



# Glorifying Vietnam

The Influence of 9/11 on the Glorification of War and Nationhood  
in *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers*.

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“In memory of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War and later died as a result of their service. We honor and remember their sacrifice”

- Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C. -

## Abstract

American military movies are often seen as glorifying the military and are easily grouped together without paying attention to the impact of the release date. This thesis discusses the differences in glorification of war and nationhood in the American military movies about the Vietnam War *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *We Were Soldiers* (2002). These movies, one being released before and one after the 9/11 attacks, show different kinds of glorification, or no glorification at all, and attract attention to the possible impact of 9/11 on this particular genre of movies. American military movies have an impact on the opinion of citizens on the military. By analyzing movies about the same subject made in different time periods, results will show the influence of historical moments on the presence of glorification in film. The research question is as follows: In which ways do glorification of war and nationhood differ in American military movies about the Vietnam war released before and after 9/11? The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that film audiences forget to take historical influence of war movies into consideration and take it as a representation that is close to the truth. This thesis will shed light on how the 9/11 attacks influenced the glorification of war and nationhood in the case studies, and how glorification can be incorporated in films.

*Key words: Vietnam War, Full Metal Jacket, We Were Soldiers, war movies, glorification, war, nationhood.*

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## **Introduction**

During my semester at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I got into contact with a group of students that were part of the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). They were trained to join the United States military while taking courses for a regular undergraduate program. Even at university, they already had to wear their uniform and participate in ceremonies. This sparked my interest in how United States' military members are treated in America and how they are glorified. The United States military is the most powerful military in the world (Woody, par. 34). On top of that, as it becomes clear from SIPRI's Fact Sheet on military expenditure, the United States spent over a third (\$611 billions) of the world's military expenditure in 2016 (Tian et al., par. 4) The runner-up was China with 13 per cent, almost three times less than the United States. Since then, the military spending has only increased. However, not just the government thinks the military is a big contribution to American society. Research by the Pew Research Center shows that "Americans continue to hold the military in high regard, with more than three-quarters of U.S. adults (78%) saying that members of the armed services contribute "a lot" to society's well-being" (par. 1). These ROTC students already experienced how American soldiers are treated, but before actively serving the military. While the military is now held in high regard, the opinion of the military was not as favorable during and after the Vietnam war, mainly because many Americans contested the war.

After the North Vietnamese had defeated the French colonizers in Vietnam in 1954, they wanted to unify the entire country under a communist regime, which would be modeled after the regimes of the Soviet Union and China. South Vietnam, however, wanted to be closely aligned with the West. The United States, fearing the spread of communism, supported the Southern Vietnamese with military equipment, and eventually started sending troops to the country in 1965.

Four years later, “more than 500,000 U.S. military personnel were stationed in Vietnam” (Spector, par. 2). The North, supported by China and the Soviet Union, was a strong opponent however and eventually, the costs and casualties of the Vietnam War proved too much for the United States to bear. The United States withdrew from the war in 1973, and in 1975 South Vietnam was invaded by the North. The total number of United States armed forces who died or went missing in the Vietnam War is 58,200 (Spector, par. 3).

According to Lunch and Sperlich, Political Science and International Studies scholars, very few American citizens were aware of the first American involvement in the Vietnamese civil war in 1955 (21). When the United States became actively involved in the war in 1965, American citizens began to take notice. Mid-1966, a certain uneasiness began to set in, and when the war escalated in 1967, less than half of the United States' citizens supported the war (Lunch and Sperlich, 22). This was partly due to the fact that the Vietnam War was the first televised war. Which means that it was broadcasted on television, and "much of what the public could see of the war on television appeared confusing if not futile" (Spector, par. 6). The image of war Americans knew before Vietnam came from the movies and was important in shaping "American culture and its perception of America's uniqueness and its cult of endless victories" according to Wetta, scholar in history, and Novelli, scholar in English (862). Vietnam was not a war of endless victories and thus much grimmer and less heroic than the movies the American public were familiar with. Near the end of the American military involvement in Vietnam,

Gallup found that only 31 percent of his respondents felt that the war in Vietnam was not a mistake and at the same time a dichotomizes question which asked if respondents favored or opposed withdrawal from Vietnam found only 28 percent opposed to withdrawal. (Lunch and Sperlich, 31)

The level of war support at the end of the Vietnam War was thus shallow. During the Vietnam War, an anti-war sentiment came up and, according to history scholar Hall, “as the war dragged on, this dissent grew dramatically, becoming one of the largest social movements in the nation’s history” (Hall, 13). There were mass protests, and local level actions and the movement troubled some members of the government (Hall, 14). The antiwar sentiment stuck around after the end of the Vietnam war. Richard Rovere, a veteran political reporter, wrote about the antiwar sentiment: “American opinion [...] will tolerate intervention no longer – at least when the combat zone is so remote” (qtd. in Lunch and Sperlich, 32).

This anti-interventionism was mostly gone around the turn of the century and after the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The 9/11 attacks were followed by a declaration of a war on terror by President George W. Bush. Bush located his war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2003, 71% of the American people agreed to the intervention and use of military force in Iraq (Oliphant, par. 3). When comparing this to the sentiment about war after the Vietnam War, it is clear that the American people were more pro-war than in the 1960s and 70s. Since American movies are essential elements that influence American public opinions about war, movies about war have the ability to shape the public opinion about war (Everett, 2). However, at the same time, public opinion about war could also shape the movie's opinion about war. In the time after the Vietnam War and the time after 9/11, different sentiments about war were popular. Since popular opinion can influence movies and movies popular opinion, it is logical to assume that the representation of the American military and the representation of war and nationhood in movies will be affected. Therefore, the research question I will try to answer is as followed:



In which ways do glorification of war and nationhood differ in American military movies about the Vietnam War released before and after 9/11?

The films that will be focused on in this thesis are *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002). According to Gates, professor in Film Studies, a new cycle of war films came into play in the early 2000s (298). One of these films was *We Were Soldiers*. This “new Hollywood war film” build upon the realist combat films of the late 1980s to which *Full Metal Jacket* belongs, but as Gates states, “they do not necessarily offer a more accurate portrayal” (298). Since *We Were Soldiers* was built upon films like *Full Metal Jacket*, and both films cover a controversial war, but *We Were Soldiers* in a less accurate manner, it is telling to compare movies from each of these groups. My interest in *Full Metal Jacket* was also sparked because the cadets of the ROTC told me that it is the one military movie that most military employees agree on being an accurate portrayal of training and war. In contrast to other military movies, they get small things right that can bother military employees, such as uniforms. I thus chose to analyze two movies that were quite the opposite to my knowledge prior to writing this thesis: one movie that is known for being accurate and one that should be less accurate according to Gates.

In chapter one, I explain the different definitions I will use, like the definition of glorification. It serves as a framework for the rest of my thesis. Also, to contextualize the movie scenes I am talking about in my thesis, I will describe the plots of the movies I am using as research material. This is why my second chapter will include a short description of the plots of *Full Metal Jacket*, and *We Were Soldiers*. In chapter two I will then use the movies to study the glorification of war in American Vietnam War movies. I do this by analyzing two scenes from each movie, both their visual and textual elements. Elements of the plot and mise-en-scene are combined to analyze the way the Glorification of War is presented in these movies. In chapter three I will

analyze two different scenes from each movie in the same way, now studying the presence of glorification of nationhood.

In this thesis, I will combine film analyzation with an American Studies-point of view. This study is, therefore, a combination of an analytical and explanatory methodology. Film analyzation gives me the terms and tools to talk about these movie scenes, to see what is happening on a strictly movie-level. I evaluate these things through American culture, history, and values, as I have learned in my American Culture-studies.

Two of the sources that will be used most in this thesis are “Now Playing: Vietnam” by Marilyn B. Young and “The Tragedy of Justified War” by Michael Neu. Michael Neu is a philosophy, politics and ethics scholar, whose article mostly contributed to the definition of the Glorification of War in chapter one to introduce just war theory. In his article, Michael Neu is critiquing the binary structure of contemporary just war thinking, that a war is either just or unjust. According to Neu, binary thinking is wrong because even if a war is justified, it can still be tragic. Contemporary war thinking forgets what the real world is like and make it into "a sterile analytic playground" (463). The flaw in the just war theory is that they deny that a morally just war is fundamentally tragic which means that virtually all wars would be unjust. Neu acknowledges that not waging war is sometimes even less morally acceptable, think of World War II, but that does not mean it justifies war. Justified warfare constitutes both a moral evil and a physical evil, unlike what just war theorists say; that justified war absorbs the injustice of war. So, Neu argues that: there is no such thing as a just war. There is also no such thing as a morally justified war that comes without ambiguity and moral remainders” (475).

Marilyn B. Young is a history scholar and author of *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. In her article, she discusses different movies about the Vietnam war and how the manifest content of

most of them is antiwar. Before the Vietnam war, movies about war were mostly pro-war. Young's starting point for Vietnam movies is *The Green Berets* (1968), which she finds interesting because the "justice of the cause must be explained and at considerable length" (23). The movies that followed *The Green Berets* and were made during or in the aftermath of the Vietnam war "did not try to justify or sell the war" (23). Young identifies a subgenre of Vietnam movies that *Full Metal Jacket* also belongs in, namely the "noble grunt movie", where the battlefield is internalized, and the enemy is mostly the "cold, abstract forces of bureaucracy and the incompetence of superiors" (23). The movies in this subgenre do not end in total victory, and the cause for which the troops fight is unclear and unworthy. After 9/11, new films about war, and the Vietnam war had to erase the old image of the Vietnam war. One of these movies was *We Were Soldiers*, which has very patriotic values and unlike the older Vietnam war movies, does not have a defeatist story.

## **Chapter 1: The Definition of Glorification and Different Kinds of Glorification**

### **1.1 Definition of Glorification**

To be able to determine whether or not movies contain elements of glorification, it is necessary to establish what it means to glorify something and how we can expect to find it in United States' military movies. Starting with the dictionary definition, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the transitive verb glorifying means "to make glorious by bestowing honor, praise, or admiration" in which glorious means possessing or deserving glory, praise, honor, or distinction ("Glorifying"). The example Merriam-Webster provides to illustrate the meaning of glorious is "[they] had a long and glorious military career." The fact that the Merriam-Webster dictionary decided to use a military career as an example of what is seen as "glorious" supports the popular opinion that all soldiers deserve glory and are like heroes (Powell, 177). As Fallows, national correspondent for The Atlantic states:

Americans admire the military as they do no other institution. Through the past two decades, respect for the courts, the schools, the press, Congress, organized religion, Big Business, and virtually every other institution in modern life has plummeted. The one exception is the military. (Fallows, par. 18)

This reinforces the expectation that glorification will be found when portraying the American military since the people portraying the military might also have this same admiration for the U.S. military.

The definition by Merriam-Webster also indicates that the subject glorified is portrayed in a more positive light than it is actually in. Words as glory, honor, and praise are used when talking about, for example, an achievement or a career. The example of Merriam-Webster, in which they

use a glorious military career, is telling, especially because a glorious military career often insinuates that a person has experienced the death of other people or even killed people themselves. Glory is thus used to describe a situation that might not be as glorious as initially thought and glorification does virtually the same, representing a situation better than it actually is. Glorification would thus entail that a discrepancy exists between the reality and the portrayal of a subject.

Powell, an anthropologist from Concordia University Montreal, uses the same discrepancy mentioned above to explain the glorification of the military. She mentions that the military in general and its members are portrayed as “unstoppable forces” and that the media tends to leave out the dark sides of the military and its related conflicts (167 and 169). By saying that the media tends to leave out the dark sides of the military, Powell uses the definition of glorifying which says that glorification makes situations, actions, or people look better than they are in reality. This would thus mean that negative images are left out of the portrayal of the American military. Noted entertainment journalist Zakarin adds the term “unflattering” to the list of lexicons that cannot represent the image of the military (qtd. in Powell, 170). Anything that is deemed unflattering to the image of the military is left out when something is glorified (Powell, 170).

As Zakarin and Powell have suggested, the definition that is used for glorification throughout this thesis will be that glorification is portraying an act, a situation, an aspect or a person very positively, while purposefully leaving out the negative. Throughout this thesis, two kinds of glorification will be focused on when analyzing American military movies. These different forms of glorification are the glorification of war and the glorification of nationhood. These forms will be described in the following subheadings.

## 1.2 Glorification of War

The first kind of glorification is the glorification of war. The glorification of war entails that a war is, for example, portrayed as easier, as more just, or that the conditions are better than they actually are. Powell shows this when she states, that the media portrays conflicts involving the United States of America and the military as less violent, with minimized death and destruction (169). Therefore, people who have not seen war might have a completely wrong idea of what happens in a war and what the circumstances are for soldiers who live and fight in a war. The minimization of death and destruction can also contribute to the idea that a war is just and simultaneously means that it is easier to justify a war. When a movie shows little American casualties, the costs of the war seem minimal. When there are then also some benefits that can be attributed to the war, it is easier to assume that taking part in that particular war is a good idea. Even when a war is controversial in American society and approval ratings for that particular war are low, movies can pretend like all of the negative opinions surrounding the war do not exist. They can thus not only pretend that the costs are minimal, and the benefits are higher, but also that there had never been any question about the war. Regan, a PhD in Political science, states that there are two points of interest when discussing what influences public opinion about a war, namely “the ability of media to shape attitudes toward the military” and “entertainment outlets that emphasize issues of patriotism, glorify the military, and shape cognitive patterns regarding the role of force in foreign policy” (46). So, movies can affect public opinion about the war because they are an entertainment outlet which is simultaneously part of the media. Since movies can affect public opinion, glorifying war in a movie can imprint audiences with a glorified image of a war, where death and destruction are minimized, a war justified, and negative images of war do not exist.

Movies also tend to only show one side of a conflict (Powell, 170). If you only see American soldiers leaving behind their families and sacrificing their life, and the enemy trying to kill them, you are less likely to have a sense of understanding for the opposite side. This one-sided approach, and presenting the enemy as evil, helps classify a war as morally justified (Thussu, qtd. in Powell, 170). Presenting a war as just or unjust is thus part of the glorification of war. Take, for example, a film that leaves out any controversy, protest, or doubts about a war that was, in reality, very contested. This war is then presented as if there was no discussion about the justness of the war even though there was. Giving a war the label just or good, helps to get people behind a war because the violence and the lives lost will more often be condoned when it happens for a just or good cause. Neu writes about the binary distinction between justness of wars. As he states, “theorists claim that the waging of war, and the committing of military acts within war, is either just or unjust” (Neu, 461). However, Neu himself does not agree with this binary divide. He claims that the only time that a war fits into this binary is in fiction (Neu, 461). An element that often discussed in the divide of just and unjust is morality. According to Neu, theorists who justify war forget to be critical about Western moralism. The world in which they justify war is non-complex with a non-exploitative relation between countries. The suffering of the individual is forgotten, and they are “nonchalant about suffering of unimaginable proportions” (Neu, 474). Neu, however, argues that justified warfare “constitutes as moral evil”, as well as a physical evil (474). So even a war which theorists call a justified war, is morally and physically evil. Tom Pollard, Professor of Social Sciences, chooses to use the term good war instead of just war, and focuses on whether or not the cause is essentially noble (Pollard, 123). Pollard thus mentions the idea that agrees with the just war theorists that Neu talks about, accepting physical and moral evil as long as the cause is right. Later on, however, Pollard states that:

The concept of a righteous war became more difficult for the American public to internalize during and after both the Cold War, and Vietnam, which stirred unprecedented dissent over what had been achieved that could possibly justify such huge losses of human life (126).

Thereby questioning the idea that a good cause can justify a war. He later touches upon the same point that Neu made, a completely just, or in Pollard's term, good war, only exists within fiction. Pollard mentions that within the film industry, directors try "to apply the "good war" label to Vietnam" (127). Gates supports this by acknowledging that directors try to apply this just war label to their films by heightening moral assertions (Gates, 298). This, in turn, ties into both Pollard's as Neu's ideas that wars can be presented as justified when their cause is moral or noble enough. Gates comes back to the idea that leaving out political issues is able to add to the glorification of war because "no longer is Vietnam the war that should not have been fought, or U.S. military intervention questionable, because the grunts that put their lives on the line for their country are fighting for the "right" reasons" (Gates, 302). In this thesis, when something is written about the representation of war as just or good, it is about a combination of the ideas of Neu, Pollard, and Gates. When glorification of war in a movie contributes to the representation of war as just, it is because political discussions are deliberately omitted, moral assertions are heightened, or because the righteousness of the cause of the war is magnified.

### 1.3 Glorification of Nationhood

The Merriam-Webster dictionary presents three possible definitions for nationhood. The first being "political independence or existence as a separate nation," the second "national character," and third the "membership in a particular nation" ("Nationhood"). In this thesis, I will not focus on



the first definitions as much but on the latter two. The glorification of nationhood will be based on the feeling of love for one's nation and the belief that one's nation is great. Nationhood is closely related to patriotism. In the chapter on nationhood, patriotism will thus also be discussed. Patriotism is described similarly to nationhood, but on a more individual level with a focus on values and beliefs. Americans can call themselves patriots if they feel like that applies to them. However, being a patriot can still have a different meaning for different people. Nationhood refers more to a unity of people. People that all belong to one nation with, for example, the same background. When the number of Americans that call themselves patriots, or when the United States is called a very patriotic nation, it means that many Americans feel love and devotion towards their nation and its values for example. The term nationhood itself does not contain the definition that people feel love for the nation or feel that its values are great. However, when nationhood is glorified, it does present this nation as one to be loved and its values as great. Even though patriotism and nationhood are thus not terms that can be used interchangeably, they are often used to complement each other. Therefore, if there is a strong feeling of patriotism in the U.S., this is an indication of the sentiments in the U.S. about nationhood, and if a film is described as very patriotic, it is an indication of the presence of glorification of nationhood in films.

Nationhood is an important aspect in the lives of American citizens which can be supported by results found by the Pew Research Center. As C. Doherty, associate director of the Pew Research Center states, "America is a patriotic country [and] Pew's political values surveys over the past 20 years have found overwhelming agreement with the statement 'I am very patriotic'" (par. 1). A symbol that Americans use to display their patriotism is their national flag. As Huddy and Khatib, both political science scholars, state, "the symbolic patriotism scale [...] combines being American with pride in the flag" (63). This is in agreement with results of surveys conducted

by the Pew Research center, according to which “patriotism means showing the flag [and] overall, 62% [of Americans] say they display the flag at home, in the office, or on their car” (C. Doherty, par. 2). This symbol of the American flag is also used in films. One example is the central display of the flag in figure 9, that is used to symbolize nationhood. The shot portrayed in figure 9 will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.

Fallen soldiers can also glorify the nation and, as Bartov, a history scholar, states, “endow [the nation] with deeper meaning because they had given their lives for it” (Bartov, 15). This is one of the ways in which the second kind of glorification, the glorification of nationhood, is shown in movies: soldiers that are willing to give everything for the United States of America. The United States is presented as more than a nation; it is has changed into a city upon a hill. John Winthrop first introduced this idea in the sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* in which he presents the United States as an example for the rest of the world to look up to. This sentiment is still relevant when American citizens, or in this case soldiers, feel like the United States has superior values that other countries should have as well. Values such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

## Chapter 2: Glorification of War

### 2.1 General Plot Description Case Studies

*Full Metal Jacket*, 1987:

Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* is a pre-9/11 movie about the Vietnam War, which is divided into two parts. The film starts at the United States Marine Corps Training Camp near the end of the 1960s, where young recruits are being prepared for basic training. Their trainer, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, played by Ronald Lee Erme, is extremely tough, and does not show any mercy to the recruits, and instead tags them all with his degrading, made-up nicknames. The goal of the training is to basically eliminate the recruits' personalities and turn them into killers. The first part of the movie focuses on two of the recruits, "Joker" and Leonard "Pyle" Lawrence, and how Pyle slowly loses his sanity despite Joker's help. Joker, played by Matthew Modine, is one of the recruits that "has guts and that is enough" as Hartman states. Pyle, played by Vincent D'Onofrio, is a recruit that is struggling with their training because of his weight and is constantly ridiculed by Hartman and later even beat up by his fellow recruits. As cultural historian T. Doherty very well captures "we next see Leonard in stark close-up, he is a new, or rather a non, man [his] eyeballs rolled high, mouth back in a ghastly grin, he has gone over the edge (T. Doherty, 28). The night after their graduation, Pyle cracks, resulting in him shooting his superior officer and later himself.

One year later, Joker is a military journalist working for "Stars and Stripes" in Da Nang, Vietnam. Joker's partner is photographer "Rafterman," played by Kevyn Major Howard, who has never really seen war but desperately wants to. Rafterman and Joker are first seen at their base, talking to prostitutes and attending press meetings. In these press meetings, their commanding officer reminds them that they should report positive news, even if it is a lie, to keep the soldiers'

morale up. While this may suggest glorification of war, the question remains if the display of only allowing positive news leads to glorification of war in *Full Metal Jacket*. The same evening, their base is attacked, just as many other locations throughout Vietnam, however not as heavily. After this attack, Joker and Rafterman are sent to a base near Hue, a city in South Vietnam where an important supply line for the U.S. and Allied Forces was passing through, to report the combat taking place there. Arriving at the site, they first visit a mass grave in which over twenty "gooks" were buried. There, Joker also meets a colonel who demands to know why Joker is walking around wearing "Born to Kill" on his helmet but is also wearing a peace symbol, telling him to "get with the program." This colonel's statements will also be discussed in chapter three.

Afterward, Joker and Rafterman meet Joker's old friend "Cowboy" and his squad. Cowboy, played by Arliss Howard, is one of the recruits that was in basic training with Joker. Joker and Rafterman join Cowboy's squad during the Battle of Hue. During patrol, four men of the squad are killed, including Cowboy. One by a booby trap, and three by a sniper. When they go inside the building where the sniper is located to get revenge, they find out that the sniper is a young girl. One soldier called "Animal Mother," a soldier in Cowboy's squad, who is now in charge of the squad, wants to let her bleed out and suffer, but Joker wants someone to shoot her to get her out of her misery. Animal Mother agrees to shoot her, on the condition that Joker does it himself. The movie's end scene shows the soldiers' marching through the ruins to their post for the night, singing the Mickey Mouse theme song. Joker concludes by saying that he is in a world of shit, but that he is glad to be alive and no longer afraid.

*We Were Soldiers*, 2002:

*We Were Soldiers* starts in the middle of a patrol mission of a French Army unit in Indochina, in July 1954. During their patrol, the unit is ambushed by Vietminh soldiers, who execute the French soldiers, as they think it will stop the French from sending more troops.

The film continues eleven years later, following Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore, played by Mel Gibson, who is a dedicated American soldier who is preparing his troops for the war in Vietnam. The night before they leave, Moore learns that his unit will be known as the first battalion and seventh cavalry regiment, the same unit that was slaughtered at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. Moore is also dismayed with President Johnson, who has not declared the war a national emergency, resulting in Moore being deprived of the best 25% of his battalion. When he and his unit arrive in Vietnam, he has to go after the Vietnamese soldiers that attacked an American base, and eliminate them, even though the number of enemy soldiers is unknown. He then leads a newly created air cavalry unit into the Ia Drang Valley to fight against the enemy, who turn out to be over 4,000 soldiers.

Back home, Moore's wife Julie, played by Madeleine Stowe, is also fulfilling an American duty and takes on the role of delivering telegrams informing families of the death of soldiers together with another soldier's wife. The wives in *We Were Soldiers* are about the only part of life at the home front that we get to see and will therefore also possibly contribute to potential glorification. In the Ia Drang Valley, Moore's unit captures a Vietnamese lookout who tells them that they are actually on their way to the headquarters of the North Vietnamese division. Close to the battalion, there is another American squad that ran into an ambush and is trying to hold off the North Vietnamese from their position. They are outnumbered by many but manage to eliminate most of the North Vietnamese force. The soldiers regroup at the foot of the mountain where the

Vietnamese headquarters is located. The Vietnamese set up heavy artillery near the entrance of the headquarters, and the American soldiers charging up the mountain seem to walk to their impending death. However, before the Vietnamese can fire, helicopter pilot Major Bruce “Snakeshit” Crandall, played by Greg Kinnear, comes flying in with his helicopter and kills the Vietnamese troops standing between the headquarters and the American troops. The Vietnam commander, whose behavior will be discussed later in this chapter, is made aware of this fact and he orders to evacuate the headquarters. The stranded *Platoon* is rescued, and Moore has thus completed his objective. Moore only leaves the battlefield after all his men have left, being the last American to leave the ground. The film ends with the audience receiving the information that Hal Moore fought 235 more days in the Vietnamese War, after which he returned home safely.

## 2.2 Glorification of War in *Full Metal Jacket*

The first scene that is revealing to look at shows Joker at a press meeting at the base and is shown in figure 1. The location of the scene is seemingly safe and far away from the actual combat. Joker’s commanding officer and leader of the meeting, Lieutenant Lockart, is discussing everyone’s stories and quickly stating his improvements on them. He is superior to the soldiers in the room, whom all listen to him carefully. Lockart especially evokes authority when he is standing up and literally above the soldiers. Starting off he corrects Joker on his style, saying, “Joker, the enemy never runs. He flees, patrols aren't dangerous, they're danger-filled”. Lockhart changes words describing combat with a negative connotation to words with a more positive connotation. In this remark, it is already clear that Lockart chooses to present a more hopeful and constructive picture of the war to the American soldiers, but in two of his remarks in the same scene, it becomes even more apparent. The first remark being:

Joker, I've told you we run two basic stories here. Grunts who give half their pay to buy goods toothbrushes and deodorants - Winning Of Hearts and Minds. Okay? And combat action which result in a kill - Winning the War. I don't ask much of you people, but I do expect you to adhere to my editorial policy.

Here, Lockart “rationalizes the purpose of combat journalism” (Huei, 140). He basically tells his writers that, first of all, he is obviously in charge, and secondly, that they can only present positive news, even if it is not the truth. The only option is "winning," whether that is "winning of hearts and minds" or seemingly "winning the war" which would, in turn, lead to support of the war, does not matter. As historian Pang Yang Huei states, “Vietnam was probably the first war that was run as an advertising agency might run it” (140). This is precisely what Lockhart is doing when changes the reports into more positive reports. He is trying to sell the Vietnam war to the readers, making Stars and Stripes an advertisement for the war. The only marine going against Lieutenant Lockart is Joker. In his story, he does not mention any kill, which Lockart does not accept. He tells Joker to make up a kill, preferably someone higher up like an officer. Joker responds by asking if he should write about the kill of a general, clearly ridiculing Lockart’s ways. During the Lieutenant’s remarks, Joker keeps looking at him, not writing anything down, not batting an eye, only slightly smiling. The scene ends with Lockart saying not shying away from the truth by stating:

Joker, maybe you'd like our guys to read the paper and feel bad. In case you didn't know it, this is not a particularly popular war, and it's our job to report the news that the why-are-we-here civilian newsmen ignore.

By saying this, Lieutenant Lockart criticizes two situations: the approval ratings of the Vietnam war, and the media coverage of the Vietnam war. The Vietnam war was not a popular war. At the

beginning of the war, just 24% of Americans did not agree with the war (Newport and Carroll). This changed about two years later when 41% of Americans were against the war (Newport and Carroll). In 1968, Gallup found for the first time that the majority of Americans opposed the war, with 53% being against the war (Newport and Carroll). This majority was there to stay, see figure 2, and gave birth to a "generation of anti-war feelings," as Pollard names them (130). This was all partly influenced by the fact that the Vietnam war was the first "television war", which showed the true costs of the war to people in the U.S. As historian Jacob Hillesheim describes, the American people consequently started to conclude that the war was not worth the price they were paying, which eventually led to a decreasing support for, and increasing hostility towards, the war. (par. 14).

Kubrick chose to show the part of the war in which the media tries to glorify events in the war, so that soldiers get a more positive image of the war they are fighting in and get the idea that America is already winning, thus boosting the morale of soldiers. It is noteworthy that the glorification of war is actually happening in the storyline of the movie. By having a character in the film dictating to the main character that he has to glorify the war, Kubrick is criticizing the glorification of the war in the media. On top of that, the war is being glorified for and sold to soldiers, not even to the home front. It seems absurd that a war in which soldiers are already fighting still has to be sold to them. This is an indication of the failure of the American army in the Vietnam War, something which could endanger the already low morale. By criticizing the glorification of war in this scene, it is clear that *Full Metal Jacket* is not glorifying the war in this particular scene.



The second scene, presented in figure 3, also has to do with the media coverage of the Vietnam war. After the scene in which the squad members stand over two of their dead friends in a circle and they all utter some words to say something about their death, it cuts to the interview crew. The fact that it cuts from their dead friends to interviews about the justness of the war is telling since it reminds the viewer of the costs of the war just before them. The interviews are called the Hue City Interviews, and the crew calls for roll 34. After that, the squad members appear before the camera one by one.

In every shot, the crew and the camera and audio gear are visible. This reminds the viewer of what the squad members are looking at as they answer the questions. During most of the interviews, soldiers are just strolling around in the background. These soldiers accentuate a whole other part of a war that is usually now shown in movies and less heroic: the waiting. Throughout the movie, it is apparent that the soldiers sometimes behave differently in front of the cameras. In one of the scenes, for example, a superior officer immediately changed his attitude and kept smiling when the camera appeared. The fact that the soldiers are different in front of the camera is visible through their behavior. Cowboy, for example, seems very nervous and keeps repeating his words. Animal Mother obviously chooses his words, where he usually never seems to bother to do so. When he is talking about the Vietnamese he usually always says "gooks"; however, in the interview, he pauses, smiles slightly, and then says "Vietnamese."

The feeling that they do not feel comfortable or know what they are doing in front of the cameras also suggests that some of them do not really know what they are doing in the war. This is in agreement with the idea that Barker, Media Studies scholar and author of *A Toxic Genre*, has about Vietnam War films made in the second half of the 1980s. He states "frequently, soldiers are depicted as uneducated grunts, not always clear on why they are fighting" (Barker qtd. in Chapin,

81). This is especially visible during one question the squad is asked, about what they think about America's involvement in the Vietnam War. As mentioned in Chapter 1, glorification of war is concerned with a one-sided view of the war and the minimizations of death and destruction, but it can also portray the war as just and the right choice. The question the interviewer asks puts forward the latter subject: if the war is just or unjust.

In Cowboy's interview, it is visible that he does not know what to say, indicated by him scratching behind his ear and repeating his words. In his interview he says:

When we're in Hue, when we're in Hue City, it's like a war. You know like what I thought about a war, what I thought a war was, was supposed to be. There's the enemy, kill 'em.

This remark makes it seem like he does not have a clear idea of what he is doing in Vietnam because he is reciting what he has been taught. Before he arrived in Vietnam, he had this idea of war, most likely derived from stories of previous wars such as World War II. He has been told who the enemy is and that he has to kill them, but he does not seem to have a clear understanding of why. The soldiers do not have a very clear idea of who their enemy is; they only know what they were told. As Rasmussen and Downey, both professors in the Department of Speech Communication, point out “the enemy in these four films (*The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, and *Full Metal Jacket*) is ill-defined; it is not the traditional adversary of evil incarnate (Rasmussen and Downey, 179).

The feeling of not knowing why they are there continues in the following interviews. "Crazy Earl," also a member of Cowboy's squad, states that he does not know if America belongs in Vietnam, but only that he knows that he belongs there. Some of the other squad members, however, have a more negative rather than an unknowing view of the war. Squad member “Doc

Jay” quotes President Lyndon B. Johnson: “I will not send American boys eight or ten thousand miles around the world to do a job that Asian boys oughtta be doin' for themselves.” He thus has a definite opinion about whether or not America belongs in the war, but he does not seem mad about it because he still has a very relaxed posture and even tries to imitate President Johnson.

Apart from opinions solely about the involvement of America in the war, they are also portrayed as confused about whose side they are on, which ties back to the lack of a clear enemy mentioned before. As “Eightball,” the only African American member of the squad, says:

I mean ... they sort of took away our freedom and gave it to the, to the gookers, you know. But they don't want it. They'd rather be alive than free, I guess. Poor dumb bastards.

Here he suggests that the Vietnamese are not always grateful for the help they are receiving, which confused some of the soldiers. This is confirmed by statements by Cowboy, “I'm not real keen on some of these fellows that are supposed to be on our side,” another squad member “Donlon”, “I mean, we're getting killed for these people and they don't even appreciate it” and Animal Mother, “Well, if you ask me, uh, we're shooting the wrong gooks”. This, again, comes back to the statement of Rasmussen and Downey about the enemy not being “the traditional adversary of evil incarnate,” since Animal Mother is not even sure if their enemy should be their enemy (179).

The fact that Kubrick chose to show that media reporters in the Vietnam war were asking questions like this could have resulted in a more positive view of the war. The reporters were most likely hoping to get positive answers out of the soldiers, a clear view on why the soldiers thought they were there and why this was good. Positive answers would have made it easier to justify the war back home in newspaper articles. Since the Vietnam war turned out harder and there were more deaths than anticipated, the war became a contested point in American society. The media

reports had to make sure that the public opinion would become more favorable. If the soldiers had given positive answers, this could have contributed to the glorification of the war. Since the questions are aimed at a positive portrayal of the war, and some of the answers come across as fairly positive, the scene might come across as showing glorification of the war. However, most of the answers Kubrick and his fellow screenplay writers wrote, have a negative connotation. Negative answers or answers with negative connotations give the viewer the idea that soldiers were not even in favor of fighting the war. On top of that, interviewers were asking questions that aimed for answers that would sell the war back home. Combining these two points leads to the conclusion that the war had to be sold and that this scene is not glorifying war.

### 2.3 Glorification of War in *We Were Soldiers*:

In figure 4, a meeting of all the soldier's wives is depicted. They have all gathered to discuss questions about their new home while their men are at war, like where to do laundry. Obviously, the movie does not refrain from the old-fashioned gender roles. In *We Were Soldiers*, women are portrayed as nothing more than housewives. As author of *Gendered Love, Marriage, and Emerging Lifestyles*, Lindsey states: "the traditional housewife role is associated with the fulfillment of the American Dream for women [...] it is seen as the height of a woman's aspirations, a deliberate choice that gives her the maximum amount of pride and satisfaction" (229). The housewife was part of the so-called nuclear family that, as Rich, a writer for *The Atlantic*, states, "usually existed of one bread-winning father, one stay-at-home mother, and two children (one of each sex, of course)" (par. 3). The American Dream was focused on this nuclear family (Rich, par. 12). The director uses the wives to give the illusion of the American Dream in *We Were Soldiers*. This supports the image created in the film that the American Dream was able to live on back home

during the Vietnam War. The American dream became a very commercial phenomenon in the 1950s, and the nuclear family with a perfect straight married couple and one or more children became the center of many commercials. In these commercials, traditional gender roles were often used and emphasized. Even though the fight against these gender roles in post-World War II America was already ongoing, the wives in figure 3, still look like they came straight out of a 1950s commercial (see the example in figure 5). This 1950s sentiment comes back in the nostalgia that Gates talks about:

The film offers a nostalgic rendering of American heroism before the nation's loss of innocence that the war incited. Rather than shots of home front protest or boot camp hell, the film proffers perfectly turned out wives that keep the home fires burning. (Gates, 306)

Leaving out this political part of the war and replacing it by perfectly lovely wives that have all confidence in their husbands and the war makes it look like the war did not hugely affect the lives back home. Gates recognized this resemblance to commercials as well and stated that “films like *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers* seem like advertisements for military recruitment with their glorification of heroism and war (308). These commercial-like qualities of the scene present the situation as if the American Dream was still able to survive during the Vietnam war, the impact on United States’ society was not too substantial, and that the American citizens thus did not have to doubt America’s involvement in it.

In the scene depicted in figure 4, the women talk about what their lives are going to look like when their husbands go off to war. During the subject of laundry, one of the wives says something about only being allowed to do white laundry at the laundromat, because it says "whites only" on the window. Michelle Alexander, a legal scholar, states that segregation laws like these

were invented to create a division between poor whites and African Americans (34). The other wives know that “whites only” refers to the segregation, and at that moment the wives suddenly become more aware of the fact that there is one African American wife amongst them. That one black woman is not treated as an equal during the mid-1960s. The wife who made the remark about the “whites only” sign is shocked and talks about how that is terrible since the African American woman’s husband, who is also African American, is fighting in the war. The African American woman reacts by saying that she can manage it because she knows what her husband is fighting for. This remark illustrates that the woman has no doubt about her husband fighting in the war and does not question the war.

This sentiment continues to be seen in the behavior of the wives throughout the movie. As the assistant editor for the *Wall Street Journal* Minitier wrote in his piece called “*We Were Soldiers, Not Baby Killers*”:

Even the wives don't question the justness of the war. When they start receiving telegrams breaking the news their husbands are dead, they don't ask, ‘Why are we fighting?’ Instead, they say, we all knew this could happen and we accepted it.  
(Minitier, par. 8)

The fact that these wives react in such a calm manner shows a lot about how the director wants to portray the opinion of the population towards the war. If even the wives seem to think that the war is so just that they can accept that their husbands are fighting and potentially dying in it, it is hard to question that anyone could have doubts about the war.

In the next scene, the first *Platoon* moves out in the battle of Ia Drang. When they spot a scout, they follow him further up the hill, unknowingly towards the Vietnamese base camp of about 4000

men. There, the Vietnamese have been waiting for them, and quite a lot of the American soldiers are wounded. The others try to get the ammunition off of the wounded and to get out. At first sight, this scene looks like quite a critical representation of the war. In the first battle of the war, when the first *Platoon* moves out, a lot of them are already wounded, and the costs of the war are thus already adding up. In the following shots, however, we get confronted with one of the wounded. In figure 6, we see him from a bit further away, surrounded by other fallen soldiers and two soldiers who are desperately trying to help him. This immensely changes the atmosphere of the scene. Where the viewer is confronted with soldiers getting ammunition off of wounded and leaving them behind at first, we now see soldiers trying to help each other. This changes even more because of the shot depicted in figure 7. Here, a close-up of the same fallen soldier is depicted. Instead of screaming in agony, he is now silently staring into the sky, knowing that he will die. As he lies there dying, not exactly knowing whom he is talking to, he utters his final words "I'm glad I could die for my country."

Gates points out this scene as well and presents it as an example of why *We Were Soldiers* is not critical of the war (Gates, 306). She states: "instead it promotes a uniform glorification of the war with young men who died bravely on the battlefield" (306). So, why would a war not be glorified because soldiers "bravely" died for it? First of all, it minimizes the costs of the war. As Pollard states "the concept of a righteous war became more difficult for the American public to internalize during and after both the Cold War and Vietnam, which stirred unprecedented dissent over what had been achieved that could possibly justify such huge losses of human life" (126). American citizens became critical of the war because they became critical of what cause could weigh up against the costs of the war. When the costs, the lives lost, are then presented noble in films, "American's Vietnam experience [becomes] a noble sacrifice" Gates states (306).

Secondly, the cause is replaced by the reasons for which the soldiers are fighting and is thus presented as less questionable than it was in reality. As Gates states “no longer is Vietnam the war that should not have been fought, or U.S. military intervention questionable, because the grunts that put their lives on the line for their country are fighting for the ‘right’ reasons” (302). The soldiers are fighting for their country and want to fight for their country, and are, as Gates states “individuated as moral men who think for themselves and, no matter what their orders, act humanely and heroically” (298). This last statement can be seen in figure 6, where two soldiers are trying to help their fellow soldier even though their orders were to stay low. The shot includes more of their fallen fellow soldiers, displaying the losses and what could happen to them while they are humanely trying to help the fallen. In *We Were Soldiers*, the soldiers are presented as if they made their own well-motivated decision to go to this war, that they believe that they are doing the right thing and that they are willing to die for it. Suddenly, the war does not seem questionable anymore. This creates a discrepancy between reality and portrayal of war in the film which is a better representation of the situation and thus contains glorification.

#### 2.4 Comparison

In 2002, Neal Gabler, film and American studies scholar, wrote “in the new metaphor war movies seem to be presenting, Americans are no longer distrustful of authority and no longer doubt the cause. Rather, we trust each other and see the cause as us” (par. 12). When discussing the glorification of war, this statement by Gabler could be used to describe the difference between *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers*. The new metaphor war movies would be movies such as *We Were Soldiers* and *Black Hawk Down*, in which the political parts of the war and public opposition



to the war are mostly left out, and the cause of the war is not questioned. Simultaneously, the cause of the war and the war itself is considered just.

This is visible in the first, as well as the second scene of *We Were Soldiers* discussed in this chapter. In the first scene, the wives of the soldiers do not even question the war and its justness. There is an overall absence of distrust of authority. They go about their daily lives as if the war is not making an impact on their lives. Not once do they question the cause of the war or the reason that their husbands were deployed. Even the African American wife does not question the authority of the government or the cause of the war. Her husband is fighting for the United States, a country that is still segregated and where she is not even allowed to do her laundry at the same laundromat as the other wives. This is the only time in the movie segregation that is referred to. Political subjects like segregation are only touched upon very briefly because “the new cycle of Hollywood war films has no such critique to offer its audiences – no debate about U.S. military intervention, no contemplation of race, gender, and class, or the demonizing of the racial ‘other.’” (Gates, 306). The only reaction that is shown on the subject of segregation is the appalled reaction of the other women. Not only are people who agreed with segregation left out, but the appalled reaction of the wives also illustrates how war can bring people from all strands of society together. War is thus presented as a connecting factor in society, no matter what your race or economic standing would be.

In the second scene of *We Were Soldiers*, the second part of Gabler's statement "we trust each other and see the cause as us" is more relevant (par. 12). When one of the wounded soldiers is close to his death, two fellow soldiers try to help him, thereby ignoring their commands. The soldiers are presented as always doing the right thing. Their motivations for going to war are presented similarly; they believe that what they are doing is right and are willing to give their lives

for it. The cause of the war in *We Were Soldiers* is not questioned but replaced by the soldiers' motivations, thereby seeing "the cause as us." The dying soldier himself is not questioning the war either, not even as he is dying. He states that he is proud to die for his country, exemplifying that for the soldier there is no questioning the war. In both of the scenes of *We Were Soldiers*, not one character is doubting the war or questioning it. A soldier is proud to die in the war for his country and women do not question sending their husbands off to war. Opposition and confusion about the war are not shown in *We Were Soldiers*, even though it was certainly present during the Vietnam war.

In contrast to the new metaphor movies, "the Vietnam era films of Stone and Kubrick, [...]" articulated a generation of anti-war feelings that ultimately found their way into the cinematic world (Pollard, 130). These scenes are most notably in contrast with the second scene from *Full Metal Jacket*. The soldiers are being interviewed in the city of Hue, and while answering questions about the war, it becomes clear that they do not exactly know what they are fighting for or why their enemy is their enemy. As Rasmussen and Downey state, the "interviews of Marines attest to their confusion about the purpose for their being in Vietnam," in which most of them are uncertain or even just negative about America's involvement in Vietnam (179). The questioning of the reasons for their presence, and the over questioning of the war in *Full Metal Jacket* is thus in stark contrast with the first scene of *We Were Soldiers*, where the wives of soldiers are not doubting the war and trusting the American government.

One of the soldiers, Donlon, in *Full Metal Jacket* says that they are getting killed for the Vietnamese people. This is in stark contrast to the soldier from *We Were Soldiers*, who has the idea that he is dying for his country. The glorification of war in *We Were Soldiers* comes in the form of a soldier proud to die for his country, by which the movie shows that the Vietnam war was

an honorable war to die in. Dying in a war is seen as a noble thing and something to be proud of. In *We Were Soldiers*, death is then portrayed as something for the greater good, not as an act that makes war futile. Death in *Full Metal Jacket*, however, is seen as something futile. As Donlon said, "we're getting killed for these people and they don't even appreciate it". The question then remains what the soldiers in *Full Metal Jacket* die for since their death seems futile. Consequently, the war is envisioned as purposeless (Huei, 138). This is opposite to the presentation of the cause of the war in *We Were Soldiers*, in which the cause is either not questioned at all or replaced by the motivations of the soldiers. In *We Were Soldiers* war is therefore represented as sacred (Huei, 138). In *Full Metal Jacket*, the motivations of the soldiers are unclear, or repetitions of what they have been taught and they fight without any conviction of their own.

## Chapter 3. Glorification of Nationhood

### 3.1 Glorification of Nationhood in *We Were Soldiers*

Before the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry in *We Were Soldiers* go off to war, their Lieutenant Colonel, Hal Moore, speaks to them at a ceremony about what they are about to experience. This ceremony is portrayed in figure 8. Hal Moore starts his speech by saying:

Look around you. In the 7th Cavalry we got a captain from the Ukraine. Another from Puerto Rico. We've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics, Cherokee Indians, Jews and gentiles. All Americans.

With this comment Hal Moore tells his soldiers that being American is most the important identity of these soldiers right now. By saying this, however, he also sends the message that being American is more relevant than and superior to all those other identities because it can make those identities seemingly unimportant in this situation. The fact that all these soldiers are expected to first and foremost identify with being American displays a patriotic feeling. On top of that, Moore seems to ignore the ongoing discrimination in American society. By stating that all the people are Americans, no matter their ancestry or heritage, he insinuates that they are all equal, but this was not the case within American society itself. There was a racial hierarchy, and it did matter where you came from and who your ancestors were. During a part the war, segregation was still alive. As Eleanor Roosevelt wrote:

The overall struggle in the world today is one between Communism and Democracy. If Communism understands the problems brought about by segregation, accepts wiping out of segregation, and is more helpful to the new nations than those among us who profess Democracy, then I think Communism will have won a distinct advantage over the Democratic nations of the world. It

behooves us, therefore, to realize that the significance of the segregation of races is the effect that our approach, as members of Democratic nations, can have in the final decisions arrived at by these new nations. (Roosevelt, 6)

She wrote this text, named “Segregation” in 1959, when segregation would still exist for another five years, until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would abolish it. Hal Moore glorifies the United States as a country where everyone is ‘created equal,’ which disregards the racial tensions present at that time.

This statement from Moore is supported and strengthened by the shot itself. First of all, the shot is very symmetrical, telling the viewer that the middle, in this case, Hal Moore and two other officers, is most important. The symmetry also creates a sense of balance and, ironically enough, peacefulness. This peacefulness is extended by the contrast between the soldiers with their static posture and army green clothing, and the audience of family and friends that are seated more dynamically and are mostly wearing pastel colors. In this scene, the people staying home in the States appear to be very calm, and the American daily life is presented as going on as usual, for the most part. As film critic Peter Bradshaw states, “the soul of any war movie is tested by how it handles civilian scenes back home,” and that they are presented as orderly and peaceful shows that the United States of America is not hugely affected by a big war overseas (par. 7). It shows that the States are powerful enough to be able to keep its society going.

One of the last scenes of *We Were Soldiers*, as seen in figure 9, prominently features the American flag. The previous scene portrays the victory of the American soldiers. After this, the screen turns white and opens with that small American flag waving in the foreground. The Vietnam commander notices the flag and picks it up. In the background, the viewer can already see Vietnamese soldiers

carrying away their many fallen fellow soldiers. From the emotions of Hal Moore, who has to accept the men he lost, we quickly switch to a scene that shows the American victory. As a historian of American foreign relations, Young states about *We Were Soldiers* “Americans die in great numbers but are still victorious over the far more numerous Vietnamese,” pointing out the approach of this movie that will show some American tragedy but makes sure that the Vietnamese tragedy is always way worse (25). This minimizes the struggle of the Americans since they have fewer casualties, which gives the idea that the battle was not as difficult for them as it was for the Vietnamese. At the same time, it emphasizes the disasters the Vietnamese suffered. In the ABC documentary: “Vietnam: They Were Young and Brave”, it is explained how the supposed victory was portrayed in the media in America. The narrator explains that the battle was indeed depicted as a victory in which “best of the enemy’s forces could be stopped dead in their own territory” (intext citation). However, the victory was not as perfect as the media made it seem. On top of that, the film shows the many losses of the Vietnamese. While this might seem an attempt to humanize the enemy, it is not the case. You barely see the faces of the fallen soldiers, just their lifeless bodies, making them nothing more than a prop in the American victory.

Even after a tremendous loss, the Vietnamese commander puts the American flag into the wood, which is a gesture full of respect. A lot of Vietnamese soldiers were killed in the battle of Ia Drang and handling the American flag with such care after such a loss, seems to conflict with his interest as a Vietnamese commander. Showing how much respect for the United States and its army the enemy of the United States has after a loss, insinuates that America is a great nation because even enemies respect them. The Vietnamese commander could almost be interpreted as an American patriot even though he is the enemy because putting the flag back is such a patriotic move for Americans. The waving flag standing there after the battle carries history and can be

traced back to the origin of the national anthem of the United States, the Star-Spangled Banner. The Star-Spangled Banner is based on a poem written after the bombardment of Fort McHenry in the war of 1812. The American flag, then with 15 stars and 15 stripes, was the inspiration of this poem. After the bombardment and after the battle, “through the night [...] our flag was still there”. The flag thus symbolizes the strength of the nation.

In figure 9, the brightness had to be slightly turned up to make the situation clear. This made it extra noticeable that most of the scenes that portray the side of the Vietnamese are very dark. For the scene in chapter 2, the Vietnamese Camp is rather dark for a reason: they are inside. However, this shot takes place outside, during the day. Forceville, scholar in Media Studies, and Renckens, scholar in Films Studies, explain that movie audiences tend to take light for granted since, without light, the viewer cannot see anything at all (162). Here, the choice between dark and light tones becomes pertinent when looking at the symbolism. For long, the color white, and consequently lightness, has been seen as good. Angels are white, and if God is portrayed in films, He or She wears white clothes. The color black, and consequently darkness, is seen as wrong or evil. Death is clothed in black, and so is Hades’ dog Cerberus. So, “we tend to associate light, and by extension the colour white, with good things, and dark & black with bad things” (Forceville and Renckens, 163). According to Forceville and Renckens, this association makes sense because humans cannot see well in the dark which makes us vulnerable, thus giving us an advantage in the light (163). It is therefore biologically sensical that we connect light and darkness to good and bad. Every time the Vietnamese are portrayed the scene is darker than the scenes with the Americans. The Vietnamese are the enemy or the evil ones in this movie, which automatically makes the Americans the good guys or the saviors. However dark this scene is, there is one point of light in this scene, and that is the sky just behind and above the American flag. Again, America is presented

as the good side, the light in the darkness. The United States as a nation is portrayed as the savior and thus glorified in this scene. The dark tones also create a more dramatic atmosphere. If the Vietnamese were carrying away the bodies in a very well-lit shot, it would still look dramatic, but it could seem like it was not as impactful on their army as it looks now. The fact that the situation is very grim emphasizes the supposed victory of the Americans.

The second element that is noticeable in the shot is the condition the flag is in, which is quite damaged. This shows that the battle was not easy for the Americans. The American army lost a lot of men, and their stories had to be told. As Hal Moore puts this in the previous scene “tell the American people what these men did here [...] tell 'em how my troopers died”. The flag does not only represent this hardship, but it also stands for what they died for. As Young states about *We Were Soldiers*: “a soldier’s last words express gratitude that he has sacrificed his life for his country [and] Vietnam has become a war of which Americans can feel proud,” expressing that the soldiers were willing to die for their country (Young, 25). In the ABC documentary, they talk about how survivors returned to Ia Drang and what a “terrible waste of lives, however bravely sacrificed” it was, thus contradicting this idea of the soldiers dying for a great cause: The United States (intext). The fact that *We Were Soldiers* presents the soldiers as willing to die for their country and their deaths as for a good cause, even though this was not always true, it shows a discrepancy between reality how it is represented in the movie.

### 3.2 Glorification of Nationhood in *Full Metal Jacket*

*Full Metal Jacket* is easily divided into two parts: basic training and in Vietnam. The next scene, figure 10, marks the formal end of basic training and portrays the recruits' graduation. In this scene, Hartman gives a speech to the recruits sitting in front of him, which could be compared to the



speech Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore gives to the 7th cavalry in *We Were Soldiers*. Where Moore focused on America by, for example, telling his soldiers that they are "all Americans," Hartman does not mention the United States once. When paying attention to this and going beyond this one particular scene, it becomes clear that Hartman leaves out the United States in most of basic training. He is focused on creating killing machines but leaves out whom they should kill: the enemy of the United States. Arguably this is what happened to private Pyle, who was driven to complete madness and shoots Hartman and himself in the scene following the speech scene. He became the killing machine that Hartman wanted him to be, but Hartman failed to tell him who his enemy was or what he was killing for, which led to him killing whomever his enemy was at that point.

The scene still seems to contain some pride of the United States. The scene uses two shots that it switches between: a speech by Gunnery Sergeant Hartman and a parade with hundreds of marine. Both shots are included below. In figure 11, you can see hundreds of Marines marching in their uniform, with spectators, flags, and all. This could make the viewer think that this scene is portraying and celebrating their devotion to their country. This, in comparison with the many spectators, seems to ignore the critical attitude towards the war that existed and would thus glorify their devotion to their nation.

However, the fact that the scene switches between the parade and Hartman talking to his recruits diminishes that glorification. In figure 10, this part of the scene is shown. The descriptions in the script can help when looking at shots, which also goes for the shot in figure 10. This shot is described as: "Hartman talks to the recruits formed up in a school-circle." This might not seem very elaborate and significant, but the term "school-circle" might contain more information than expected. The recruits are about to be marines, "killing machines" as Hartman would call them,

and out participating in a war, but here they are still treated as children. This contrast between powerful and proud marines parading for their country, and childlike marines in a circle, immediately decreases the patriotic impression that figure 11 could give to the viewer.

In the next scene in figure 12, Joker and Rafterman are sent out into the field to do their job: report. It is Rafterman's first time taking photos outside of the base. In this particular scene, they are interviewing Luitenant Cleves about a grave that was discovered. While interviewing, a colonel sees Joker's peace button and interrogates him about it. The colonel then also states: "We are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out." The Colonel's assumption that in every Vietnamese is an American trying to get out is a fairly striking statement, based on the myth of the United States as a city upon a hill. In the early colonial days, John Winthrop called to life the image of America as a city upon a hill by saying that "we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us" (qtd. in Willoquet-Maricondi, 8). According to Willoquet-Maricondi, "the myth [of America as a city upon a hill] continued to make itself manifest in the settling of the West and was extended beyond America's pacific border to Asia" (8). The fight in Vietnam is just another frontier in Asia, where the danger of communism has to be fought and the Americans are "once again 'western pilgrims' on a mission of protection and progress" (Hellman, qtd. in Willoquet-Maricondi, 8). Joker himself is also promoting the idea of Asia as the new frontier by wearing the Peace Corps button and writing 'Born To Kill' on his helmet. The Peace Corps was created by Kennedy, who was promoting the New Frontier mentality, and both the slogan on his helmet and the button represent "the common motives behind both the Peace Corps and the Special Forces" (Willoquet-Maricondi, 9). The colonel has this idea of the United States as a city upon a hill and sees himself and the United

States army as western pilgrims, protecting and helping the Vietnamese. He is thus also making Vietnam the new frontier, and for the colonel, this automatically justifies his presence in Vietnam as protecting and spreading freedom. If those reasons were not enough, he is also there to free other 'Americans,' the Vietnamese who are American inside. The idea that Vietnamese want to be Americans is part of the myth of the city upon a hill. This means that the city upon a hill, the United States, is so great that not only do they have to spread their freedom everywhere, all people, consciously or unconsciously, should want to be an American.

By stating "we are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out," the colonel implies that people are only worth fighting for if they aspire to either be American or live the American way. The idea of American exceptionalism that the United States is special, different, and superior to other countries, also transfers to American citizens and, in the case of the Vietnamese, want-to-be Americans. According to the colonel, the Vietnamese have to be rescued because they are Americans and Americans are exceptional and thus worth saving.

The idea that the Vietnamese need help makes the way the scene is filmed more ironic. The colonel is talking to Joker about helping the Vietnamese in front of a mass grave, where the people they are supposed to help are laying dead. It could be said that while the dialogue glorifies nationhood, the overall scene does not. The mass grave is a sign of the failures of the American army in the Vietnam war, and its inability to protect and save people. So, instead of glorifying the American nation, the scene shows how the United States failed or is failing in the Vietnam war.

### 3.3 Comparison

It is clear that there is a difference in the glorification of nationhood between *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers*. *Full Metal Jacket* has less glorification of nationhood than *We Were Soldiers*, visible when comparing the scenes. In the first scene examined from *We Were Soldiers*, the United States is presented as a unified and strong nation where everyone is equal and in the scene with the flag, even the enemy has respect for the United States. *We Were Soldiers* represents the United States as a unified front, inherently better than the Vietnamese they are fighting against, something the Vietnamese commander eventually also acknowledges when he puts the flag back into the wood.

The first examined scene of *Full Metal Jacket* seems to glorify the military power the United States has. However, the switch to the recruits in a child-like school circle dramatically diminishes that impressive power the United States army gives off at first. The second scene is heavily based on the idea of a city upon a hill, which glorifies the United States, but at the same time shows the failure of the United States in Vietnam and the failure of their quest to be a city upon a hill.

*Full Metal Jacket's* attitude towards nationhood can be attributed to the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome." This syndrome, as described by Wetta and Novelli, created a cynical view of patriotism and harbored the view of many that the United States "lay sick, infected with a malaise, robbed of its vigorous sense of triumphalism" (865). This Vietnam Syndrome affected the nation's politics, society, as well as the Hollywood film production. *Full Metal Jacket* is only one of many films affected by this Vietnam Syndrome, in its representation of nationhood and patriotism. Other examples of movies affected by this syndrome are *Platoon* (1986), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) (Rasmussen and Downey, 176). As Young states, war films in the 1980s

like *Full Metal Jacket* “do not end in total victory; the cause for which the troops fight is obscure and probably unworthy; and honor and courage can be salvaged but only by abandoning patriotic rhetoric” (24). The lack of a sense of triumphalism is evident in the last scene examined in *Full Metal Jacket*. The colonel talks about helping the Vietnamese, which is his duty as a western pilgrim, but behinds him lay numerous dead bodies of people he wanted to help and protect. There is no sense of triumphalism in this scene.

In *We Were Soldiers*, as opposed to *Full Metal Jacket*, nationhood is more glorified. This is visible also in the moments when patriotism is glorified. While traditional notions of patriotism are visible in the movie, new forms of glorifying nationhood, or neo-patriotism, are also present. According to Wetta and Novelli, new patriotism

can be seen as a repudiation of sentimental and ideological concepts that put nation and cause ahead of individual survival (...) and celebrates loyalty to one's comrades in battle, the ability to survive the horrific face of modern hyper-lethal weaponry and warfare, and the shared experience of battle. (861)

*We Were Soldiers* reflects this new patriotism for instance when in the movie Colonel Hal Moore promises his troops that he will be the first man out of the helicopter and the last men to step off the ground (Wetta and Novelli, 878). This neo-patriotism goes hand in hand with the traditional forms of patriotism. In the first scene examined of *We Were Soldiers*, Hal Moore talks about the unification of Americans, and it goes back to the idea of the American melting pot. This is what makes the United States special, even though the race relations within society are tenser than Moore likes to make belief.

The neo-patriotism is influenced by the Vietnam Syndrome, in a way that the focus of neo patriotism is not on the nation but the individual survival. While patriotism was mostly absent in

war movies, this kind of patriotism prevailed more and more. However, after 9/11, there was a resurgence of patriotism which is also visible in *We Were Soldiers*. The combination of the two kind of patriotism, neo- and traditional patriotism, in *We Were Soldiers* is a combination of both the return of patriotism after 9/11 and a left-over of the Vietnam Syndrome in war movies.

## Conclusion

The Vietnam war has been the subject of many war movies, both directly after the Vietnam war and later in the 20th and 21st century. Since there is a time difference of approximately a decade between movies after the Vietnam war and in the 21st century, in which the 9/11 attacks took place, I was interested in the possible differences between the movies. Focusing on *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers*, the following research question was formulated: In which ways do glorification of war and nationhood differ in American military movies about the Vietnam war released before and after 9/11?

In chapter one, I explained the different forms of glorification. It became clear that glorification itself entails a presence of a discrepancy between reality and how a subject is portrayed in film. In this thesis, I used the act of portraying a subject very positively while purposefully leaving out the negative as the definition of glorification. In the description of the glorification of war, just war theory proved to be an instructive way to examine this form of glorification, because presenting a war as unquestionably just turned out to be one of the ways in which war could be glorified in films. Other means of portrayal that could be used in the glorification of war were the omittance of politics, heightening the morality, and strengthening the righteousness of the cause. In the description of the glorification of nationhood, besides explaining nationhood as it was used in the thesis, the relation between nationhood, the glorification of nationhood, and patriotism were clarified. This led to the outcome that the feeling of patriotism in the U.S. could serve as an indication of the sentiments in the U.S. about nationhood.

In chapter two, the glorification of war, the scenes analyzed from *We Were Soldiers* contained glorification of war. The two scenes analyzed were very different and showed the glorification of war in two different settings, the home front and the front in Vietnam. Neither the

wives nor the dying soldier challenge the notion that is provided by the American government that the war is just. In both of the scenes, it is believed that they are meant to be there. By showing that people at the home front and people fighting in Vietnam supported the war, a controversial war is turned into a war Americans can believe in. *Full Metal Jacket* shows the exact opposite. Joker is questioning authority, and his reason is presented as valid, since the authority figure at the press meeting is turning facts about the war into fiction, making them more positive. The interviewed soldiers are supposed to be the American war machine, convinced of their righteousness to be in Vietnam and to fight communism, but all the soldiers are confused about American involvement in Vietnam. Soldiers are the people who have to believe in the war the most; they are after all the ones fighting it. By making the soldier uncertain about their presence in Vietnam, *Full Metal Jacket* is criticizing the Vietnam war. Where the wives and even a soldier in his last moments do not question the war in *We Were Soldiers*, most of the soldiers in *Full Metal Jacket* cannot even justify why they are there.

In chapter three, the glorification of nationhood is abundantly present in *We Were Soldiers*, whereas, in *Full Metal Jacket*, it is mostly absent. In the first scene of *We Were Soldiers* as well as *Full Metal Jacket*, a speech is portrayed. In *Full Metal Jacket* this is a graduation speech and parade, while in *We Were Soldiers* it is a speech at a ceremony just before they go off to war. While both seemed to contain glorification at first, with flags as a symbol for nationhood in the parade and at the ceremony, *Full Metal Jacket* managed to change this portrayal to a more critical one. It achieved this portrayal by switching to the soldiers diminished to a group of children sitting in a circle while their Lieutenant speaks to them every time the audience could get the idea of an impressive parade to show glorification of nationhood. The speech in *We Were Soldiers* did prove



to actually contain this glorification since it focused on the superiority of the American identity above all other identities.

In the second scene of *We Were Soldiers*, the American army is presented as a unified front, where no man will be left behind. The film ends in victory for the Americans, something the Vietnam commander also acknowledges as he puts back the American flag into the wood. The greatness of America is thus also acknowledged by the enemy. The clear-cut victory for the American military in the end, again confirms the message the movie was trying to convey: the American nation is great. In *Full Metal Jacket*, the intervention in Vietnam is being regarded as a failure of the city upon a hill. Rather than depicting victory and triumphalism, death and failure are present, a consequence of the Vietnam syndrome. Even when a Lieutenant does not question this concept of the city upon a hill at all, the visual aspects of shot undermine him. This indicates that Kubrick did not intend to convey this message in this film. Therefore, the Vietnam syndrome in *Full Metal Jacket* makes it impossible for any form of glorification of nationhood to be visible in the film.

Comparing *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers* and the glorification of war and nationhood, it is clear that *We Were Soldiers* contains the glorification of war and nationhood, whereas *Full Metal Jacket* is critical of war and nationhood. Sentiments about war after 9/11 differed a lot from the sentiment in the decades after the Vietnam War. The differences in the glorification of war and nationhood in *We Were Soldiers* and *Full Metal Jacket* are a consequence of the different sentiments about war at the time the films were made. The anti-war sentiment present after the Vietnam war can be found in *Full Metal Jacket*, just as the prowar and interventionist sentiment at the beginning of the 21st century can be seen in *We Were Soldiers*. Thus, the anti-war sentiment influenced the glorification of war and nationhood in *Full Metal*

*Jacket* and made the film critical of the Vietnam war. This is visible in the confusion of the soldiers, the failure of the Americans to help the Vietnamese, and how the press tries to shape opinion about the war. *We Were Soldiers* came out after 9/11, when public sentiment was more pro-war, which positively influenced the glorification of war and nationhood in the movie. This is visible in the respect of the Vietnamese for the American flag, the unification of the wives at the home front, the dying soldier who is proud to die for his country, and of course the speech by Colonel Moore, which puts the United States on top once more. Thus, it is clear that *We Were Soldiers* contains more glorification because, contrary to *Full Metal Jacket*, it omits political subjects instead of focusing on them, and it chooses to focus on the good intentions of the soldiers rather than why their government sent them there.

## Further Research

This thesis studied the differences between two case studies, *Full Metal Jacket* and *We Were Soldiers*, analyzing a total of four scenes per film. The difference in glorification of war and nationhood between those two movies could be explained. However, for other movies from the same era, assumptions can be made, but those cannot be supported by an analysis yet. These two case studies can thus not prove the influence of 9/11 on itself. There are plenty of other American movies about the Vietnam War to research if this trend could be applied to other case studies. On top of that, one could address the influence of other factors on the American war sentiment instead of just the 9/11 attacks.

Also, because I combined a visual and textual aspect in my analyses, I had to decide what to incorporate and what not, having to cut back on information I used from both the methodologies. The scope of BA thesis is not big enough to do a full analysis of two movies using two methodologies. By using only one methodology, analyses could have been more in-depth, but I could not have analyzed scenes from as many perspectives as now.

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### Filmography

- The Green Berets*. Dir. John Wayne. Warner Bros, 1968.
- Black Hawk Down*, Dir. Ridely Scott. Revolution Studio, 2001.
- Platoon*. Dir. Oliver StoneStone. Hemdale, 1986.

*We Were Soldiers.* Dir. Randall Wallace. Icon Entertainment International, 2002.

*Full Metal Jacket.* Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Warner Bros, 1987.

*The Deer Hunter.* Dir. Michael Cimino. Universal Studios, 1978.

*Apocalypse Now.* Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Zoetrope Studios, 1979.



## Appendix



Figure 1: Full Metal Jacket, press meeting, 49:05

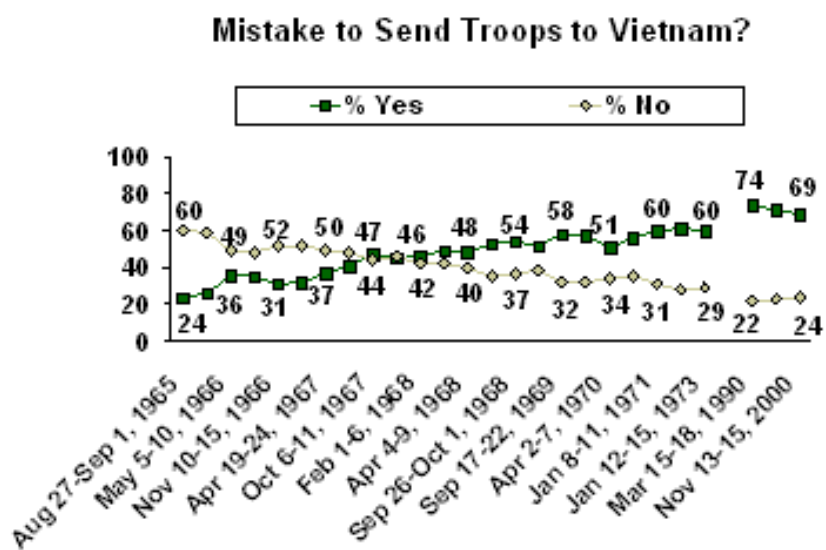


Figure 2: Approval Ratings, percentage agreeing to the notion “it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam”.



Figure 3: Full Metal Jacket, Hue City Interviews, 1:19:52



Figure 4: We Were Soldiers, soldiers' wives meeting, 19:25

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**BE A "FRESH UP" FAMILY!**

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Figure 5: 7-up commercial, 1949.

“Dad’s like a kid again when Bill and Bobby bring out their construction set. And Mom and Betty can’t resist a little ‘experting’ on the sidelines. At all family affairs 7-up is a welcome part of everyone’s fun. For - 7-up the all family drink – is a good friend of youngest and oldest alike”





Figure 6: We Were Soldiers, American soldiers help fallen fellow soldier, 51:29



Figure 7: We Were Soldiers, dying soldier close-up, 51:20



Figure 8: We Were Soldiers, Moore's speech, 33:59



Figure 9: We Were Soldiers, Vietnamese commander puts the American flag back, 2:07:02



Figure 10: Full Metal Jacket, graduation speech, 39:13



Figure 11: Full Metal Jacket, graduation parade, 38:32



Figure 12: Full Metal Jacket, mass grave, 1:04:43