jungle and the Vietnamese attack them. This time the casualties are a little more than in the previous battles. Chris gets his first true kill and gets excited about it. Elias devises a plan and scopes out the enemy position. Barnes goes to get him after Wolfe tells them to get out of the area because they were going to bomb it. Elias runs through the woods and finally finds Barnes. Barnes gives him an evil look and then shoots him. He goes to tell Chris and the men with him to evacuate and tells them that he found Elias dead, "about a hundred yards back." Chris reluctantly believes him and the men are loaded on to helicopters to get out of the area. As they lift off, Chris sees Elias running away from the Vietnamese below. He is finally tracked down by the enemy and killed.

Back at the camp, everyone is very tense about the Elias ordeal. Chris is very upset about it and shares his anger with the other soldiers. He did not know that Barnes was listening in. Barnes walks in and gives the men a speech that puts down Elias. He then challenges the men to kill him and Chris takes up the challenge. Chris gets in a few good hits, but is taken down by Barnes who also cuts his cheek. Chris hears about the other battalions that have been hit hard and informs the others that they were probably going to be also. The next day, the platoon heads out in the jungle to prepare for the battle. Chris and King talk some and King gets a message that his tour was up and he could take the next helicopter out of there. Meanwhile, gunfire is heard in the distance, so

the rest of the platoon prepare in their foxholes. Chris is teamed with Francis. Later in the evening, the advancing Vietnamese trip some flares and the battle begins. Tex comes in to Chris's hole and tells about all of the Vietnamese that are coming. Francis wants to withdraw, but Chris wants to hold his ground. Chris fights heroically and saves himself and Francis from dying. The heavy fighting continues and the Vietnamese seem to be overrunning the Americans. In the midst of this, Chris meets with Barnes who gives him a real dirty face and seems like he is going to kill Chris. Before this happens, bombs are dropped close by to wipe out nearly everyone.

The next morning, Chris wakes up to a great surprise - he is alive! He slowly gets up to survey the mass destruction of the night before. In this he finds Barnes. Barnes tells Chris to get him a medic, but Chris gives him a few bullets instead. A few minutes later relief forces arrive and give the injured Chris some help. Francis, who also survived, stabs himself in the leg to end his Vietnam days. Chris, Francis, and all of the other injured and dead are taken to a helicopter landing zone. The injured, including Chris, are loaded on to the helicopters and flown out. On the ride in the helicopter, Chris thinks about the war in general. "The war will always be there the rest of my days."³⁴

Figure-8 *Full Metal Jacket*

The first part of the movie takes place on Parris Island in South Carolina at the Marine boot camp. A new group of recruits has just arrived for their training, which lasts several weeks. Gunnery Sergeant Hartman is the Marine Senior Drill Instructor (SDI) while they are there. He's strict and demanding who, from the recruit's viewpoint, seems set in his harsh ways.

There are three Marines that become friends and are central to the story. 'Joker' is a witty and sarcastic recruit who stands for what he believes in and can talk his way out of almost anything. 'Gomer Pyle' is a recruit who's fat and foolish qualities come to hurt him very badly. The third is 'Cowboy'. He is a true Marine who goes by the book and knows what to do and when to do it.

Hartman gets on Joker and Pyle (especially) in the movie. Joker earns Hartman's respect because of the way he stands by his beliefs and the fact that he has good reason for doing the things he does. Pyle, on the other hand, does not get the same respect. He is constantly put down and embarrassed by Hartman who seems to have no compassion towards him. One night, towards the end of training, Hartman is inspecting the health of the Recruits and their lockers when he finds Pyle's lock to be unlocked. He gives him hell about it, particularly when he finds a jelly doughnut in the locker. He starts making the other Marines pay for Pyle's mistakes. This goes on for several days until one night the recruits get up in the middle of the night, hold Pyle down with a blanket and beat him with soap wrapped in towels. After this, Pyle is never the same. Not only does he have Hartman against him but his fellow recruits as well. It is winding down to the last days of training and they have almost earned the title, 'Marines'. After going through weeks of hell, they seem ready for combat. Hartman gives each one their job specialty. Most get Infantry (03), which means certain duty in Vietnam. Joker is assigned to be a military journalist.

³⁴ John Woggon, "Platoon Plot Summary" <http://www.historyinfilm.com/platoon/plot.htm> (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

On the last night on the island Joker draws fire watch. He hears a noise coming from the head and finds Pyle inside with a fully loaded M-14. Pyle starts sounding off and pretty soon Hartman comes in. He tells Pyle to give him the rifle and Pyle replies with a bullet into Hartman's chest. Pyle then sits down and pulls the trigger on himself.

The second part of the movie concentrates on the war itself. Joker is working as military reporter in DaNang (the HQ for the Marines in Vietnam). It is the eve of the great Tet Offensive in February 1968. He and his friend, 'Rafterman', are sent to Hue City, (The old Imperial Capital of Vietnam where the heaviest fighting of the war took place.) to get a story. When he gets there he meets with the first platoon, 'Hotel' Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. His old friend Cowboy is part of the platoon. They get reacquainted and meet with the other Marines and then they have to move out. They are on the outskirts of the city when incoming fire suddenly come down around them. Heavy fire is exchanged between both sides. The tanks then move in and, after securing a portion of the city, they set in for the night.

The next morning they get word that the NVA have supposedly withdrawn during the night. The Marines start to move in on the city. Joker and Rafterman join a patrol with Cowboy's squad. After a while, the Marines realize that they have made a mistake in direction. They send Eightball (a black Marine) in to see if the area is secure. It isn't - he gets shot. Doc J then goes in to try and rescue Eightball and he is shot too. Animal Mother (a big, bad Marine) goes in after them. He figures out that there is just one sniper. Cowboy, Joker, Rafterman, and three other Marines then go in. Once they have closed in, Cowboy gets on the radio to report the situation but chooses a bad place to stand. The sniper shoots him down too. He dies soon after.

The Marines move in on the building that they think the sniper is in. Once inside they split up. Joker stumbles upon the sniper, a Vietnamese girl no older than a teenager, who opens fire. He fumbles with his weapon and is saved by Rafterman who shoots her. The other Marines come in and they stand around the girl. She starts saying prayers and then asks for one of the men to shoot her (to put her out of her misery). They are at first reluctant, but Joker finally does it. The Marines move out and head down to the Perfume River. While they walk they all sing the Mickey Mouse song.³⁵

³⁵ John Woggon, "Full Metal Jacket Plot" <http://www.historyinfilm.com/jacket/plot.htm> (Accessed 26 April, 2011)

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