The "Good War" Gone Bad:

An analysis of American World War II films made during the Vietnam War - 1955-1975

Karlien Haak
0208957
MA Thesis, American Studies Program, Utrecht University
June 29, 2012
Word count: 25,879

Table of Contents

Introduction

"In 1945, the United States inherited the earth…at the end of World War II, what was left of western civilization passed into the American account. […] The continental United States had escaped the plague of war and so it was easy enough for the heirs to believe that they had been anointed by God."[1]

In 1984, Studs Terkel published *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*. It was the first time that phrase was used to describe World War II, even though the decades before that, World War II was used as a positive reference in political rhetoric and popular culture. Even before Pearl Harbor and the American influence in World War II, presidents, like Roosevelt and Eisenhower, talked about America's role in the war and movies addressed and reflected the war situation across the sea. Once the United States became involved with the war, the rhetoric changed, as well as the messages in Hollywood films. Themes of American goodness were harnessed by Hollywood movies, which brought these themes into the American consciousness. The imagery of World War II was positive and three-fold; America as unity, America as bringer of freedom and democracy, and America as victor.

World War II created a turning point for the position of the United States in the world. Not only did the country become the only superpower left in the world politically, it also became the most important producer of mass and popular culture. Popular culture was more than entertainment, it was a way to educate and convince the audience influenced by domestic and foreign affairs. Many scholars have researched and written

---

[1] Studs Terkel, *"The Good War" An Oral History of World War Two* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1984), 8

about how American mass and popular culture and American politics, domestic as well as foreign influenced each other. Scholars like Richard Pells, Amy Kaplan, Rob Kroes, Rob Rydell, and Penny von Esschen have all stressed the importance of American mass and popular culture as a means to sell American values to the rest of the world. Kroes and Rydell posit that since the nineteenth century mass and popular culture was used by the Americans to promote American values at home as well as abroad. "American mass culture had come of age as a fully developed, integral component of the American national identity."[2]

These ideas about nineteenth century mass culture were expanded into the twentieth century. In her book *The Anarchy of Empire*, Kaplan analyzes the American national identity and discusses how American foreign policies and American involvement in world affairs was shaped by this identity. She also talks about films and how films "helped make the world accessible to American power abroad, […] enacted and celebrated the capacity of military power…"[3] indicating that popular culture and American foreign policies are intertwined. Richard Pells, in his book *Not Like Us*, talks about American culture and films made during and after World War II. According to Pells, Hollywood became an important ideological ally of the American government during World War II reflecting favorable and positive images.[4] Lewis Jacobs describes in his article, "World War II and the American Film," how the Hollywood films addressing the war became more and more influenced by American diplomacy and the European war.[5]

---

[2] Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill In Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2005), 141

[3] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire: in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 150

[4] Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans have loved, hated, and transformed American culture since World War II* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997), 214

[5] Lewis Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," in *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 7 (Winter, 1967-1968), 1-21

It is clear that popular culture is influenced by the political situation of a nation. As Siegfried Kracaur states in his research "The films of a nation reflect its mentality more directly than any other media."[6] The World War II films made during and after the Second World War did appear to do just that. WWII was of great importance for the United States and its society. It brought profound and permanent social, governmental and cultural changes in the United States, and has had a great impact on how Americans regard themselves and their country's place in the world."[7] Moreover, World War Two was a good war for the United States and Americans. Not only did the war bring the nation together, it also elevated the position of the country in the world to a higher level. "After the war, this industrial capacity was converted into an unprecedented flow of consumer goods — cars, washing machines, and eventually, television sets. This standard of living was the awe of foreign peoples and America shared some of its prosperity with a world in need: through the Marshall Plan alone, $12 billion in aid was used to help spark European economic recovery. There was much to be proud of."[8] This mental high was reflected in many World War II films in which, war was depicted as glamorous; Americans were the best, won the war, and made everything better.

This imagery of America in popular culture changed from positive to negative during the Vietnam War. "The dedication and patriotism of the American people that was evident in World War Two just wasn't there in others. If people know there's a good reason for what they're doing, they're enthusiastic about it. But when they have doubts,

---

[6] Siegfried Kracaur, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 5

[7] Mark Weber, "The 'Good War' Myth of World War Two," on Institute for Historic Review, http://www.ihr.org/news/weber_ww2_may08.html (last accessed June 12, 2012)

[8] Michael C.C. Adams, "The Good War Myth and the Cult of Nostalgia," in *The Midwest Quarterly* Volume 40, Issue: 1 (1998), 59

it's difficult."[9] The Vietnam War was considered a 'dirty war,' an evil war, an

unnecessary war.[10] This feeling of discontent about the war was indeed reflected in

Vietnam War films. Films like *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Apocalypse *Now* (1979), and

Platoon (1986) all showed the impact of the Vietnam War on American soldiers, as well

as the atrocities of the war. The films were raw, emotional, demoralizing, and

confrontational, demythologizing the traditions in war films.[11] Nevertheless, these films

were all made after the end of the Vietnam War.

During the war in Vietnam, no major films directly addressed the war. However, "war

itself was a topic of great debate in films in the late sixties and seventies, and many of

these cover the issue of Vietnam."[12] As Jeanine Basinger points out in her article

"Translating War," films may not have been directly about the Vietnam War, but "other

genres—westerns, gangster films, and the World War II combat film—were used to

express America's doubt and anger concerning Vietnam."[13] So seeing as that certain

films in a way did allude to the context of the Vietnam War, the question that arises is

how did this allusion influence the films in which this issue was addressed?

By looking specifically to World War Two films made during the Vietnam War, this

thesis will touch upon the aforementioned question. Instead of focusing on the well

known and outspoken anti-Vietnam films, like *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal*

---

[9] Terkel, 196

[10] Tim O'Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up And Ship Me Home* (New York: Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1989), 17

[11] Doug Williams, "Concealment and Disclosure: From "Birth of a Nation" to the Vietnam War Film," in *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, Vol.12, No. 1, The Politics of Art/Art et politique (Jan., 1991), 36-38

[12] Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, "Vietnam and the New Militarism," in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. J. David Slocum (NY: Routledge, 2006), 240

[13] Jeanine Basinger, "Translating War: The Combat Film Genre and Saving Private Ryan," *Perspectives: American Historical Association Newsletter*, Vol. 36, no. 7 (October 1998), 44

Jacket (1987), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and more recent films like *Tigerland* (2000) and *Rescue Dawn* (2007) all made after the Vietnam War and using the war a narrative backdrop, this thesis will focus on films about a 'good' war made during a 'bad' war. Though anti-Vietnam war films reflect anti-war sentiments, this anti-war sentiment is not solely a post-war occurrence. Instead of looking at instances of more popularly known and acclaimed anti-war films, this thesis will instead focus on a period in which war films were not as vocalizing as the aforementioned films, but were moving to a questioning and even accusatory tone. War films made during the Vietnam War, in particular, World War II films, specifically concern the context of war and the positive outlook the United States and the America people had on the Second World War.

This thesis will focus on the extent to which the context of the Vietnam War influenced the representation of "good war" themes in World War II films. In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to consider a range of viewpoints, including the extent to which "good war" themes are represented in politics and popular culture, how reflections of "good war" themes in World War II films evolved, the domestic and foreign context at that time, how "good war" themes in World War II films made during the Vietnam War reflected and evolved and what was happening to America on a foreign and domestic level. By answering these questions and putting the analysis of World War II films made during the Vietnam War in the larger frame of the influence of political policies concerning the Vietnam War on popular culture, this thesis intends to show that films and popular culture are more than a mere reflection of politics and political rhetoric. Instead, they can mirror the sentiment of the American people, question political decisions by reflecting this disputing in storylines, and take a stand against the government. It would be too easy to deem American popular culture as an

imperial tool to bring across political (and dominant) ideas. Rather, popular culture challenges the political realm by opening up a dialogue in which popular culture questions political views and offers alternative answers.

To answer the previous questions and finally the main question, this thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter focuses on what good war themes are and how these are reflected in politics and popular culture. By looking at presidential speeches and popular culture, contemporary and otherwise, chapter one will provide a basis for the later film analysis. Chapter two describes the development of the World War II film, also looking at the political and cultural context during that time. By chronologically describing the evolving of the World War II film and the way good war themes started being reflected, chapter two is a springboard for the later analysis, as it provides a thorough image of the reflection of the good war themes. This chapter also shows a correlation between the political and the cultural, albeit it more one-sided from a political perspective. Chapter three analyses three World War II films made during the first ten years of the Vietnam War. It looks at how good war themes are reflected, while looking at the context of the Vietnam War. It will first give an overview of the political context, on a diplomatic and social level, and it will also look briefly into presidential rhetoric. Followed by the analysis of the reflection of good war themes while taking the context into consideration. Chapter four then describes how good war themes are reflected in three World War II films made during the second half of the Vietnam War. Like chapter three, it gives an overview of the context, presidential rhetoric and analyses three films on their reflection of good war themes, while keeping the context in mind. This thesis will end with a conclusion in which the findings of the analyses are summarized and a preliminary conclusion will be drawn.

For the purpose of these analyses, six American World War films made between 1955 and 1975 will be analyzed to see how the representation of good war themes changed. The six films analyzed are *The Enemy Below* (1957), *The Great Escape* (1963), *The Thin Red Line* (1964), *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), *The Bridge at Remagen* (1969), and *Patton* (1970). These films were chosen because they are representative of the period and cover a long period of the Vietnam War. The movies were selected on the basis that they all depict American soldiers or sailors in a war situation, taking place during World War II. *The Enemy Below* takes place in the Atlantic Ocean, *The Great Escape*, *The Dirty Dozen*, and *The Bridge at Remagen* are situated in Europe, *Patton* is situated in Africa and Europe, and *The Thin Red Line* takes place in the Pacific.

It should be mentioned that there are several limitations to this research. First of all, the choice of films, even though the films selected are representative for the time they came out, is arbitrary. Due to the inability to obtain more films, a selection had to be made that covered the longest period of time, which resulted in the aforementioned films. Also, after 1970 the number of American World War II movies made, decreased substantially, leaving little option than to choose films up to 1970. Furthermore, the analysis of the films only looks at the reflection in the films, it does not take into consideration the idea behind the film. Of course, since films are considered cultural texts, it is all a matter of interpretation. Another limitation is that some of the films are based on books or actual events. Storylines may have been altered for entertainment purposes, however this should not influence the analysis of this thesis, since the reflection of good war themes is of importance, and not the truth or the motivations of the filmmakers.

Chapter One

The "Good War" In Political Rhetoric and Popular Culture

On the 7th of December 1941 Japan attacked the American naval base Pearl Harbor, thereby attacking the United States leaving the Americans little choice but to engage in a war rendered as "necessary."[14] World War Two became the war of the Allied versus the Axis of Power or the war of good versus evil. The outcome of the war and the way the war was "lived" in the United States led to a transformation from the idea of the war being necessary to it being the good war, "the best war the country ever had."[15]

This chapter will focus on how World War II became perceived as a necessary war or the good war and how this image is still used in politics and popular culture today. It will investigate the reasoning and myths behind calling World War II the good war by looking into historic accounts both on a personal, cultural, and political level. It is of importance to provide a thorough image of the "good war" in order to investigate the influence of the context of Vietnam War on this image as shown in movies, which will be done in chapters three and four of this thesis.

Before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States retained its policy of isolationism; it remained neutral during the first two years of the war feeling the need to keep the focus on its on economy and prospects. With the devastation of World War I in their memories and still recovering from the economic setbacks of the 1920s, Americans wanted their government to put their own country first, rather than fight

---

[14] Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), xiii
[15] Ibid., xiii

another war overseas.[16] In 1935, US Congress passed the Neutrality Act, ensuring that the United States would not enter or participate in a war in any way unless it involved an attack on the United States itself.[17] After Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939 and war was declared between Germany on the one side and France and England on the other, Roosevelt wanted to lift an embargo of the Neutrality act enabling the US to send arms to Europe, ensuring a way of defense against an aggressor, while at the same time remaining neutral.[18]

Although the US did not physically intervene in the war, during the period of neutrality the American government did issue pro-war articles, posters, and speeches. On January 6th 1941, American president Franklin Roosevelt gave his "Four Freedoms" speech in the American Congress in which he not only emphasized the need for national unity within the US, but he also emphasized freedom and democracy all over the world. In the speech it becomes clear that Roosevelt sees an American participation in the war as inevitable and plays into that sentiment by underscoring the need for unity, patriotism and "getting the job done." Even though the United States is not officially at war, it is preparing for it. Roosevelt states: "To change a whole nation from a basis of peacetime production of implements of peace to a basis of wartime production of implements of war is no small task."[19] The rhetoric of this pre-war speech is already that of a nation coming together in order to support a greater cause; freedom and democracy for the entire world.

---

[16] Fleming, T, *The New Dealers' War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War Within World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 105

[17] U.S. Department of State, "Neutrality act of 1935," *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S., Government Printing Office, 1943), 265-271

[18] Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Message to Congress Urging Repeal of the Embargo Provisions of the Neutrality Law.," September 21, 1939. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15813 (last accessed May, 20, 2012)

[19] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," January 6, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16092. (last accessed May 20, 2012)

It was not until the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese that the lives of Americans came to a halt and society unified to fight the good fight. "Marriages were postponed or accelerated. College was deferred. Plans of any kind for the future were calibrated against the quickening pace of a march to war."[20] In their books *The Good War* and *The Greatest Generation* authors Studs Terkel and Tom Brokaw give those who witnessed the war first-hand the opportunity to provide their view and experience the war gave them, men and women, soldiers and citizens alike. What is striking about most of the personal accounts is that the men and women of that generation saw it as their duty and their job to serve their country. They recall how the war and their purpose within the war helped them become the person they are today. "They were mature beyond their years, tempered by what they had been through, disciplined by their military training and sacrifices. [..] They stayed true to their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith."[21]

However, it has to be said that in many accounts of soldiers and army personnel, especially of soldiers who saw combat, those men and women do wonder about the ultimate purpose for the war and do see the war as a must rather than a privilege. In his book *Wartime*, published in 1989, Paul Fussell shows the atrocities of World War II and how it negatively influenced American society. Of course, the book is written by a later generation for a later generation to understand the distorted image people have of the Second World War and to show it was not all that good or necessary or justified. According to Fussell, because there has been so much talk about the good and necessary war "the young and innocent could get the impression that it was really not such a bad thing after all. It is thus necessary to observe that it was a war and nothing else, and thus

---

[20] Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (NY: Random House, 2005), 8-9
[21] Ibid., xxviii

stupid and sadistic."[22] Fussell, among others, does point out how and why this image came to be in the first place. American soldiers fought the war to defend themselves and the United States from "the monsters who had bombed Pearl Harbor without warning."[23] Many were not even aware of the German input in the war. "We were fighting Germany essentially because she had allied herself with the Japanese who had attacked us at Pearl Harbor."[24] In order to enhance the image of fighting for a good cause and to sell the war was to motivate the troops through training films, which taught soldiers all about the Nazis and German influence on the war[25] and through ads which glorified combat and shed a positive light on American soldiers.[26] Because of this Americans tended to see this distorted image as reality, creating a sense of good and necessity in fighting this war.

The war, or the reason for fighting the war, needed to be sold through imagery and ideology, since many Americans had little conception of the reality behind the war. The "Good War" imagery and ideas stem from more than personal accounts from American men and women caught up in the war and part of a society at war. The idea of the good also came from the juxtaposition with evil. With war came propaganda and with propaganda came the visibility of evil. American propaganda focused on the role of the United States and American soldiers as the depiction of good and the savior of freedom and democracy, while Nazis, fascists and Japanese were depicted as evil and a threat to those two notions so important to Americans. Posters, cartoons, and movies were published to show the Americans how horrible the Nazi's and Japanese were and the

---

[22] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understand and Behavior in the Second World War* (NY: Oxford UP, 1989), 142
[23] Ibid., 137
[24] Arthur Miller, "The Face in the Mirror: Anti-Semitism Then and Now," in *New York Times Book Review* (October 14, 1984), 3
[25] Fussell, 138
[26] Adams, "The Good War Myth", 73-74

threat they posed to the free world. Not only did the depiction of evil become an important part of propaganda and popular culture, but the depiction of good and the American soldiers as heroes fighting for their country did as well and still does in (war) movies made today. An example of this propaganda is a series of films made by Frank Capra and the U.S. Army Signal Corps, called *Why We Fight*. In these films, compiled from newsreel footage from both the Allied and Axis side, the U.S. tries to provide answers and a motivation as to why the war is fought.[27] The Allied side is projected as being the good side, while German Nazis, Italian fascists, and imperialistic Japanese are portrayed as the ultimate bad guys, or evil. Nazis were depicted as lecherous, demeaning towards women (also in a sexual way), and soulless[28], while the Japanese were depicted as either terrifying monsters or inferior creatures, conducting sneaking warfare.[29] Through propaganda like this, and other forms of propaganda like posters, pamphlets, and commercials, the image of Americans fighting the good war was amplified, giving people reason to believe the war was indeed fought for the right reasons. At the same time the image of unity is enhanced. In his book *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, Gary Gerstle points out the importance of unity within a platoon, often reflected through the key image of the multicultural platoon in which men of different ethnic backgrounds would be transformed into "one mold, that of the all American fighting man."[30] It was necessary to come together as one American nation, in order to defeat the enemy. According to Gerstle a multi-ethnic platoon was always led by most often a white protestant or

---

[27] Fussel, 138

[28] Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 188-191

[29] Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 134

[30] Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 204

sometimes an Irish Catholic, but never a Jew or an Italian, and African-Americans were hardly ever present in the picture at all.[31]

The idea of the Second World War being the good war stems from more than the way the war was portrayed in society and to soldiers, or from the fact that it left the United States as the only major power that came out of the war stronger in quantitative measures[32] and an enhancing economy. Another way in which becomes clear, and still does today, that World War II is seen as the good war is in politics and political rhetoric. Especially presidents used the imagery of the good war, by focusing on the importance of unity, democracy, freedom and its enemies, as a way to justify certain views or ideas or to unite the American people for a greater cause be it nationally or internationally. By looking at some of the speeches given by presidents that were in office after World War II, it can be seen that these men then use the symbolism and myths of the good war to address that feeling people have about this war being indeed the best war ever. Moreover, these speeches also make clear the superiority felt in the United States over the rest of the world, a superiority achieved after World War II.

The theme of unity recurs many times throughout Roosevelt's presidential speeches. In his "infamy Speech," Franklin Roosevelt states: "No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory" and "With confidence in our armed forces - with the unbounded determination of our people - we will gain the inevitable triumph - so help us God."[33] Here Roosevelt puts the focus on the American people as a unity, in order to

---

[31] Gerstle, 204-205

[32] Adams, "The Good War Myth", 59

[33] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War with Japan," December 8, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16053 (last accessed May 20, 2012)

fight against Japan. This kind of rhetoric returns in several speeches declaring war or justifying military actions in the 20th and 21st century. For example in a speech by Lyndon B. Johnson made in 1965. The speech is made in regards to the growing hostilities between white and black Americans, but it does use that rhetoric of unity and peace and Johnson does refer to World War II and the war in Vietnam. "men from the South, some of whom were at Iwo Jima, men from the North who have carried Old Glory to the far corners of the world […] men from the east and from the west are all fighting together without regard to religion or color or region in Vietnam."[34] Another speech in which the theme of unity returns is a speech given by George W. Bush on Thursday, September 20th, in which he responded to the attacks of 9/11. Over the course of the speech, Bush emphasizes the already growing unity among his fellow citizens and calls for Americans to come together in order to rebuild the nation.[35] His language is strong and like Roosevelt, Bush has no doubt that America will be victorious.

Another recurring theme is that of freedom and democracy. President Roosevelt had already emphasized the importance of freedom, not only for Americans, but also for the rest of the world in his "Four Freedoms" speech made in January of 1941, even before the United States had entered World War II. Given the history of the United States and its own fight for liberty from oppression, it is not surprising that sentiment is used as an important tool in domestic and foreign politics. Evidently, before the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt already had ideas of entering World War II, seeing Germany as a

---

[34] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise," March 15, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26805 (last accessed May 21, 2012)
[35] George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11," September 20, 2001. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=64731 (last accessed May 21, 2012)

considerable threat to democracy in Europe.[36] It was in the world's best interest that democracy and free nations vanquish and dictatorships end. Especially in the wars with Vietnam, and Iraq and during the Cold War did democracy and the freedom to govern played a large role. At the beginning of the Cold War President Eisenhower stated in an interview that: "First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs. Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world." With this he meant that it was in no one's best interest that nations would fall into the hands of Communism; that democracy should prevail. A similar situation occurred during both Gulf Wars, especially the second one. In his second inaugural address, given on January 20, 2005, amidst the Iraq War, President George Bush uses the words freedom, free, and liberty a total of 49 times.[37] Freedom and democracy being two concepts used by presidents to create a gap between the United States and terrorists or the enemy."When presidents do supply motives for terrorists, they claim that terrorists deplore and want to threaten freedom, democracy, [...]."[38] The Second World War brought democracy back to Europe and Asia, another image that still feeds the minds of many.

The final theme to be discussed here is that of American dominance. During and particularly in the aftermath of World War II, the United States was not only portrayed and seen as the savior of democracy and the free world, but also as the front runner on economic, military, and technological advances. Not only did the United States industry produce a great amount of weaponry and supplies for the Allied troops, it also kept

---

[36] Fleming, 1 and 84

[37] George W. Bush, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2005. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58745 (last accessed, May 21, 2012)

[38] Carol Winkler, "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric: Reagan on Libya; Bush 43 on Iraq," in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Volume 10, Number 2 (Summer 2007) 311

improving military technology and trained its soldiers thoroughly. "All American machines were good. American soldiers were the best on the planet; highly committee, superbly led, and superior in morale and morals.[39] This particular theme does not just recur in speeches about battle or military interventions; it is also used by President Kennedy in reference to the race to the moon, and by President George Bush in reference to the war on drugs. The use of us versus them shows that there is a good and dominant side that is competing with or fighting against the adversary. And even before the battle is over, the United States is a winner.

Many speeches evolve around dichotomous language, such as we-they, us-them, good-bad, aiders-oppressors, freedom, democracy, stability, all notions that were emphasized by Roosevelt since the beginning of World War II. Because this war was a victorious one for the United States this would be the kind of language or imagery used by people to stress the "goodness" of that particular war. This imagery does not necessarily solely occur in political rhetoric, but it also presents itself in books, music, art, television, and movies.

Themes that are considered good war themes can be found in many facets of American popular culture. It would be too easy, though, to say that all reflections of themes like unity, perseverance, dominance, and victory in popular culture are reflections or representations of the good war. It is possible to say that these representations of these themes in popular culture are representative of America and American ideals. As mentioned before, the next chapters will focus on the representation of good war themes in World War II films and how the context of these films influenced the way in which good war themes were displayed on the movie screen.

---

[39]Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 69

Chapter Two

The Development of American World War II Films 1937-1950

In the mid -1930s, Hollywood was already using the fascist threat of Germany and Italy, and Soviet communism as a means to provide entertainment to the American people in order to divert their attention away from the looming economical crisis. Even though they addressed serious topics, some movies that concerned fascism were light, almost comical, and had few American characters, instead focused on foreign characters and the psychological side of war, rather than action based. In the following years, as the US was still recovering from the losses is World War I and the Great Depression, and had returned to its policy of isolationism, Hollywood provided "escapist entertainment," in order to divert the audience's attention from radio broadcasts and newspaper articles focusing on the atrocities and violence committed by the Nazis and fascists.[40] It was not until 1939 that the United States and Hollywood, in response to President Roosevelt's foreign policy, took an important turn and sided against fascism. American characters started to become more important in World War II films and after The United States declared war on Japan in Germany in late 1941, movies started to involve the armed forces and later also combat.

This chapter focuses on the context of World War II and the American films made in the period between 1937 and 1950. It is the intent of this chapter to show how American World War II films evolved during the Second World War and in what ways the themes previously discussed in chapter one start to become of importance in the World War II film. The purpose of this chapter is to further explore the World War II film in chronological order and how it changed from product of isolationism to propaganda to

---

[40] Lewis Jacobs, 1

an early reflection of "Good War" themes. This exploration is of importance for chapter three and four in which World War II movies made during the Vietnam War will be analyzed based on the "Good War" themes and how the Vietnam War may have influenced the depiction of the "Good War." It is therefore necessary to know how World War II films came to reflect these themes and the context of this process. However, it is of importance to understand that this is an exploratory chapter into "Good War" themes and symbolism; it is not a study of pro- or anti-war films.

Before the Second World War had officially commenced, Hollywood and American films studios were already addressing what was happening in Europe and Asia. These films were not World War II films, since there was no World War to speak of, but instead reflected political policies and foreign situations. In 1937, the axis of power shifted in Europe, Asia and also Africa. Nations like Germany, Japan, and Italy became more forceful and brutal in expanding territory and a Civil War had broken out in Spain, urging France and England to rearm pending German and Italian threat.[41] The United States, on the other hand, remained politically impartial during this tumultuous period, as a result of the 1935 Neutralities Act. Even though President Roosevelt would like to quarantine those powers that violate treaties by invading alien territories or threaten the foundations of civilization should be quarantined in order to protect the rest of the world against them,[42] the American people were still wary of yet again becoming part of a conflict which was not their own.[43]

---

[41]Michael S. Shull and David Edward Wilt, *Hollywood War Films, 1937-1945* (NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996), 12

[42] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at Chicago.," October 5, 1937. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15476. (last accessed, May 27, 2012)

[43]Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York: Free Press, 1957), 242-244

The change that occurred in the world in 1937 was also reflected in Hollywood. In their book *Hollywood War Films, 1937-1945*, Michael S. Shull and David Edward Wilt refer to the year 1937 as a milestone for the motion picture industry. Not only was 1937 monetarily profitable, but the number of movies addressing the world crisis, increased dramatically.[44] Films made in the late 1930s, before the war in Europe broke out in September 1939, were musicals, comedies, romances, melodramas, and hardly touched upon the dangerous facets of fascism as dramatic subjects.[45] These films did, however, often refer to world events via so-called contraband messages[46]: "direct, veiled or allegorical references to current (1933-1945) international issues, superfluous to the main plot or theme of a given film."[47] For example, the western *Range Defenders* (1937) depicts villains are completely dressed in black, like a uniform, carry a sleeve badge similar to the one the SS have, confiscate ranches and territories, and abuse the elderly and weak. Without explicitly specifying thus, it condemns fascism and their behavior though it has to be done through hidden messages. Lewis Jacobs points out in his article "World War II and the American Film," that film-makers and companies were disinclined to address the subject of fascism and dictatorship, as they felt restrained by "isolationist sentiment and potent pacifist groups, added to the government pledges of neutrality."[48]

It was not until 1939 that film- started to become somewhat more outspoken against fascism and Nazis in their films. That particular year saw the first movie that openly spoke out against Nazism as an ideology. *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* was released in the spring of 1939. The films deals with a German doctor that comes to the United States to

---

[44]Adler, 13
[45]Jacobs, 1
[46]David White and Richard Averson, *The Celluloid Weapon: Social Comment in the American Film* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 25
[47]Shull and Wilt,19
[48] Jacobs, 1.

rally support among German Americans for the Nazis. One German American, unemployed and unhappy with his life, joins the group and starts to spy for them.[49] The movies does not only openly condemn Nazism and fascism, but it also highlights the importance of democracy and the containing of the disease of fascism, as Roosevelt had already pointed out in his 1937 speech. It is also the first movie that mentions Hitler and openly identifies Nazis as the enemy, which until then was only done in a cryptic manner.[50] A movie that goes one step further and takes a stronger stand against Nazism than Confessions of a Nazi Spy, is *Beast of Berlin* (1939). This film is set in Nazi Berlin, and concerns a German resistance group that attacks the brutal Nazi regime. The group was betrayed, with most members sent to concentration camps by the Gestapo.[51] What is interesting about this film, is the mixed unity within the resistance group; different social classes, Communists and Democrats, Jews and Catholics. In fact, this was the first indication of "Good War" principles of the unified melting pot combat unit that played a big role in later World War II films. After Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939 and war was officially declared in Europe, movies started to become more outspokenly anti-fascist. However, the focus of the movies was still very much on the threat that the Third Reich posted against the "sanctity and unity of the family"[52] rather than on the actual warfare. But still it is possible to see another theme make its way into a World War II film.

So, up until 1940 most films that had to do with what was happening in Europe did not actually speak up and label the situation. They showed what was happening or condemn what was happening through hidden messages. This attitude changed in 1940 after the

---

[49] *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, dir. Anatole Litvak, 104 min., Warner Bros, 1939, DVD.
[50] Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film*, (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 59-60
[51] *Beast of Berlin*, dir. Sam Newfield, 87 min., Producers Releasing Cooperation, 1939, DVD
[52] Shull and Wilt, 51

fall of France in June of that year. The Hollywood film makers began to understand that isolationism was no longer an option and that the message of films should change from indifference to resistance and upholding the ideals of democracy.[53] Still, films at this time were not about Americans or the United States a nation, but they did reflect this feeling of the necessity to change policies from isolationism to interventionism. Films like *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *Escape to Glory* (1940), and *Arise, My Love* (1940) all addressed the war, they all showed the downside of fascism and Nazism, and they all urged the United States to "arise….and be strong,"[54] while at the same time making use of American characters to indicate the importance of intervention.

Films about World War II carried a pro-British and pro-French sentiment, clearly choosing sides and speaking out against Hitler and Nazism. During the course of 1940 and 1941 this presence of an American character became more and more important and he even started to be a part of the actual battle going on between the British and French on the one side and Germans on the other. In films like *Escape to Glory* (1940), The *Long Voyage Home* (1940), and *International Squadron* (1941) show American citizens and journalists become part of the war, but also showed American service volunteers contribute to English fight against Germany, often sacrificing themselves to save others or for the greater good.[55] Something that played a great role in Second World War films to come. During these same years, many films that centered around or World War II also played into the importance of serving one's country. Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States declaring war on Japan and Germany, the symbolism of patriotism and fighting for the preserving of freedom and democracy was an

---

[53] Schull and Wilt, 56.

[54] This line, taken from *Arise, My Love*, (Paramount, 1940, runtime 110 minutes) was not literary used in the other movies mentioned here, but it does carry the sentiment the other films try to convey.

[55] Shull and Wilt, 62-63

important theme in those films. Not just through the previous mentioned volunteers and citizens that went into the lion's den, but also by putting the focus on the resistance, Hollywood made World War Two a "people's war." Because of certain qualities possessed by the resistance, like love of country, hatred of Nazism or fascism, and refusing to remain passive bystanders when a country was being dishonored and its human rights violated[56], the latter unknown to Americans until Pearl Harbor, these stories would have great appeal, showing that fighting for one's country and dignity was honorable and the right thing to do. These symbols and themes were not only reserved for movies about the resistance once Pearl Harbor was attacked and the United States needed to defend its citizens, country, and honor, they also became part of the American World War II movie.

From 1942, after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the American declaration of war to Japan and Germany, the World War II film became more focused on the American side of the story and the enemy was rendered voiceless. The portrayal of the enemy became more stereotypical and evil. This way the American audience was thoroughly exposed to images of good versus evil; "a free world comprised of democratic nations versus an enslaved, fascist-dominated world."[57] As seen in chapter one, this image of The United States or the American fighting evil, be it Nazi's or any other evil enemy, returns not just in popular culture, but also in political rhetoric. After Pearl Harbor, even though the government did not openly interfere with the message spread by Hollywood, The United States Office of War Information (OWI)[58] did offer a list of guidelines with

---

[56] Dick, 146
[57] Shull and Wilt, 143
[58] The OWI, established in June 1942 was a US government agency created to centralize government information services. Its tasks, among others, were to release war news for domestic use and promote patriotism.

certain ideas as to how the war aims of the United States should be presented.[59] Even

though the American government did not specifically tell the motion picture industry to

propagandize, Hollywood itself, in a matter of mere months, made the transition from

"outspoken denial of any active promotion of U.S. involvement in the war to aggressive

on-screen support for that effort."[60] During this time, the focus of the World War II film

shifted from espionage related films to combat films.[61] Of course, the American

government did collaborate with film directors and writers to create propaganda films

and training films, like the film series *Why We Fight* mentioned in chapter one.

After the United States entered World War II, films addressing the war became more

patriotic and reflected more of the themes discussed in chapter one. As Thomas Doherty

points out in his book *Projections of War*, the Second World War needed a new

mythology, which was achieved by focusing on a new hero; a regular white Joe easy to

identify with, personal sacrifice, and the diversity in ethnic and class background in the

larger group.[62] The first film in which these themes come together, making it one of the

first "Good War" films, is *Bataan* (1943). In the film a small unit of American soldiers

with different ethnic, racial and class backgrounds are left behind on the Bataan

peninsula to delay the advancing Japanese in order to allow the American retreat. Even

though their mission is doomed from the start, the men sacrifice their lives in heroic

ways in order to achieve the greater purpose. The movie ends with a shot of the battle

worn, but relieved and thankful looking American soldiers who were able to escape the

Japanese thanks to the sacrifice of the other soldiers. Even though most World War II

---

[59] Shull and Wilt, 142

[60] Thomas Schats, "World War II and the Hollwood 'War Film,'" in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. J. David Slocum (NY: Routledge, 2006), 149

[61] Ibid., 150-151

[62] Doherty, 100-101, 139

films made during this time did not end happily, they did not question the purpose of the

war and suggested that no matter the war's cost, all was worth it in the end.[63]

Not all World War II films from 1942 onward focused on combat or the American

soldier, many of them focused on the home front, the story behind the soldier, or even

male female relations during war time, but these movies did start to concentrate more on

the American side of the story, highlighting those aspects of heroism, patriotism, unity,

and democracy,[64] themes pointed out in chapter one as "good war" themes. As Shull

and Wilt point out in their book, that even though, as the war progressed, films became

a means to escape the realities of war, but at the same time reflected the previous

mentioned aspects.[65] Musicals, for example, were tonally lighter and focused on the fun

side of being in the army, but at the same time they "contained general patriotic

messages, promoted democratic ideals and stressed the importance of teamwork over

individuality"[66] amongst others. Also comedies, romantic films, and movies in which

women played the lead would divert attention from the war itself, but still emphasized

the importance of heroism, freedom, unity, and democracy in the details. Examples of

these movies are *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), *Follow the Boys* (1944), which do not

directly address the war, but did promote patriotism, teamwork and perseverance.[67]

The importance of teamwork became an essential theme in the general World War II

film as a reflection of the coherence and goals of the United States. America's motto 'E

Pluribus Unum' (one out of many) resonates in the World War II film, especially in the

---

[63] George H. Roeder, Jr., "War as a Way of Seeing," in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. J. David Slocum (NY: Routledge, 2006), 73

[64] John Bodnar, "Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America," *The American Historical Review* June 2001 http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/106.3/ah000805.html (last accessed June 2, 2012)

[65] Schull and Wilt, 273-274

[66] Ibid., 274

[67] Ibid., 276

characters in the films. As Gary Gerstle points out in his book *American Crucible*, World War II brought Americans from different backgrounds together in the army. According to Gerstle, the image of the army unit consisting of different cultures became "ubiquitous in official and popular culture."[68] Doherty then points out that the melting pot of mainly different ethnic backgrounds, and in a lesser way different racial backgrounds, was a persistent presence in the World War II film[69], not just made during the war itself, but also after. In films like *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), *Pride of the Marines* (1945), *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), the different ethnicities would be seen through names and appearances, but these differences would not stand in the way of the unity and fighting for a greater cause.

In the course of the Second World War, films addressing it, changed from distant storytelling, reflecting the isolationist attitude of the United States, to becoming more engaged as the American nation became more involved in the war. What, for the purpose of this thesis, are now deemed as good war themes, slowly started to be reflected in several types of movies addressing World War II. Themes like patriotism, unity, freedom, leadership, dominance were brought to the foreground in order to mirror America's ideas, ideals, and position in the world. Given the dominant position of the United States during and after World War II, and the reputation of World War II as a "good" thing for the United States, it is understandable that films would emulate this position or the themes reflecting America. The next two chapters will thoroughly examine how movies explicitly addressing the role of the United States in the Second World War reflect "good war" themes, while made during a period in which the

---

[68] Gerstle, 204
[69] Doherty, 139

untouchable and dominant position and positive role of the United States in the world is

questionable.

Chapter Three

World War II films and the Vietnam War - 1955-1965

The previous chapters explored World War II as the "Good War," how "Good War" themes were reflected in political rhetoric and popular culture and the development of the World War II movie. This chapter will focus on World War II films made during the Vietnam War and specifically during the years between 1955 and 1965. From 1955 onward, the United States became militarily involved and it was in 1965 that the war escalated starting with 'Operation Rolling Thunder.'[70] The idea of a short and clean war started to change by the end of this period. This chapter will analyze three films made during this time period and focus on how "Good War" themes are represented in these films. This chapter will first provide a historic overview of the context during this decade, after which the three World War II films will be analyzed using the "Good War" themes previously discussed. The point of this analysis is to research how the first years of the Vietnam War, during which the American presence went from to finally invasion and warfare, influenced the image of the Second World War shown in films. It is the purpose of this chapter to find out in what ways the "Good War" themes discussed in chapter 1 and 2 are reflected and to see if and how the context of the Vietnam War could play a role in this reflection.

The three films that will be analyzed are *The Enemy Below* (1957), *The Great Escape* (1963), and *The Thin Red Line* (1964). These films all show different aspects of World War II and focus on different issues Americans come across during the war. All three films take place in situations that have to do with war and have little to do with the

---

[70] George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975*, (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), 130-131

home front, but more with how the combats men experience the war, their response to the situation they find themselves in, and how they deal with everything around them. Of course, many more films addressing the Second World War were made during this time, however, the point of this study is to find out the influence of the perception of the Vietnam War on World War II films and their portrayal of "Good War" themes. For this, a thorough analysis of a couple of films is more agreeable than a shallow analysis of a lot of movies.

The Enemy Below is representative for this period, because it depicts the top position in which the United States found itself in the mid 1950s. The film also shows the human side of the enemy, something to identify with given the early Cold War stages and the unseen Communist enemy. Other films that provide this image are *The Young Lions* (1958), *Run Silent, Run Deep* (1958), and *Sink The Bismarck!* (1960). *The Great Escape* focuses on the Allied unity and the American role in that unity, often dominant. This story can also be seen in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *The Longest Day* (1962), and *Von Ryan's Express* (1965). *The Thin Red Line* focuses on the story of the soldier and what war can do to a man. More films made during this period that reflect that image are *Between Heaven and Hell* (1956), *The Naked and the Dead* (1958), *Hell Is For Heroes* (1962). Some of the movies discussed are based on books, but for the purpose of the analysis only what happens in the films themselves is taken into consideration. Nothing that has to do with the production of the films, apart from the time during which they were made and distributed, will be mentioned during the analysis. It is just the representation of World War II and "Good War" themes that are of importance for the analysis.

The Vietnam War - 1955-1965

Until 1954, the Vietnam War was a French war. In 1940, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (until then French colonies) came under Japanese rule. After World War II ended, Vietnam, under influence of communist Vietminh leaders declared independence, driving France into reclaiming their Asian territory. The United States supported France financially, ensuring a good relationship with the French government, while at the same time containing Communist influence in Asia.[71] As the Communist threat within Vietnam proceeded, the United States became more openly supportive of anti-Communist forces fighting in Vietnam.[72] Over the course of the war, the French could not form a front against the Vietminh, mainly because the United States refused to intervene,[73] eventually surrendering in 1954. Right after the French surrender, the Geneva Peace Conference started where several delegations of Asian and Western nations discussed what would happen to Vietnam and Indochina. One of the outcomes of the Conference was the division of Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel, requiring free elections in both parts. The Communists won in the North, after which the South, under influence of the United States did not hold elections and declared a pro-American as president. Because of the active Communist presence in North-Vietnam, the United States remained supportive of South-Vietnam, financially as well as through military aid.[74]

In 1954, during a press conference, Eisenhower expressed a certain fear of an expansion of Communism in South East Asia, which has become known as the 'Domino Theory.' "You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will

---

[71] Herring, 7, also see George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal Fourth Edition* (NJ: Pearson Education Print, 2002) , 48-49

[72] Moss, 51

[73] Herring, 36

[74] Moss, 92

happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could

have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences. […].

Then with respect to more people passing under this domination, Asia, after all, has

already lost some 450 million of its peoples to the Communist dictatorship, and we

simply can't afford greater losses."[75] This position led to an increasing of America's

influence in South Vietnam from 1955 onward. Not just financially, but also through

military presence and training. Between 1955 and 1961, the United States put more than

1 billion US dollars into economic and military assistance, while at the same time

having between 750 and 1,500 army training personnel train the South Vietnamese

army rangers and navy.[76] This was part of an experiment in building a South

Vietnamese nation, providing the country with a strong army, an important step towards

a stable and democratic government,[77] free from communist influence. At the end of the

1950s, southern Communists and revolutionaries started to revolt against the South

Vietnamese government, and North Vietnam began to send arms and advisers to assist

the southern revolt, encouraging revolutionary activities in the south.[78] Moreover,

North-Vietnamese guerillas were infiltrating in the southern part, attacking landowners

and government servants.[79]

During the 1950s, America's influence in the Vietnam War remained relatively low

key; apart from economic aid and military trainers, no American troops were present in

Vietnam. This changed in the early 1960s when John F. Kennedy became president in

1961. Kennedy already made clear in 1956, when he was a senator, how he felt about

---

[75]Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The President's News Conference," April 7, 1954. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10202 (last accessed May 28, 2012)
[76]Herring, 56-57
[77]Ibid., 56
[78]Moss, 104-105
[79]Norman Stone, *The Atlantic And Its Enemies: A History of the Cold War* (NY: Basic Books, 2010), 215

Vietnam and the importance of that nation. In a speech, he pointed out what America's stake in Vietnam was and gave four important points for this, focusing on a free and democratic Vietnam, calling it "the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, a proving ground of democracy in Asia."[80] This attitude towards Vietnam Kennedy carried with him into his presidency. Even before his inauguration, Kennedy sent security advisors to South Vietnam to assess the situation and make recommendations.[81] They recommended sending a military task force to support the South Vietnamese mentally and physically. Kennedy reluctantly agreed to send in these troops, making the United States militarily involved in the Vietnam conflict.[82] Between 1961 and 1962 the number of military assistance more than doubled and the number of material vastly increased.[83] Kennedy was aware of the rising tension between North and South Vietnam and gave American combatant troops present in Vietnam permission to fire when fired upon in order to protect themselves, but also "to prevent a communist takeover of Vietnam."[84]

1963 marked a turning point in the Vietnam War, not just for Vietnam, but also for the United States. The government of South Vietnam started exploring a possible settlement with North Vietnam resulting in the American withdrawal from Vietnam.[85] However, in the first months of 1963, the South Vietnamese government started to lose control over

[80]John F. Kennedy, "Conference on Vietnam," held on June 1, 1956. Online at *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum* http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/JFK-Speeches/Remarks-of-Senator-John-F-Kennedy-at-the-Conference-on-Vietnam-Luncheon-in-the-Hotel-Willard-Washing.aspx (last accessed May 28, 2012).
[81]Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., A *Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Houghton Miffin, 1965) 545-547
[82]Stephen Graubard, *The Presidents: The Transformation of the American Presidency from Theodore Roosevelt to George W. Bush* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2006), 420
[83]Herring, 86
[84]John F. Kennedy, "The President's News Conference," February 14, 1962. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9003 (last accessed May 28, 2012)
[85]Herring, 94

the country, also causing complications for the American policy in Vietnam.[86] Not only was the US supporting a government that was close to a dictatorship, due to newspapers and photographs the Americans started to question America's support for the South Vietnamese government.[87] In October 1963 a coup against the South Vietnamese government, without the official support of the United States, but with approval[88] was committed, resulting in the brutal death of the South Vietnamese leader. South Vietnam had become unmanageable and corrupt, leaving everything wide open for the North Vietnamese to take over. The new American president at that time, Lyndon B. Johnson, wanted, like his predecessors had, to protect Southeast Asia from Communism, but preferably without too much military involvement.[89] However, when the Communists and Vietcong started targeting and killing American soldiers, Johnson increased the American military presence and started air bombing North Vietnamese targets.[90]

However, the United States did not officially become involved in the Vietnam War until August 1964. In that month, several incidents took place in the gulf of Tonkin. South Vietnamese patrol boats had attacked North Vietnamese military installations after which the North Vietnamese torpedo boats fired at the American destroyer USS Maddox. [91] In the first days of that month, American and North Vietnamese vessels kept running into each other and minor fights broke out, but nothing serious enough for the American government to retaliate.[92] This attitude changed after a "supposed" [93] attack

---

[86] Herring, 95
[87] Moss, 138-139
[88] Ibid., 142-143
[89] Graubard, 457
[90] Ibid., 457-8
[91] Moss, 165
[92] Herring, 120
[93] Weather conditions made it unclear whether and attack was actually taking place, and the captain of the American ship later stated that the evidence of an actual attack was less than conclusive. (Herring, 120). In 1995, Robert McNamara, President Johnson's Secretary of Defense stated that one of the reported attacks by the North Vietnamese never took place.

by the North Vietnamese on August 4. That same day Congress passed the Joint
Resolution to Promote the Maintenance of International Peace and Security in Southeast
Asia, also known as the Tonkin Gulf Resolutions, after which President Johnson
ordered military forces to reply and take action against the North Vietnamese
aggressor.[94] Johnson hoped this declaration would keep the North Vietnamese
government and army at bay, but the increasing American military influence only made
the Vietcong more aggressive and it started to target American soldiers and army
bases.[95] As an answer, in February 1965 Johnson authorized Operation Rolling
Thunder, "a systematic, gradually expanding bombing campaign"[96] striking North
Vietnamese targets. When it became clear that this bombing operation did not have the
desired effect of the North Vietnamese backing off, President Johnson decided to
deploy fifty thousand troops to support[97], while at the same time going back and forth
on his plans and policies concerning Vietnam,[98] not willing to fully commit to a foreign
war when the nation itself was in financial turmoil. In July of 1965, Johnson expanded
the American effort in the Vietnam War, expecting to save South Vietnam from
Communist influences quickly and allowing him to re-build the American society
economically.[99] At this time, around the start of Operation Rolling Thunder, a majority
of the American people supported the war effort against North Vietnam.[100]

During the first ten years of the American presence in Vietnam, three different
American presidents were in office. These three presidents each found themselves

---

[94] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed
Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin," August 4, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The
American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26418 (last accessed May 28,
2012)
[95] Moss, 182-183
[96] Ibid., 183
[97] Herring, 142
[98] Ibid., 141-142
[99] Moss, 205
[100]Ibid., 183

inheriting three different phases of the war, with each holding different ways of

presenting these phases and their responding to the American people. By looking

closely at this rhetoric, the speeches and phrases used by the presidents reflect "Good

War" themes. Eisenhower had already made clear in 1954 how he felt about the

situation in Asia via the domino theory. His policy of containment did not change, but

he did put more emphasis on freedom and the role of the United States as leader of the

free world. In 1956 he stated**:** "Our nation is called to leadership"[101] in reference to the

situation in Asia. Throughout his presidency, Eisenhower kept emphasizing the idea of

peace and the notion that the U.S. would not become military involved in Vietnam.

Phrases like "We will never be the aggressor"[102] and "America is committed to

avoidance of force as an instrument of national policy"[103] were part of Eisenhower's

public speeches showing the American people he would not start a war in Vietnam.

Kennedy had already spoken out on the Indochina situation as a congressman, calling

for the building of a non-Communist sentiment within South-Asia.[104] During his short

presidency, Kennedy used the imagery of idealism to "to encourage Americans to view

the conflict there as one small part of the larger struggle between freedom and

communism."[105] In his inaugural address, Kennedy points out the necessity from

American technological dominance before engaging in any war to ensure victory. "Only

[101] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Address at Annual Dinner of the American Society of Newspaper Editors," April 21, 1956. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10786 (last accessed May 28, 2012)

[102] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Radio and Television Address to the American People on "Our Future Security."," November 13, 1957. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10950 (last accessed May 29, 2012)

[103] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Remarks at the Civic Auditorium, San Francisco, California.," October 21, 1958. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11267. (last accessed May 29, 2012)

[104] John F. Kennedy, "Advance Copy Report on His Trip to the Far East by the Hon. John F. Kennedy, Rep. 11th District of Massachusetts Over Mutual Broadcast Network From Station WOR, New York, New York," 15 Nov. 1951

[105] Denise Bostdorff and Steven Goldzwig, "Idealism and pragmatism in American foreign policy rhetoric: The case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam," in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 24, issue 3 (Summer 1994,), 515-516

when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed."[106] He also comments on the deaths of two military advisors in Vietnam in 1962, comparing their sacrifice to those of World War II.[107] Even though his rhetoric towards Vietnam is strong, his policies concerning Vietnam are not. He does choose to expand America's role in Vietnam, but wanted to keep it to a limit.[108]

Before the earlier described Tonkin incident, President Johnson had no intention to send troops to Vietnam. However, after "this new act of aggression,"[109] Johnson did focus his rhetoric more on the growing influence of the U.S. on Vietnam and uses World War II policy references to sell his point of the necessity to stand up against aggression and protect the weak.[110] In 1965, Johnson started to emphasize how he had "inherited" this war, and that he did not seek a wider war[111], a phrase he uttered before the U.S bombings of North Vietnam an indication of his ability to deceive the American public.

The rhetoric the three presidents used played into American feeling of dominance, feeling of justice, and willingness of the American public to support their government support and stand up for the weak which are all ideas referring to the "Good War."

---

[106] John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8032 (last accessed May 30, 2012)

[107] F.M. Kail, *What Washington Said: Administration Rhetoric and the Vietnam War: 1949-1969* (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1973) 181

[108] Herring, 75

[109] President Johnson, "Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin."

[110] Kail, 44-45

[111] Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's News Conference," April 1, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26859. (last accessed May 30, 2012)

The "Good War" in films - 1955-1965

Now that the context of the Vietnam War up until 1965 has been explored, this chapter will continue with the film analysis of three World War II films and their reflection of "Good War" themes. This analysis will take into consideration the historical context concerning the Vietnam War of the time when the movies were produced and distributed. As mentioned before, this analysis is an interpretation of possible reflections in particular movies, not an actual research into the stories and ideas behind these movies.

The first film that will be analyzed is *The Enemy Below*. In this 1957 movie an American destroyer ship, the USS Haynes, and a German U-boat accidentally stumble across each other in the South Atlantic Ocean, resulting in a cat and mouse game between the two boats. The USS Haynes is led by Captain Murrell (played by Robert Mitchum), whose previous ship sunk leaving him one of the few survivors. During the movie his ability to lead the ship is called into question by some of the seamen, because of his reluctance to interact with the crew and because of his history with the previous ship. However, during the course of the movie, Murrell shows himself to be a worthy captain in a vivid battle with Kapitän von Stolberg, which does not only test both men, but also both crews to the limit.

This movie has been chosen for analysis, not only because of the time in which it came out, early stages of the American involvement in the Vietnam War, but also because of the way the United States, Americans, the enemy, the war, and "Good War" themes are represented. The analysis will show that The Enemy Below is a World War II movie as they came to be over the course of World War II; pro-American, pro-freedom, and pro-democracy.

Several "Good War" themes are reflected in several ways. One of the recurring themes in the movie is the American dominance. Considering the role of the United States in World War I, World War II and the Cold War, and the way the nation took up the role of world leader, it finds it necessary to fit and defend this role as protector of freedom and democracy.[112] Over the course of *The Enemy Below* this role of a dominant America is reflected in several ways. First of all, the movie tells the story of an American ship versus a German U-boat, meaning America is located on top of or above Germany already emphasizing a certain physical and mental dominance. It is the Americans who, albeit accidentally, run into the Germans. At first they are unaware of what kind of "target"[113] they are dealing with, but soon find out that it is a German U-boat, all the while the Germans have no idea what and who they are dealing with; it still takes them a while to figure out there is another ship out there. At the same time there is technological dominance. The American vessel does not only look more modern and up-to-date than the German U-boat, its technology is more advanced as well, given the better radar, and later on better weaponry.

Another way American dominance is reflected can be found in the presentation of both crews. At the beginning of the film, before the "target" is encountered, the American crew, foremost the non-officers and off-duty personnel, looks bored and disheveled. Once it becomes known there is a "target" out there and possible actions will follow, all the men of the American ship get ready for action and dress accordingly and neatly, looking like a crew ready for battle. The German crew, on the other hand, even Kapitän von Stolberg who is not dressed in full uniform, look like a bunch of ill-fitted, sweaty men and therefore disorganized. Unlike the American crew, they do not look like a crew

---

[112] Garry Wills, "Bully of the Free World," in *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 2 (March 1999), 50-52
[113] From the moment the Americans find something on the radar they refer to as "target" rather than object or anything else.

ready to fight, ensuring the image of American dominance. The disheveled and sweaty Germans might appear that way because of the circumstances within the U-boat, great heat and no fresh air, but the Americans, even in the heat on the top deck, remain in full uniform keeping up the appearance of a uniform and working crew. Even at the end of the film, when the German crew is rescued by the Americans and given clean uniforms to wear by the Americans, the Germans still look bedraggled and not at all like a unity, where the American crew does.

Moreover, it is the Americans who lure the Germans out of hiding, and the Americans dictate all the moves made by not only the American ship, but also the German submarine. The moment the Americans find out there is "a spook on the radar,"[114] they are on the chase and drive the German U-boat to great depths and exertions, while at the same time keeping exact tabs on the moves of the Germans. And even when it seems the Germans are possibly outsmarting the Americans, the American captain seems to know exactly what is going on. For example, in the scene where the German U-boat has gone to the absolute maximum depth, they ensure that they stay off radar. The American crew wonders whether the U-boat is still underneath the ship, and Captain Murrell has no doubt that they are. When one of the senior officers asks him if the U-boat might have gotten away, Murrell replies: "No, he's down there all right."[115] Not only that, the Captain has an answer to everything the Germans throw at the American ship, in his intellect and way of maneuvering the ship. When the German U-boat fires two torpedoes at the destroyer, Captain Murrell, knows exactly what evasive action to take to ensure that the torpedoes miss their target.[116]

---

[114] *The Enemy Below*, dir. Dick Powell, 98 min., Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1957, DVD
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

American dominance is not the only "Good War" theme reflected in *The Enemy Below*. Another theme is that of the unity. In the beginning of the story, the crew is bored, has not seen action for a while, and the captain is nowhere to be seen, even being called a "feather merchant"[117] by some of his crew members, showing the gap between him and the crew members. At the same time, the captain does understand this nickname for him and does not blame the crew for naming him that given his recent history in the navy.[118] However, once "the target" is spotted, the crew comes together in fighting the enemy. The Captain takes control of his crew and ship, while the crew members do everything within their power to be of service to the captain and the ship. Even though some of the crew have never seen action and have never had to fight, they show no fear and put their best foot forward even if it leaves them injured. One of the torpedo loaders injures his hand and needs to have several fingers amputated. When Captain Murrell goes to see him and blames himself for the crewman's injuries, the loader takes the blame himself, yet another sign of unity; not putting the blame with anyone and taking your own responsibilities. Even once the ship is damaged beyond repair, the crew sticks together in fighting back against the Germans, and no one leaves until the order to abandon ship is given. Smaller representations of unity can be found in the multi-cultural diversity of the American crew. It does not only consist of white people, but also African-Americans, and Latin Americans. The first line is actually spoken by an African-American character. However, no matter how diverse the crew is, the men in charge are white, Anglo-Saxons as seen in chapter one.

Americans are depicted as good or represented by the savior. The most salient way being through Captain Murrell. Not only does he stand up when it becomes necessary

---

[117] According to the dictionary, a feather merchant is someone who avoids responsibility and effort
[118] *The Enemy Below*

after the enemy is detected, but as a man and a captain he is a good person and knows honor. He becomes a good person when he tells one of his officers why he joined the navy. It becomes clear he joined for personal reasons[119], but does not let those personal feelings get in the way of doing his job; fighting for his country. One might expect his personal history to make him into a person looking for revenge, but instead he looks at the greater picture; doing his job for his country, even though he does not like the job. Another way Murrell depicts good is through his sense of honor. Once the ship is hit and going down, he is the last man on the ship. On his way of the ship he encounters the German captain and salutes him, showing respect as a good American should. Not only that, he also single-handedly saves the German captain and another German crew member from certain death, while risking his own life. Not just Murrell represents good, but also the crew of the American vessel does. Only at the beginning of the movie do some of the crewmen wonder about the capabilities of the captain. However, throughout the movie they do not question him and they do not go off rail; they keep their heads together and do not lose sight of their purpose; defeating the enemy.

This representation of the United States as the force of good usually comes with the dichotomous depiction of the enemy as evil; however, that representation is not so outspoken in this film. The German crew is depicted as lost and unsure and especially the Kapitän wonders about the purpose of the war. "I'm sick of this war, this is not a good war. They've taken human out of the war. This is a bad war. It's reason is twisted."[120] This statement can be read in several ways, but in view of this thesis, this comment might be an accusation towards the Germans and Hitler in keeping up this "bad war," rather than taking the easy way out. Then again, Kapitän von Stolberg does

---

[119] The freighter he was working on as a civilian was torpedoed and in the attack he lost his wife.
[120] *The Enemy Below*

exactly the same thing; fighting the war, rather than surrender. Another small representation of "Good War" themes lies in the area of isolationism. As mentioned, the crew and ship are not battle prepared as such, and do not commence in engaging with the enemy before the German U-boat tries to sink the American destroyer. This attack could be seen as a reference to Pearl Harbor, giving the American government and army incentive to become part of World War II.

The Enemy Below was released at a time during which the economic aid of the United States to South Vietnam was increasing and the number of military training personnel situated in Vietnam was steadily growing, is still a "Good War" movie in the tradition of the World War II film as described in chapter two. The themes it represents do not question war in general, although they do question the necessity of the German perseverance to continue with the war.

The second film that will be analyzed is *The Great Escape*, based on a true story and distributed in 1963. In the film, the Nazis have constructed a new POW camp, which they consider to be escape proof and proceed filling this camp with a variety of allied prisoners who have all already escaped at least once from other camps. From the first moment of arrival, men start trying to escape in numerous ways, but from the moment British squadron leader and escape expert Bartlett arrives, the attempt to escape becomes a group effort in digging tunnels. However, one American officer named Hilts (Steve McQueen) keeps trying to escape, first by himself, later with a Scottish officer. When the Germans not only discover the tunnel the group has been working on, but also kill the Scottish officer, Hilts joins the group effort and finds them the last information they need to make the 'great escape.' In the attempt, seventy-six soldiers escape of

which three actually get out of Germany, around fifty get killed and about twenty are sent back to the same POW camp.

Although *The Great Escape* is not specifically about American troops, it does reflect several of the "Good War" themes discussed in chapter one, including American dominance, unity, and freedom. The film was released in 1963, amidst the backdrop of an increase in tension between North and South Vietnam, as was the American involvement in South Vietnam, not just economically, but also politically and military. Another reason for choosing this film for analysis is the American character of the film, the way the American soldiers are depicted, and also how war is depicted. The following analysis will show that The Great Escape is not only a reflection of "Good War" themes, but also has propagandistic tendencies.

Although *The Great Escape* evolves mainly British or non-American characters, one of the major "Good War" theme reflections is the American hero, specifically the white American hero. There are only three American prisoners in the camp of which two have major parts in the escape effort. By analyzing the latter two and their actions it becomes clear how the American hero theme is reflected. The first character is lieutenant Hendley, played by James Garner, who is involved in the group effort from the start as the scrounger, the person who gets anything that is needed. He is called "the best" by one of the British high-ranking officers[121], already putting him ahead of anyone else who might be able to do the job. Hendley also does not doubt his own abilities; he walks tall, keeps his cool, comes across as rather cocky, and has no problem convincing a German camp guard in getting him what he wants.

---

[121] *The Great Escape*, dir. John Sturges, 172 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures, Inc., 1963, DVD

Other ways in which the American hero is reflected in Hendley are through his perseverance, and his standing up for the weak. During his stay in the cap, Hendley is bunking with a British officer, Blythe, who worked in Photographic Aerial Reconnaissance Interpretation, and who accidentally ended up in the POW camp. From the moment they met, Hendley scrounges up all kinds of extra things for Blythe to make his stay as amicable as possible. Even when Blythe loses his sight and cannot escape, Hendley decides to help Blythe escape and they get away together. The fact that Hendley helps someone weaker than him find their way, is not only a reflection of an American hero, but also of the United States politics as discussed in chapter 1. Once they have escaped, Hendley does everything in his power, jumping of a train, stealing an airplane to ensure their escape from the Germans. Unfortunately, he fails, but his attempt is nothing if not that of an American hero; fighting until the bitter end.

The other American character portraying the American hero is Hilts, already briefly mentioned in the synopsis. In the beginning he is depicted as a bit of a loner and a hotshot trying to find a way to get out by himself, but over the course of the movie he becomes more involved with the group effort and without him the big escape attempt could have never happened. During his escape attempts, he teams up with Ives, a Scottish officer who is starting to resent being captured. Hilts becomes aware of this and, like Hendley did with Blythe, he tries to take care of Ives by joining efforts and helping him get out. When Ives is killed during an escape attempt on the fourth of July, Hilts changes his mind about not being part of the big attempt. He escapes one more time and succeeds, but gives up this freedom to ensure the big attempt can happen; he gives up his freedom, his individuality for the greater good. In that respect this change in character symbolizes the choice the United States made to join the war effort after

Pearl Harbor; Hilts represent the isolationist United States, Ives equals Pearl Harbor, and the great escape embodies the Allied effort to win World War II.

Another reflection, and rather obvious given the premise of the film, of a "Good War" theme in *the Great Escape* is freedom. As seen in chapter 1, freedom was an important issue for the United States and specifically Franklin Roosevelt. America itself had to fight to gain its freedom. So how is freedom represented in *The Great Escape*? First of all, the whole film is about achieving freedom from oppression. Hundreds of captured allied soldiers find that their German counterparts dictate their lives and do everything within their power to either make it the Germans as difficult as possible to keep an eye on them or to escape to freedom. The Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, SS, and Gestapo are one and the same; "the common enemies of everyone who believes in freedom."[122]

Secondly, freedom is depicted as something worth dying for. Scotsman Ives would rather die while trying to escape than remain in the POW camp. Hilts stunts around on a stolen motorcycle and tries to jump barbed wire fences to get into Switzerland. Getting hurt or possibly ending up dead is a more desirable option than finding your way back into German hands. The same goes for Hendley and Blythe. They jump off a moving train, steal a German plane, and crash trying to find freedom. And when Blythe is fatally wounded by a gunshot, he is pleased he does not die in a camp, but out in the open. He actually thanks Hendley for getting him out of the prison camp.[123] However, it is only the two American characters that find themselves in this situation; going through great lengths and action packed sequences on their quest for freedom. The three that do escape (one Brit, one Australian, and a Pole) do not find themselves in life threatening situations, and the other important characters find themselves easily caught, and all get

---

[122] *The Great Escape*
[123] Ibid.

shot by the Gestapo.[124] So, it seems that exerting yourself in finding an eventful way to freedom is something American.

Another way in which freedom is represented is by the fourth of July. The American soldiers in the POW camp make a genuine effort of celebrating the fourth of July, or Independence Day; the day which rendered them free from British oppression. Hendley, Hilts, and the third American, Goff, not only take the time to distill their own 'real American moonshine,' but also to dress up and boost the morale among the imprisoned allied soldiers. They drink, laugh, and celebrate their impending freedom together, until it all falls to pieces when a German guard finds the tunnel. At the same time, the fourth of July in The Great Escape carries a certain symbolism. It is the day on which Ives dies, the Germans find out about the tunnel that is being dug and therefore it also symbolizes the day on which the British fail, and it is the day on which Hilts decides to escape, to gain and lose his freedom so that others can also have a chance at gaining their freedom.

The American hero and freedom are not the only "Good War" themes that are represented in *The Great Escape*. Just like in *The Enemy Below*, there is a sense of American dominance in this particular film. In the POW camp there are hundreds of allied soldiers, most of them British, composed of English, Scottish, and Irish, and only three Americans. Yet, it is the Americans, and specifically Hilts, that ensure that the escape attempt can actually take place. Without Hendley, the imprisoned soldiers would not have been able to get all the stuff they needed, and without Hilts they would not have had a clue as to what was directly outside of the camp and beyond the tree lines. Moreover, the two Americans make everything they do look so easy and simple,

---

[124] *The Great Escape*

compared to them the other prisoners almost look like they are clueless. For example when Blythe makes a comment about tea being uncivilized if it does not have milk in it. Hendley goes out to get wood for the stove, and comes back with a tin of milk like that was just lying around somewhere.[125] Another example can be found when Hilts tells Bartlett and another British officer about his next escape attempt. When Bartlett inquires as to what he would do for breathing, Hilts simply states: "Oh, we've got a steel rod with hinges on it. We shove it up and make air holes as we go along. Goodnight, Sir."[126] The other British officer then wonders as to how they never thought of that, placing the American character yet again in a dominant position.

The way "Good War" themes and Americans are portrayed in *The Great Escape* makes it seem that war or being imprisoned is not all that bad at all. Americans are cool, calm, and compared to their allied fellow prisoners, not so stressed about the situation. This film does not condemn war and it does celebrate the American soldier as being patriotic (celebrating Independence Day), honorable (trying to save the weaker) and willing to make sacrifices (Hilts and his freedom). Looking at the Vietnam situation during the time *The Great Escape* focuses on the "good" a war brings, giving it a propagandistic undertone.

The final film that will be analyzed for its depiction of "Good War" themes is the 1964 film *The Thin Red Line*. The story takes place during the Allied invasion of the Pacific island of Guadalcanal in 1942. The film revolves around a newly-wed soldier, private Doll, who is dreading the idea of going to battle, decides his to draw his own plan and

---

[125]*The Great Escape*
[126] Ibid

steals a pistol before landing in the Pacific. His veteran sergeant, named Wells, catches Doll and from then on not only considers Doll a coward, but also starts to harass him for acting so. When on the ground Doll has to kill a Japanese soldier with his hands and nearly breaks down. Later Doll gets his hands on a Japanese machine gun and loses his self-control. After a surprise attack by the Japanese, Doll, Welsh and the other survivors team up and take control of a Japanese outpost in a mountainside. During this raid, the situation causes Doll to completely lose it and even shoot at his own companions.

The reason for analyzing this film is based on the story it tells compared with the time it came out, a time in which, as seen earlier in the chapter, an American war effort in Vietnam became more ominous. Another reason for electing this film for analysis is that it completes the image of the war given in this analysis. *The Thin Red Line* focuses on actual ground man-to-man battle, an image not yet analyzed but most certainly just as important as a cat and mouse game at sea, or how to deal with captivity. Given the situation in Vietnam, this choice for a more personal account of war could be seen as a message the war is not necessarily a good thing.

An important theme reflecting the Good War that occurs in *The Thin Red Line* is that of leadership. The most pivotal way this is reflected is through Captain Stone. As the leader of Charlie Company (C Company), the unit the movie revolves around, Captain Stone is the epitome of what is required to lead; honesty, patience, perseverance, the will to stand up for what he believes in. From the first moments in the film, Captain Stone establishes himself as the person who looks out for his soldiers, no matter what rank they are. In the first couple of minutes in the film, Stone questions a decision from his superior officer, Colonel Tall, because it will ensure the death of many of his soldiers. This does not only show his leadership, but also that he empathizes with and

cares for his troops, standing up for them, where they cannot. This compassionate attitude returns throughout the film. For example, when C Company is wading through the jungle. The new soldiers become exhausted and even though Sergeant Welsh, who has more experience than Stone says they should keep going, Stone decides on a ten minute break: "if we keep moving, we'll get there without an army."[127]

Other times in which Stone resembles leadership is when his superior gives him a direct order to move through a canyon known as 'the bowling alley' in order to move a nearby town. The canyon is barb-wired, packed with mines, and on top of the cliffs are Japanese soldiers with machine guns loaded. Stone is aware that going through the canyon is a suicide mission. When Stone receives the direct order to move into the canyon, he "refuses to obey that order."[128] By doing this, he does defy his leaders, but does lead himself. Also, the way he deals with impossible situations show his leadership skills. For example, in the 'bowling alley' when he tries to come up with alternative ways to get through or around it and succeeds in taking out the mines. Or when the Americans have to take in the Japanese compound that is guarded by a heavily armored box from which Japanese machine guns are operated. Stone loads a jeep with explosives and pushes that into the direction of the box, which proceeds to explode ensuring an American take-over. His display of leadership does get Captain Stone a recommendation for a Silver Star, which is rewarded to those who show gallantry in action, which "must have been performed with marked distinction."[129]

Similar to *The Enemy Below* and *The Great Escape*, perseverance and not giving up are central themes reflected in this movie. Even though Doll is ready to yield to the luring

---

[127] *The Thin Red Line*, dir. Andrew Marton, 99 min., Security Pictures, Inc., 1964, DVD
[128] Ibid.
[129] "Silver Star," *The Institute of Heraldry* http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Awards/silver_star.aspx (last accessed June 5, 2012)

dangers of battle, he hangs in there and even at times shows signs of being a good soldier. For example, when he finds two 'Jap nests'[130] and leads the attack on one of them and through a moment of ingenuity destroys the nest. Or during the last siege in the film when he does not stop until he reaches his goal of entering the Japanese outpost. Another recurring theme is unity. After a surprise attack by the Japanese on Charlie Company, leaving only 26 men alive, these men come together as a real unit to avenge the death of their fallen comrades as well as achieve what they came there to do; occupy the elephant.[131] In the end, the two adversaries Doll and Welsh come together when Welsh sacrifices his life to save Doll. All throughout the film, Welsh despised Doll, calling him a coward and Doll hated Welsh for not getting off his back. However, when Welsh gives his life to save Doll, according to Welsh because he was stupid,[132] Doll holds Welsh in his arms until Welsh dies. Something he probably would not have done at the beginning of the film; war has made them come together.

A third smaller theme is that of sacrifice. As just mentioned Welsh sacrifice his life to save Doll's. But sacrifice returns on other occasions. Colonel Tall has no problem sacrificing the lives of soldiers in order to reach the object; or the greater good. It might not be a noble sacrifice, but it has to be done to get what is required. When the American camp is bombed during the night, Doll finds his trench occupied, after trying to convince the other soldier to get out Doll leaves him in the trench to sit out the bombing in the open. During the canyon shooting, one of the American soldiers is badly wounded, but is left in the open so that anyone who goes near him will get shot. Welsh is aware of this, and yet he is willing to sacrifice his life to relieve the wounded soldier from his pain. And of course Doll, and with him any other (drafted) soldier, sacrifices

---

[130] Camouflaged areas in the high grass of the swamp from which the Japanese shoot at enemy soldiers
[131] The elephant being the nickname for the Japanese outpost in the mountainside.
[132] *The Thin Red Line*

his innocence for an unknown fate, which according to The Thin Red Line, is somewhere between sanity and madness.

As far as reflecting "Good War" themes go, this is the extent of it in *The Thin Red Line*. It does represent "Good War" themes, but it does not represent the "Good War." Instead it challenges the imagery of World War II as the good war. The movie shows the harsh realities of war, any war, not just World War II. Compared to the other two case studies, *The Thin Red Line* is darker, more confrontational, less glamorizing of the war. It questions war and the purpose of it. "Point? What's point got do with it? If these guys get of this ship without being killed they're gonna be fighting for an island they never even heard of before. They're gonna spill out their guts for a piece of real estate even the birds don't want. Now what's the point in that?"[133] It shows the harshness of war and what it can do to a person. Before getting drafted, Doll was a happily married man still enjoying his wedding bliss, but the realities of war make him go mad and make him do things he never thought possible. He spaces out when he finds himself in a man-to-man battle situation. He kills a Japanese soldier with his bare hands, in his head comparing it to having sex with his wife of seven days. He defies a Japanese bombing by not getting in a foxhole expecting to survive, because he is drawing his own plan and surviving. And when he again finds himself in a man-to-man battle situation, Doll completely looses sense of reality and cannot distinguish between right and wrong or good and evil. He is literally on the thin red line, and only the sacrifice of another brings him back on the 'right' side of the line.

Taking into consideration the time the movie came out, the fact that the movie takes place at Guadalcanal, which is just as remote for the United States as Vietnam is, there

---

[133] *The Thin Red Line*

is reason to wonder whether *The Thin Red Line* is actually an anti war film more than it is an anti Vietnam War film. Even though *The Thin Red Line* is a World War II film which does reflect some of the "Good War" themes, it is not a pro-war film. It does not glorify war or being in the service like *The Enemy Below* and *The Great Escape* and it does not glorify the American presence. Instead it gives an image that goes against several of the "Good War" reflections, leaving the feeling that war is not all that good to begin with. And looking at what was happening in Vietnam around 1964, *The Thin Red Line* could be seen as either an accusation against a past war, war in general, or a future war.

So looking at these case studies it can be said that *The Enemy Below* of 1957 still resembled the World War II feeling as it came to be reflected in films made at the end of and right after World War II. American dominance, unity, America as the savior, perseverance, all themes that made a "good" World War II film can be found in *The Enemy Below*. It was at that time that the United States was not yet militarily involved in the Vietnam War, but had taken a stand against North Vietnam and communism. During the 1960s the involvement of the US in Vietnam changed and so did the films. Looking at *The Great Escape* (1963) themes that glorified the war and the role of America and the American soldier were enhanced, making it seem that, for Americans at least, war did not seem all that negative and every American should fight for freedom. The 1964 film *The Thin Red Line*, however, crushed this glorified view of America and the war. Yes, it still represented the "Good War," though less outspoken and this representation was overshadowed by the negative views on the war. A shift in "Good War" reflection already occurred, even before American military involvement in Vietnam.

Chapter Four

World War II films and the Vietnam War - 1965-1975

Chapter three explored "Good War" themes reflected in World War II films made between 1955 and 1965, a decade during which the American influence in Vietnam slowly progressed from providing economic assistance to military training assistance to declaring war on North Vietnam. This chapter will continue that line of thought and focus on the years between 1965 and 1975. During these years the American military presence in Vietnam increased and therefore the war effort.[134] At the same time, it became clear that the Vietnam War was not going to be an easy victory, and resistance against the war grew, not only politically, but also among the American people. Like chapter three, this chapter will analyze World War II films made during the Vietnam War and focus on the representation of "Good War" themes made in the films. This chapter will first provide an historic overview of the context of the Vietnam War after which three films made during 1965-1975 will be analyzed. It is the purpose of this chapter to find out in what ways the "Good War" themes discussed in the first two chapters are reflected and to see in what way the context of the Vietnam War could influence this reflection.

The three films that will be analyzed are *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), *The Bridge at Remagen* (1969), and *Patton (1970)*. Like the films discussed in chapter three, these films show different aspects of World War II and focus on different issues Americans come across during the war. *The Dirty Dozen* is representative for this time period,

---

[134] For further information see Herring's *America's Longest War*, chapters five, six, and seven and Moss' *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* chapters six and seven

because it is the first in a line of "dirty group"[135] films made during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Other examples of that genre would be *The Devil's Brigade* (1968), *Play Dirty* (1969), and *Kelly's Heroes* (1970). *The Bridge at Remagen* is an intense combat film, focusing on the role of the common soldier in battle and war, like *Tobruk* (1967), *Beach Red* (1967), and *Where Eagles Dare* (1969). Patton is an autobiographical film which extricates the person behind the war and show what war can do to a person, both in a positive and negative way. Other movies which do the latter are *Catch-22* (1970) and *The Execution of Private Slovik* (1974).

The Vietnam War - 1965-1975

As described in chapter three, 1965 was the turning point of the American military presence and participation in the Vietnam War. The failure of Operation Rolling Thunder to bring North Vietnam to its knees, caused President Johnson to increase the number of American soldiers present in Vietnam, as well as the amount of military material, expecting the fight to be short and victorious.[136] Not just the American politicians were optimistic about a positive outcome and fast victory, so was the rest of the nation. However, over the course of 1965 and 1966, it became clear that a speedy triumph was no longer obtainable. As the amount of American military personnel present in Vietnam doubled in 1966, Johnson and his advisors expected that the military superiority would convince the North Vietnamese to negotiate a peace treaty.[137] Because of this expectation, there was no real strategy going into the war, it was

---

[135] In her book *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), Jeanine Basinger discusses the term "dirty group." It is a maverick unit, consisting of different types and ethnicities, trained to get a though job done outside the mainstream military authority.

[136] Moss, 183

[137] Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 88-89

improvised and there was no long-term plan, since it was expected that North Vietnam would succumb under the American military power. The North Vietnamese government, though, with aid from China and the Soviet Union, prepared its citizens for a long and drawn out battle and showed no signs of relinquishing.[138]

Because North Vietnam persevered through the heavy bombing and government and nation united against the American threat, the United States upped the military force. In 1965 General William Westmoreland, a World War II veteran with a distinguished service record, took command of the American war in Vietnam. Westmoreland decided to use a so-called attrition strategy in which the focus would be on firepower and mobility.[139] Under Westmoreland's leadership, the level of warfare between 1965 and 1967 increased exponentially. Through several different bombing operations and later on also ground troop operations, Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were aiming for a clear American victory in late 1967, after which the United States could start their pacification program and begin to rebuild South Vietnam.[140]

However, by 1967 it became clear that this aim was unobtainable. Even though Westmoreland did score several victories, the United States army did not succeed in pushing North Vietnam out of the South. Westmoreland, with the backing of the Joint Chiefs and President Johnson, increased the number of soldiers and military equipment and took on a more aggressive approach.[141] In 1967 almost half a million American soldiers were stationed in South Vietnam. The amount of weaponry had never been higher, the number of flights on a combat mission heightened to over a hundred

---

[138] Herring, 149-150 and Hess, 90, 94
[139] Moss, 209-210
[140] Moss, 211
[141] Herring, 151-153, Moss, 212-213

thousand and the tonnage of bombs dropped rose to 226,000.[142] This advance in military power had a negative outcome on several different levels. The costs of the war were higher than any other war the United States had ever been a part of. In 1967, it paid more than two billion dollars per month to keep the war going.[143] Furthermore, the lost American military material, like weapons, undetonated bombs and explosives were used by the Vietcong to attack and kill American soldiers.[144] Another aspect the Americans did not take into consideration was the North Vietnamese resilience and ability to infiltrate the South and proceed with guerilla like tactics in fighting against the American and South Vietnamese army. During 196, it became clear that the fast war the United States had hoped for, was no longer an option.

This American people also realized the war in Vietnam would be longer than the government had expected. Even though every military conflict over the course of American history had caused protests, the Vietnam anti war movement of the late 1960s was the largest ever seen until then. "Never before had so many Americans representing diverse organizations publicly questioned and demonstrated against their government in time of war."[145] After the Gulf of Tonkin incident support for the war increased, and the idea of the war being a fast and easy victory ensured a positive state of mind among the American people, not just on a political, but also on a social level. However, from the beginning of the American military participation in Vietnam protests were organized, especially at universities. Later on, as media coverage of the Vietnam War not only focused on the lack of progress in a fast victory, but also showed the number of

---

[142] Herring, 147
[143] Ibid., 146
[144] Hess, 92-93
[145] John C. McWilliams, *The 1960s Cultural Revolution* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2000), 47

American casualties, the number and ways of protests increased, especially among students and on universities, questioning the purpose of the war.[146]

In 1967, even though anti war protests were taking place, a minority of the American people were actually in favor of withdrawal from Vietnam, while forty percent supported Johnson and about a third of the Americans favored a further escalation of the war.[147] However, during that year, support for the war distinctly decreased. The number of Americans fighting and dying and the amount of money put into the war to cover the costs, caused a negative surge in the approval of the war. The number of people who approved Johnson's handling of the Vietnam War plunged to twenty-eight percent by the fall of 1967.[148] The decrease in public support and confidence in the war had not only influenced the media, which took a sharper stand against the war, but also the political arena. Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs were calling for a larger role for the ground troops while Johnson's advisers and Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, advocated against current policies and for a change in political policies, leaving Johnson caught in the middle.[149] This division could also be felt in the Democratic Party when in 1968 Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, both in favor of withdrawal from Vietnam, announced their candidacy for the presidential nomination.

Early 1968, it became clear that North Vietnam had no intentions of relenting their war effort. On January 30, they commenced the 'Tet offensive', attacking the American embassy in Saigon and striking other strategic and non-strategic targets all over Vietnam. Even though the offensive was not a great success, it did show that North Vietnam had no intention of giving up the fight. At the same time, the attention the 'Tet

---

[146] Herring, 171-173
[147] Graubard, 463
[148] Herring, 173
[149] Ibid., 174-177

offensive' got from American media outlets did increase the already existing gap between political and public opinion.[150] Johnson then declared in a speech that the American army would decrease the number of attacks in North Vietnam, hoping that the North Vietnamese would see this as the first step in the right direction and open up the dialogue for peace.[151] In the same speech Johnson made clear he would not be seeking another term as president, tired of the strains of the presidency, opening up the way for negotiations with North Vietnam for peace, talks which would take place in Paris that same year. The peace talks went on for several months, without real results, tainted by the upcoming elections and the difference in outlook on the Vietnam War between the Democrats and the Republicans. At the end of October, Johnson announced a bombing halt, against the wishes of South Vietnam, to ensure the North Vietnamese would resume the talks.[152] A decision that became invalid when Richard Nixon won the presidential elections in 1968.

Nixon, a democratic South Vietnam supporter, drew away from the negotiations and adopted a policy of Vietnamization, withdrawal, and more aggression towards North Vietnam. The objectives of these policies were to reduce the number of American soldiers in Vietnam, while at the same time preparing the South Vietnamese army to fight their own battle by training them and providing them with weaponry. The idea was to have a balance between pulling out too fast, leaving the North Vietnamese to attack the South, and pulling out too slow, leaving the South Vietnamese too dependent on the American troops.[153] Ground troops would decrease, but air strikes would increase, ensuring North Vietnam would not be able to attack to South during the process of

---

[150] Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam 1941-1975* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 262-263
[151] Graubard, 466
[152] Schulzinger, 271-273
[153] Hess, 116-117

Vietnamization.[154] This policy did not settle the American population, which itself was divided, but it did give hope that the war would end without a collapse of the South Vietnamese government.[155]

However, over the course of 1969 it became clear that Nixon may have been withdrawing troops from South Vietnam, but pushing them into North Vietnam just as fast, hoping the North would give in to resume the peace talks. This policy led to another surge in the anti-war movement, with an increasing number of protests and protesters, while at the same time, the army was negatively influenced by Nixon's Vietnamization policy. As Nixon started to commit to peace negotiations, and the troop withdrawals enhanced the notion of aiming for a no-win policy, soldiers began to wonder about the purpose of fighting in Vietnam. One of the most famous questions that started to circulate after 1969 was: "Who wants to be the last soldier to die in Vietnam?"[156] showing that surviving the war becomes the only necessity. Especially when Nixon decided in 1970 to send American troops into Cambodia, based on the fears of the 'Domino effect,' ensuring the safety of Vietnamization,[157] the anti-war protest started to become more frequent and more violent, using fires and bombs to show their dissatisfaction concerning the Vietnam situation.[158] A year later, when Nixon again used the idea of Vietnamization to invade Laos, anti-war protests did not only erupt in Saigon, but the movement also started attracting Vietnam veterans, disillusioned by the war and their treatment as veterans.[159]

---

[154] Schulzinger, 278
[155] Moss, 340
[156] Ibid., 354.
[157] Herring, 230-231
[158] Moss, 361
[159] Moss, 373

Nixon's policies of trying to contain the North Vietnamese did nothing to push the North Vietnamese army back into the North or to bring them back to the negotiating table for serious talks about peace. In 1971 there was an opportunity, but neither side wanted to make the concessions needed for peace.[160] If any, it made the North Vietnamese more adamant to attack and try and invade the South, which they did in the spring of 1972. The United States soon retaliated through heavy bombings, especially targeted at the fuel and ammunition depots that the North Vietnamese army depended upon.[161] A few months later, Nixon called for a massive air war against North Vietnam, again giving the North Vietnamese an opportunity to open up negotiations. Despite this re-ignition of war, the American people protested less, possible because they felt bombings were more acceptable and because North Vietnam invaded the South.[162]

1972 was the start of a long process of ceasefire negotiations. Until the end of that year, the United States kept bombing North Vietnam and tactical places in the surrounding countries, hoping with the military power to scare the North Vietnamese into negotiating, promising to stop bombing if they would re-enter the peace talks.[163] Early January 1973 the negotiations in Paris were resumed and several weeks later the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, also known as the Paris Accords, was signed. This accord would ensure, among other things, a cease-fire in South Vietnam, the ceasing of all acts of war by the United States against North Vietnam, the declaration of South Vietnam as a free and independent nation, and a guaranteed gradual, peaceful, non-violent reunification of Vietnam.[164] At the end of March, the last remaining soldiers and prisoners of war returned to the United States. In

---

[160] Herring, 239
[161] Hess, 129
[162] Herring, 242
[163] Ibid., 248-249
[164] Moss, 399

the summer of 1973, all funds for American military activities in Asia were blocked by the Senate, while bombing in Cambodia is allowed till August 15. Thus ended the American military involvement in Indochina. However, The United States did stay involved in the Vietnamese conflict via military aid. In 1975, the North Vietnamese army invaded South Vietnam. President Gerald Ford did not respond on a combat level, but did request for military aid, which is denied by Congress. On April 23, Ford announced that as far as America was concerned the Vietnam war was over.[165]

Just as in the first ten years of the war, during the period of 1965 and 1975, three different American presidents were in office. Looking closer at the rhetoric, there is still a reflection of "Good War" themes. As mentioned in chapter three, Johnson's rhetoric and actions did not match in the early period of the war. Johnson would remind the American people he had not wanted the war, but did not back out either. He kept the focus on the necessity to contain communism and aggression against the weak. As Herring also points out, Johnson maintained a positive outlook on the progress, even though there was still no sign of a clear victory.[166] Until the end of his presidency, Johnson and his administration kept the public ill informed of the Vietnam situation.[167] "We do not want to make news until there is news. And we realize that many times diplomacy can be more effective in private than to have all your discussions, recommendations, and prophecies carried in the press."[168]

In 1969, Nixon succeeded Johnson as president. In his campaign and his inaugural speech of 1969, Nixon focused on achieving an honorable end to the war in Vietnam,

---

[165] Hess, 318-325
[166] Herring, 181-182
[167] Kail, 242
[168] Lyndon B. Johnson, "The President's News Conference," October 24, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29201 (last accessed June 4, 2012)

and focused on the role of the United States and the American people as a savior of freedom and democracy. However, at the same time, like Johnson, Nixon did not share details of several of his Vietnam policies and did not seem to take charge in forming a national direction in domestic and foreign policy.[169] He did call on the American people to support the United States war effort, while at the same time judging protesters for not supporting a good cause. "Let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that."[170]Throughout his presidency, Nixon's rhetoric kept the focus on the United States as a winner, a dominant military presence, and Nixon's refusal to lose the war. "I would rather be a one-term president than be a two-term president at the cost of seeing America […] accept the first defeat in its proud 190-years' history."[171]

The final president having dealings with the Vietnam War was Gerald Ford. The military presence in Vietnam had already decreased, but Ford was adamant in helping South Vietnam become a democracy. "We stand by our commitments and we will live up to our responsibilities in our formal alliances, in our friendships, and in our improving relations with potential adversaries."[172] During several of the news conferences in 1974 and 1975, Ford emphasized the necessity to support South Vietnam which caused protestors to wonder why millions were spent overseas while the country

---

[169]Robert R. Tomes, *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975* (NY: New York University Press, 1998) 206

[170] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," November 3, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303 (last accessed June 3, 2012)

[171] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia.," April 30, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2490 (last accessed June 3, 2012)

[172] Gerald R. Ford, "Address to a Joint Session of the Congress," August 12, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4694 (last accessed June 3, 2012)

was in a recession[173], and start assembling again. When Ford announces the end of

American involvement in Vietnam, he immediately reaches out to the American people

he ignored for several months. "I ask that we stop refighting the battles and the

recriminations of the past. I ask that we look now at what is right with America, at our

possibilities and our potentialities for change and growth and achievement and sharing.

I ask that we accept the responsibilities of leadership as a good neighbor to all peoples

and the enemy of none."[174]

Even though the presidential rhetoric of the second half of the Vietnam War still used

"Good War" symbolism, it was a rhetoric of twisting and turning. The presidents either

used deceiving language towards the public, or tried to push through their agenda and

turned around again when it became clear they or their policies failed and asked the

American people for support. This behavior of uncertainty led to dissatisfaction among

the American people causing them to stand up in protest. At the same time the use of

presidential language showed the need for freedom, democracy, and American

leadership; themes that stayed important, all throughout the Vietnam War.

The "Good War" in films - 1965-1975

Now that the context of the Vietnam War up until the American retreat in 1975 has been

explored, this chapter will continue with the film analysis of three World War II films

---

[173] Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 576 and Graubard, 521

[174] Gerald R. Ford, "Address at a Tulane University Convocation," April 23, 1975. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4859 (last accessed June 6, 2012)

and their reflection of "Good War" themes. Like in chapter 3, the analysis will take into consideration the historical context concerning Vietnam of the time when the movies were produced and distributed. As mentioned before, this analysis is an interpretation of possible reflections in particular movies, not an actual research into the stories and ideas behind these movies.

The first movie that this chapter discusses is *The Dirty Dozen*. In this movie Major Reisman, played by Lee Marvin, gets the assignment to train twelve soldiers, all of whom are convicted of crimes like rape, murder, and theft, for a special mission, which will almost certainly lead to their deaths. The mission is to parachute into Nazi-occupied France and to blow up a castle that houses several high ranking German officers. At first the twelve soldiers do not appreciate Reisman and his meddling, but this changes during the film, when Reisman stands up for them to his superior officers and turns out not to be all that by the book himself. In the end, the mission succeeds, but nine of the dirty dozen lose their lives in the process. These men were listed as honorable soldiers who died in the line of duty.

The Dirty Dozen has been chosen for analysis since, as indicated earlier, it is the first in a line of several films that came out during the Vietnam War, in which the American soldier is not necessarily portrayed as good. That is a first change in attitude, considering the analysis in chapter three where American soldiers were not portrayed as criminals or misfits. Another reason is looking at the context of the Vietnam War, the resistance against the war increased and the attitude towards the purpose of the war changed. This analysis will focus on whether this is in any way reflected in the representation of "Good War" themes in *The Dirty Dozen*.

Despite the title and the premise of being a 'dirty' movie, *The Dirty Dozen* does reflect "Good War" themes. Firstly, the theme unity of race and ethnicities. The twelve men making up the dirty dozen consist of white Americans (from New York, from the small town USA), Latin-Americans, an African-American, a Polish American, for example. These different backgrounds come together for a similar purpose; killing Germans. The formation of the platoon reflects how in World War II, men from different ethnic and class backgrounds fought against a common enemy in order to protect the American nation, while being led by a white man, in this case Major Reisman. The film shows how this unity comes about. At the beginning, the movie focuses on what sets the twelve men apart from each other, not just in ethnic background, but also in ideas and values. There is racism, especially towards the ethnic minorities, and also resentment over cultural and religious differences. However, once the training for the mission starts, the dozen all endure the same treatment and same hardship, which causes them to step beyond these differences and unite as a platoon. For instance, when one of the soldiers, named Franco (played by John Cassavetes), wants to escape the compound, because he will either be hanged or possibly killed during the mission. He gets hauled back in by two of the other soldiers, because if one escapes they all go back to prison. Or when the dozen are expected to shave with cold water. All of them stand together and opt to not shave until they get warm water. This is the first time in the movie the soldiers talk about themselves as "we", as a unity.

Another reflection of a "Good War" theme is leadership. Major Reisman gets assigned the task of training the dirty dozen against his will, he 'volunteers', based on his service record, his tendency to be "short on discipline"[175], and his difficulty with authority. He himself does not like to be ordered around, but cannot decline a mission he 'volunteers'

---

[175] *The Dirty Dozen*, dir. Robert Aldrich, 150 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1967, DVD.

for. At first, he sees the operation as a must and tries to show up his superiors by doing exactly what they want, but in the worst way possible. Before he elects his prisoners, he makes a deal with his general who gave him the mission, which ensures a commute of sentence. This deal does not only show his leadership in the way that Reisman wants to ensure enough motivation from the soldiers, but also to show those soldiers that he is the one with the power and pulling the strings. Over the course of the training and the mission, Reisman uses his position and authority to show the men their capacity as soldiers and turns the bunch of misfits in a unity, which is willing to die for each other in the end. Another way in which his role as leader comes forward is that he is part of the mission; he lands with the men, he fights with the men, and makes sure that every member of the team does his part. At the same time, Reisman also reflects the image of the good or the savior. He saves the twelve men from a sure death or decades in prison and provides them with the opportunity to better their lives and improve their reputations as killers and criminals. Moreover, he saves his own reputation by not only succeeding in uniting the men, but also in getting them ready for their mission.

Other ways in which "Good War" themes are reflected is through the themes of sacrifice, honor, and perseverance. Some of the dozen give up their long prison sentence and therefore their lives, for an almost sure death. They do not have to do this, but somehow the idea of dying in the line of duty and sacrificing their lives seems more acceptable than spending twenty odd years in prison. During the mission, Private Pedro Jiminez, fails to reach the radio tower because his foot gets stuck in the roof. Once the siege begins, he sacrifices his life to ensure the destruction of the radio tower.[176] Honor can be seen in the action of the African-American soldier Robert Jefferson, when he

---

[176] *The Dirty Dozen*

kills dirty dozen member Archer Maggott during the siege. Maggott, convicted of rape and murder and portrayed as a religious nutter, does not have the best interest of the mission in mind and almost ruins it by going off plan. Jefferson does the honorable thing for the team and shoots Maggott. Jefferson and the Polish American Joseph Wladislaw do the honorable thing when they stop Franco from escaping rather than going with him, which would have ensured the hanging of the other convicts. Instead they put the lives of their comrades before their own freedom and survival. The theme of perseverance comes back throughout the movie. Not only does Reisman persevere in training the men, the dozen also endure the hardship of Reisman and the training in order to get a chance at freedom. Perseverance also plays a part in the mission. Even though things do not go as planned, every member of the team keeps going on order to reach the objective of destroying the castle.

Even though all these "Good War" themes are reflected, *The Dirty Dozen* is not a good war film. The 'dirty' in the title does not only refer to the appearance of the twelve prisoners, but also to other characters, like the general who gives Reisman the assignment. The general is aware of the dangers of the mission and 'volunteers' a major with a bad service record and a dozen military prisoners who are expendable for the mission. At the same time 'dirty' refers to the mission and certain values and ideas lifted out in the film. When looking at the previous mentioned representations from a different perspective than the good war themes, they are not as outspokenly good as the older representation discussed in chapter three. The newer reflections are overshadowed by the story, the characters and the overall feel of the movie. The main characters are not heroic. They are criminals, challenging authority, disrespectful to superiors, subordinates, and each other. These characteristics make it hard for the viewers to

identify with the American soldier as a prime example of fighting for a good cause as is possible in the films analyzed in chapter three. The introduction of the twelve 'dirty' men is through a line up during which Reisman moves down the line looking at the men and hears their names and their sentences. None of the characters personify the image of the American soldier and they all look like disengaged soldiers wondering why they are even there or looking at the major with contempt. Even though this sentiment softens throughout the film, and some of the characters show heroic tendencies they still do not become the embodiment of the great American soldier, because they will always remain criminals.

Other ways in which the "Good War" reflections are brought down is by the mission and the elaboration of this mission. As the mission is described during the meeting between Reisman and his superiors it is the destruction of a chateau, which is used as a rest center and conference room by the Germans. The location itself has no military use, but every day there are a lot of high ranking German officers present there, "usually with the benefit of female companionship."[177] This indication gives the mission less of a heroic feeling. Yes, it will disrupt the German chain of command, but the target is not of high distinction, which is probably why the mission is given to 'dirty' men. Also the way in which the Americans ultimately kill the German officers and their female companions is not very honorable. They lure the Germans into the underground shelter, look the doors, throw gasoline and hand grenades down the air vents and blow the Germans to pieces. Through the way this is shown, this sequence gives a feeling of discomfort of dirtiness, almost of shame, that devices like this were used to reach the mission's goal. It is not the glamorous representation of carrying out missions or fighting war World War II as described in chapter two, show.

---

[177] *The Dirty Dozen*

Also, Reisman's goodness is contaminated by his bad attitude. From the beginning of the film onward, his disrespectful attitude and his ideas and conceptions negatively influence all the representations of good previously discussed in this analysis. He may be the savior of the twelve dirty men, but he is not fully engaging with them, although at the end he has more respect for the dirty dozen than for his superior. At the start of the film he states: "I'm not interested in embroidery, only result." This may not completely be the case in the end, but compared to the behavior of the leaders in the movies discussed in chapter three, Reisman is not the representation of a 'good' leader. During the training the major does not evade violence; he lets the prisoners settle disputes with their fists and he does not falter in punishing Franco by kicking him in the face. Using language like "Look, you little bastard, either you march or I beat your brains out" or "I'll blow your brains out." Again not the kind of behavior a good leader should depict.

As mentioned, the film reflects unity and camaraderie. However, it takes the reflection outside of the comfort zone depicted in earlier films. As Gerstle mentions, Hollywood spread the image of a multi-ethnic platoon in which soldiers could preserve their ethnic and religious background while excluding blacks, reaffirming racial boundaries of the United States.[178] Instead of excluding the African-American, or giving him an unimportant out of action part, Jefferson is in the middle of the unit and of the action. The movie does represent the racial boundaries by making Jefferson the target of the Southern born and bred Maggott who discriminates Jefferson continuously, by calling him 'nigger,' and showing his contempt for Jefferson by ignoring him, for example. Furthermore, the unity from earlier films is honorable and sees war as serious business. The dirty dozen, even though they have honorable tendencies, are not the epitome of honor, as is the case with soldiers in the earlier films. Also their disrespect for the army,

---

[178] Gerstle, 204

the uniform, and authority is a sign that they do not see war as something serious, but more as a joke.

The Dirty Dozen is the first 'dirty' film made during the Vietnam War. Even though it does depict certain "Good War" themes, it breaks with the traditional depiction of these films. By using disrespectful criminal soldiers rather than patriotic ones, there is less invitation to associate with these characters and therefore with soldiers and war in general. The film does condemn war as being dirty business, but since it superficially keeps intact "Good War" themes, and given the context of 1967, the film can be considered more a film that criticizes war for being a dirty political game than a critique on World War II. Like *The Thin Red Line*, *The Dirty Dozen* does not glorify war or being a soldier, or the American participation in the war.

The second case study is the 1969 film *The Bridge at Remagen*. The story takes place in early 1945 Germany. In the movie there is only one bridge remaining over which the Americans can cross the Rhine to get from France into Germany. A German general gets the order to destroy the bridge, with which he waits to get several thousand German soldiers back into Germany. He gives Major Krueger (played by Robert Vaughn) the order to hold the bridge as long as possible. At the same time, an American infantry division is given directions to get to the bridge and stop the Germans from crossing. Krueger waits as long as possible with destroying the bridge, but fails to eradicate it when the Americans come and try to capture the bridge. In the end, Krueger is shot by a German firing squad for failing his mission. It becomes clear that ten days after the American capture of the bridge at Remagen, it collapsed, leaving the Americans with nothing.

This movie is selected for analysis, because it still has the feeling of the traditional "Good War" movie; a purposeful mission, fighting against an enemy, but at the same time, the film shows the downside of war; the drag, what it does to the mind and behavior of soldiers. Taking into consideration the situation in Vietnam, decreasing chance of an easy victory, great losses, soldiers and battles, and the domestic views on these issues, *The Bridge at Remagen* is an interesting case study to find out how the "Good War" theme reflection is changing.

A major recurring theme throughout *The Bridge at Remagen* is that of American dominance. The first way this is accomplished is through material presence. In the beginning of the film, the Americans move through the French countryside, next to the Rhine, in a great number of vehicles. The column of tanks and jeeps runs on for a serious length, and has a free passage to the rendezvous point, indicating that the Germans do not possess the material power to stop the Americans. Throughout the film, this material dominance keeps playing a role in the fight over the bridge. When the Americans come closer to the bridge, and want to ensure the safest passage for the American soldiers in order to destroy the bridge, they position around eight tanks right across from three German canons and a couple of machine guns and keep firing until the German canons are annihilated. However, the American dominance is not only shown through the abundance in material, but also through the inadequacy of the German weapons. Not only do the Germans not have the firepower to seriously threaten the Americans nearing the bridge, but the material they do have, is not up to par. To ensure the Americans will not take the bridge, Major Krueger makes certain that the bridge is lined with explosives. When the Germans want to blow up the bridge, the detonating mechanism does not work, and they have to light the fuse by hand. This

succeeds, but it turns out that the explosives are not the first grade military explosives the German army promised them. Again, this could be read as a sign of American dominance, since it is the German material that does not work.

Also, because the movie tells the story of Americans trying to capture a bridge and Germans trying to destroy the bridge, there is already an 'us versus them' situation. Since the American side of the story is highlighted, this side is then dominating the German enemy side. Furthermore, the portrayal of both sides also enhances the American dominance. From the beginning of the movie, it becomes clear that the Germans are fleeing from France back into Germany, and are therefore also fleeing from the Americans. Not only that, the Germans that remain in order to defend and later destroy the bridge, are left there to fend for themselves. Whereas the Americans support their soldiers and give them cover so the soldiers can get closer to the bridge understanding the tactical importance, the German army does not. As one of the German officers on the bridge points out;"This is a farce. Where are the bombers? Our reinforcements? This is the most important place in Germany and what are we left to fight with?"[179]

A second way in which the "Good War" is reflected is through one single character; Lieutenant Phil Hartman, played by George Segal. After the death of the platoon captain, Cpt. Colt, Hartman takes over the company that is expected to make way to the bridge and to destroy it. During the film it becomes clear that Hartman is not in favor of the war, or at least questions the necessity of it, this will be discussed later. Despite of this attitude, Hartman does his duty, follows orders, and does his utmost to get the job done. In the respect, Hartman is the depiction of the good and dutiful soldier. He is also

---

[179] *The Bridge at Remagen*, dir. John Guillermin, 115 min., Wolpers Pictures Ltd., 1969, DVD

a good leader of the company. He is the first in battle and makes sure it is safe for his men to move in. For example, right after the captain is killed, Hartman sets out to secure a farm building situated close to the scene. He does not hesitate going in and flushes the Germans out, so his men can move in safely.

Another example of this show of leadership is when Hartman's superior orders him and the men to move onto the bridge and take out the Germans. Hartman first stands up for his company and goes against Major Barnes, wondering about the importance and the purpose of the bridge, as the following dialogue shows.

> Hartman: "What makes that bridge so goddamn valuable?"
>
> Barnes: "If we take the bridge, maybe it will shorten the war."
>
> Hartman: "Maybe. (short silence) Dying is a lot more definite than that, major."

He then asks Barnes why he does not take the company across, seeing as he is the superior officer. "Because I am ordering you," is the reply Hartman gets. His face shows discontent for the way in which he and his men are treated, but he knows that they have no choice but to follow the order and therefore follows it.[180] Hartman then leads his men when they set foot on the bridge and try to dismantle the explosives, exposing him to the same dangers his men face.

Different ways in which "Good War" themes are reflected in *The Bridge at Remagen* is through unity and fighting for the good cause. The company itself is a common and well-known multi-ethnic unit, ever present in the World War II film. Through characters with surnames like Angelo, Slavek, Jellicoe, and Grebs different ethnicities are

---

[180] *The Bridge at Remagen*

represented. Over the course of the movie it is shown that the members of the unit have different views and ideas and do not always see eye to eye, but do not let this stand in the way of their unit. Especially Angelo and Hartman are not always on the same page. Angelo likes to steal from the dead Germans he comes across and shows Hartman little respect, while Hartman considers Angelo a pig and a bastard. In the end however, they are glad both make it out alive and find a mutual respect for each other. Even though there are differences of opinion and perception within the company that Hartman leads, the do go into battle together and put their lives on the line for each other. The company not only portrays the "good war" unit, but also honors it with a sense of duty, and respect.

However, just like with *The Dirty Dozen*, the "Good War" feeling the first two films discussed in chapter three show, is not present in *The Bridge at Remagen*. The soldiers themselves are not depicted as patriotic or even proud to be able to fight for their country. Instead, they are represented as a bunch of men wondering about their purpose there and seeing war as a must and a nuisance rather than something worth wile. The only people who seem keen on fighting the war and beating the already fleeing Germans are the high ranked officers, who are not even part of the actual fighting. Especially Angelo and Hartman act as if they would rather be anywhere else than in Europe fighting the war. Angelo is disrespectful towards foe and friend, stealing from dead bodies and even attacking major Barnes. Hartman questions decisions made by superior officers and the necessity of the mission to capture the bridge rather than destroy it. As he puts it: "What makes that bridge so goddamn valuable?"[181]

---

[181] *The Bridge at Remagen*

Just as Hartman reflects "Good War" themes, he also reflects anti-war sentiments through his actions, facial expressions and choice of words. For example after he and his company take in the farmhouse after killing the German occupants. He and major Barnes discuss the death of Captain Colt. Hartman just fired a machine gun at a table and when Barnes asked what that was about, Hartman cynically calls it target practice. "We're the cutting edge, gotta keep sharp."[182] After which he yawns, making clear how tired he is of the war. Or when the company has reached the bridge and Barnes sends Hartman's men to the bridge so the Germans will destroy it faster. Barnes promises the company a unit citation[183] to which Hartman replies (in a Southern accent) "Why Major, sir, there's nothing my boys wouldn't appreciate more."[184] Not only is that a double negative, but the way Hartman says it and the face he pulls when he says it question the sincerity of his response.

The Bridge at Remagen, like *The Dirty Dozen* is not a pro-war film. But where the latter does in some way show the importance of the American war effort, *The Bridge at Remagen* questions this and the purpose of war in general. Even though it is not shown in the movie, through an added piece of text it becomes clear that all the trouble Hartman and his men went through had been for nothing, since the bridge collapsed several days after capture. By depicting the characters caught in the actual fighting as fed up and battle worn and the superior officers making all the important tactical decisions from a safe place behind the line it is possible to see a parallel with the war in Vietnam at that time. American soldiers and the American people questioned the purpose of the war, where the American politics kept supporting the war, as seen at the

---

[182] *The Bridge at Remagen*
[183] "Army Presidential Unit Citation, " *The Institute of Heraldry*
http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Awards/army_presidential.aspx (last accessed June 7, 2012)
[184] *The Bridge at Remagen*

beginning of the chapter. And yet, because it is a "Good War" film, it does reflect "Good War" themes. Albeit less outspoken as the films of chapter three, the ideas of American dominance, leadership and honor do seep through the negative views on war in *The Bridge at Remagen*. In that sense, this film does not criticize the goodness of the Second World War, but it does question the purpose of war in general and based on the timing, the purpose of the Vietnam War specifically.

The final movie that will be analyzed is *Patton*, distributed in 1970. This is an autobiographical movie, albeit dramatized, about the military life of General George S. Patton, portrayed by George C. Scott. The film focuses on Patton's military years during World War II and how he handled the war as a soldier and lived through the war as a person. The movies shows how Patton moved from Africa to Italy, and later France and Germany, while at the same time telling the story of the man behind the general. How Patton's ideas and conceptions led to being misunderstood by his superiors and the American people and therefore being pushed to the side line, while still being convinced of his own strength.

This film is part of the analysis, because it differs from the other two movies mentioned in this chapter in a way that it focuses on the story of one man and how he perceives the war, rather than on the unit. This way, there is a broader perspective on the reflection of "Good War" themes in films made during and therefore could be influenced by the second half of the Vietnam War. During this time, the anti-war sentiment among United States citizens grew even more, while politicians kept supporting the troops. Considering the success of *Patton*, it won eight Academy Awards, and the context of

the time during the film was made, this analysis will examine in what way "Good War" themes are represented and the possible purpose of *Patton* as a war film.

The most prominent "Good War" theme present in *Patton* is that of leadership. Patton himself was a general in the United States army during World War II and was therefore the leader of several troops of soldiers, officers and machinery. The way leadership characteristics return, come through with his stance and attitude, amongst others. The film opens with a six-minute speech given by Patton in full uniform with loaded with medals and sashes. He stands tall and has a demanding pose, which oozes self confidence. The way he is presented at the beginning of the film, already reflects his position as a leader, a reflection which returns over the whole course of the film. In attacks, he does not crouch down, but stands tall. At some point in the beginning, German airplanes attack his office building, he dives under the table at first to take cover, but once over the shock, he grabs his handgun, steps outside and starts shooting at the planes while standing in their line of fire. He lives by his motto: "Always take the offensive, never dig in."[185]

Other ways in which leadership is displayed in Patton is through his interaction with his soldiers. Patton gets a new commission in North-Africa and one of the first things he does, is check out his troops. Right before he does, he makes clear in a conversation with his second in command Omar Bradley, played by Karl Malden, why the outfit he now leads got badly beaten by the Germans. "They don't look like soldiers. They don't act like soldiers. Why should they be expected to fight like soldiers?"[186] Most of the officers and soldiers are ill-dressed and look dirty, and Patton, dressed sharply and neatly, demands they clean themselves up and dress properly at all times, as real

---

[185] *Patton*, dir. Franklin J. Schaffner, 172 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1970, DVD
[186] Ibid.

soldiers befit. Patton furthermore has the utmost respect for soldiers who do their job properly and those who are wounded or even killed in battle. On several occasions, he visits field hospitals and is clearly upset to see so many brave men suffering. At the same time, he cannot stand cowards and soldiers who inflict wounds upon them to get out of battle. Being scared is understandable[187], but being a coward is as bad as being a traitor.[188]

Besides leadership, Patton also embodies American dominance. Of course his leadership makes him dominant, but the way he acts towards his fellow army officers, American and Allied as well as German, gives a feel of dominance. The speech at the beginning already shows the dominant nature of Patton, in full uniform, with close-ups of all his medals, in front of a giant American flag. The rhetoric he uses is that of dominance, phrases like "America loves a winner and will not tolerate a loser" and "we have the finest food and equipment, the best spirit, and the best men in the world" for example, show that dominant feeling America carries. But also his entrance when he takes the commission in North-Africa. Standing in a truck, with the siren wailing to let people know he is coming, Patton drives through the desert with the sun rising in the background and later driving through a small town. He wants people to know he is coming and to get out of the way. Patton is furthermore dominant making his own decisions. He comes up with a plan to take Sicily, which is shot down for the sake forming an Allied unity. At first he goes with the plan, but when he gets the opportunity, Patton shows the other Allied forces that he can do it all and takes Palermo, according to his original plan.

---

[187] *Patton*
[188] Ibid.

Patton furthermore embodies perseverance. His aim is to be a good soldier and win the war. He truly believes in his cause and what he does, is the right thing. However, his commanding officers do not see the conviction in Patton's actions, making his job difficult for him. He is reprimanded for slapping a soldier Patton perceived as a coward not worthy of staying in the hospital. His commission is taken away from him and he is sent to Malta for unknown purposes, while the Allied forces are preparing a European invasion. Patton says to that: "That's what I trained my whole mind, body, and spirit for. What, in god's name, am I doing here?"[189] Patton is then given a ceremonial position in London, which he questions, but does not slander, mainly because he feels he is destined for greater things.[190] Instead of giving up his commission, Patton keeps trying to get back in the war and do what he is good at. He does not have to take everything his superior's throw at him, but he perseveres through hardship in order to get back into the war. He is even willing "to behave himself and keep his mouth shut."[191]

"Good War" themes are not merely reflected through the character of Patton. The film itself shows a plethora of "Good War" themes, including materialistic dominance. Only the beginning of the film shows a battle of army against army, Patton's versus Rommel's, which results in the retreat of the German army, due to the overpowering force of the American army. The majority of scenes, which address warfare, show the abundance of American or Allied weaponry and military vehicles. For example, on Sicily and later on in Bastogne. The German or Italian side is hardly shown, making it seem like they are either not present or materially not capable of withstanding the Allied Forces. 'Good War" themes are also reflected in unity and the multi-cultural aspect.

---

[189] *Patton*
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.

Apart from Patton being part of the Allied forces and fighting for the good cause and a victory, he and his direct staff also form a unity. When stuck in Malta Patton gives them the opportunity to leave him, they choose to stay with Patton, no matter where he ends up.[192] At the same time, *Patton* shows the ethnic diversity of the American army. Patton himself has an African-American soldier on his serving staff and he speaks to a wounded Latin-American soldier when he visits a hospital. Another way in which the multi-ethnic nature of the American army comes forward is in North-Africa. On multiple occasions, Patton wanders around an improvised graveyard where some of the graves are marked with a cross and others with a Star of David, showing that Jews and Christians fought, died and were buried together.

Even though *Patton* the film and Patton the character reflect certain "Good War" themes, the movie has an ambiguous view of war and, considering the context of the time of distribution. Like *The Dirty Dozen* and *The Bridge At Remagen, Patton* does not glorify the war. Even though it is a biopic of a general who had achieved a great reputation as a general and a strategic mastermind, the film does not focus on his battle achievements or victories. Instead, the film focuses on the man behind Patton and what drives him, which is not always pretty or positive. For example in a hospital scene where Patton had just pinned a medal on the pillow of a serious wounded soldier. Moments later, Patton comes across a crying soldier who "just can't take it anymore." Patton loses his cool and slaps the soldier and threatens to shoot him for desertion.[193] Even though he felt his actions were right and justified, the way he handled the situation was not worthy of an honorable man. Another example is Patton's response when he sees an important bridge near Palermo is blocked by a cart pulled by two mules. Even

---

[192] *Patton*
[193] Ibid.

though there is no imminent danger, instead of pulling the mules out of the way, Patton

shoots them, telling the men to throw them over the bridge and move the cart off the

bridge.[194] Not the kind of good behavior expected of a World War II general or depicted

in World War II films.

In other ways too, does the film castigate or question the purpose of war. Right after

Patton's patriotic speech at the beginning of the film, the screen shows dead bodies of

American soldiers and destroyed vehicles in the desert. The bodies are mangled,

bloodied, missing limbs and are picked empty by local villagers and Bedouins. Not an

image that reflects the good about a war. Or when Patton is sat in a jeep waiting for

several trucks to pass on a Sicilian country road. Several badly wounded soldiers pass

the jeep, and one of them keeps saying "take me home, please take me home."[195] This

taken together with the coward soldier in slapped by Patton in the hospital underline the

not so glamorous side of war. An example of questioning the war occurs when Patton's

troops face the Germans in North Africa. With a lot of tanks and foot soldiers on both

sides, many die due to the force of fighting. Patton then says: "What a hell of a waste of

fine infantry", indicating those men are dying for a wrong purpose.

It is also possible to see parallels between the movie and the Vietnam War, because of

the focus the film has in certain places. As previously mentioned, a reason for the length

of the Vietnam War was the American disregard for the Vietnamese history and culture.

Patton plays into this ignorance, by focusing on Patton's knowledge of historic sites and

battles, showing a feel and interest beyond fighting a war or saving a country from

oppression. Also Patton shows discontent for the Russians, refusing to drink and

---

[194] *Patton*
[195] Ibid.

celebrate with them and calling them "sons of bitches"[196], and threatening to "kick their asses back to Russia, where they belong."[197] At the time when *Patton* came out, Nixon was pushing through his policy of 'Vietnamization' in order to contain Communism. At the same time, the character Patton wants to fight the war his way, damn the consequences. That mirrors the American government's attitude during that time, which did not want to make concessions to the tactics in containing Communism and the North Vietnamese army, even though it cost a lot of many and American lives. Furthermore, at some point during the film, Patton's popularity becomes an issue. His favorability numbers are mentioned and the eleven percent con Patton is written off as obscene and ignored, while the pro-camp gets a lot more attention. This could be a reflection of the American political and social climate at the time, with the protestors being ignored by the government. Of course, it must be said that these parallels are pure speculation, but taking the context in regard, they are rather striking.

Patton is difficult to place. Considering it is a biographical film about a World War II hero, it should and it does reflect certain "Good War" themes. There is a sense of patriotism and American dominance through language and allegories. However, looking at the context of and the imagery used in film, it does show the negative side of war and what war does with people. Being a soldier and fighting for your country is not always glamorous. The question that arises, given the time *Patton* came out: is the film talking about World War II or the Vietnam War. Would the film have had the same personal focus, had it been made in the time of *The Enemy Below* or *The Great Escape*?

So looking at these case studies it can be said that all three films discussed do reflect "Good War" themes to a certain extent. Leadership, perseverance, American dominance

---

[196] *Patton*
[197] Ibid.

are themes that recur in all three films. However, the depiction of "Good War" themes becomes less obvious and the films themselves become darker and less glorifying of war. The characters are less vivacious and seem battle worn. Even the theme of leadership becomes less outspoken; it becomes a role that is taken on willy-nilly by several characters in the films, while in the presidential rhetoric it is leadership that is still very much emphasized. Looking at the context of the Vietnam War, this darker depiction reflects a darker period in Vietnam, as well as in the United States itself. The American people became aware of the atrocities happening on the other side of the world through media and popular culture, and stood up against the political leaders, who were still trying to sell the Vietnam War, wanting the bad war to end.

Conclusion

"For about twenty years after the war, I couldn't look at any film on World War Two. […] In all those films, people get blown up with their clothes and fall gracefully to the ground. You don't see anybody being blown apart. You don't see arms and legs and mutilated bodies. You only see an antiseptic, clean, neat way to die gloriously."[198] – Admiral Gene Laroque

The quote above is from a World War Two veteran which indeed indicates the glamorization of World War II in war films up until the mid 1960s. It has become clear from the analysis that the representation of good war themes in World War II films made during the Vietnam War does alter. The reflected themes stay the same, the focus remains on unity, leadership, sacrifice, and dominance, etcetera. But where the earlier made films, *The Enemy Below* and *The Great Escape* reflect a positive image of war, almost glorifying it, *The Thin Red Line* is already moving away from that positive image, showing more of the negative side of the war. Unlike the first two films, *The Thin Red Line* shows a less glorified image of war; it is more confronting, showing the brutal side of the fighting rather than keeping the imagery free of blood, death and gore. This change can be attributed to the increasing involvement of the United States in a war that is nothing like World War II. At the same time, *The Thin Red Line* is more questioning towards war than *The Enemy Below* and *The Great Escape*. Considering the presidential rhetoric during this time of the Vietnam War, which is full of "Good War" themes like democracy, leadership, freedom, and helping those who cannot defeat the enemy by themselves, *The Thin Red Line* cautiously starts to dispute these ideas,

---

[198] Terkel, 193

stepping away from positively portraying those "Good War" themes, focusing more on the soldier and his "Good War" themes, like perseverance, unity, and sacrifice.

The changing image from supporting war to questioning its purpose is carried through into later World War Two films. Even though films like *The Dirty Dozen, The Bridge at Remagen*, and *Patton* portray "Good War" themes, the way this themes are portrayed has changed, compared to the films before 1965. Themes like leadership, dominance, sacrifice, unity etcetera are still reflected, but the manner in which this is done, moves the reflections away from the idolization of war and being a soldier to questioning certain decisions and even the purpose of certain missions and war in general. Especially The Bridge at Remagen questions the purpose of war, considering that even though the films shows the Americans capturing the bridge, where it could have ended and no one would have been the wiser, it also mentions that not long after capture the bridge collapses, putting the focus on the necessity of the mission, rather than on the positive outcome. Even *Patton*, a film about a World War II hero, does not glorify war or fighting for your country. It may have put the focus on patriotism through imagery and rhetoric, but the film does not sell war as pleasant. Rather, it questions war and what war is about, specifically the Vietnam War.

Given the time in which these six films came out, it is possible to say that context of the Vietnam War, politically as well as socially, had an impact on the reflection of good war themes in World War II films. Before the United States became militarily involved and before it became clear the Vietnam War was not going to be a fast victory, the films had a more positive feeling to them; the Americans were the best, the smartest, and united in the face of danger from the enemy in the case of *The Enemy Below*, or the Americans played a pivotal role in operations and sacrificed their own freedom for a

greater cause, in the case of *The Great Escape*. However, as the Vietnam War progressed and became a military and economical burden, contaminating the good war sentiment, films addressing World War Two became more ambiguous in their reflection of "good war" themes. Even though they still portrayed the important themes like leadership, unity, perseverance, dominance, these themes are less outspoken and clouded as if the films are stepping away from the good war and into the bad atmosphere of Vietnam.

So the political and social context is of great influence on how good war themes are depicted. A positive feeling causes a positive reflection, while a negative outlook on the situation changes the reflection. This observation shows that there is indeed a connection between popular culture and the political and social realm. When political America can convince the American people to support the good cause, popular culture tends to be supportive and positive, as seen during World War II and the years after. But when the political decisions have negative ramifications for the American people and Americans distance themselves from politics in protest, popular culture also starts to move towards the negative outlook on the situation. That is what happened in World War II films during the Vietnam War; they started to focus on the negative, on the one hand, while retaining their good war rhetoric and themes, on the other. How could they not, they were good war movies after all.

However, what the analyses of these six World War II films, made during the Vietnam War, shows, is that films and popular culture do more than reflect the context of the political climate of that time. If they did just that, these films, despite having different storylines, would all be like *The Enemy Below* or *The Great Escape*; films which shed a positive light on America's participation in war and America's leadership in the world.

Instead, these films move from an assured pro-America and pro-war feeling to an ambiguous and detrimental representation of war and America's role in war. This change, taken together with the altering context and changing views, socially as well as politically, on America's participation in the Vietnam war, indicate that culture is not a mirror of or a tool for political policy. Instead, culture challenges decision made by political America, questions policies, and covertly and openly lays bare the problems society has with political decisions.

Considering this thesis is not large-scale research into the reflection of good war themes in different contexts, it proposes several options for further research. Of course expanding the research by looking at more World War II films made during the Vietnam War. Even though the movies analyzed in this thesis do provide a large enough base to draw preliminary conclusions, in order to make a conclusive claim, more movies should be analyzed. Also, keeping in mind the conclusion of this thesis, it would be of importance to investigate whether this change in reflection is also seen in World War II films made at a later stage in history or during any of the later wars America was involved in. Another interesting point that arose during the research was the previous mentioned lack of World War Two films in the final years of the Vietnam War. Was this due to the fact that rather than condemning war in general, movies could now freely address the Vietnam War? Or did it have to do with the unwillingness to contaminate the image of World War Two as the good war any further?

What is clear is that from the beginning World War II movies existed for a purpose. Be it a means to educate, propaganda, a way to unify a people, or simple entertainment, those films reflected a force of good, themes that stand for America, themes of

unification, domination, freedom and democracy, sacrifice, themes that make the second World War a good war. And even though these films were negatively influenced by a bad war and a social and political context filled with agitation, the good war film kept reflecting those themes that made it a good war film in the first place. This perseverance caused good war themes to be in integral part of popular culture and political rhetoric over the course of the twentieth century and still is today, showing that the image and myths of World War Two as "the best war ever" are infinite. And no bad or evil war can defeat that dominant and unifying force of good.

Bibliography

Articles and Essays

Adams, Michael C.C. "The Good War Myth and the Cult of Nostalgia." *The Midwest Quarterly*. Volume 40, Issue: 1 (September 1, 1998): 59-74.

Andrae, Thomas. ''From Menace to Messiah: The History and Historicity of Superman.'' In *American Media and Mass Culture*, edited by Donald Lazere, 124-138. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Basinger, Jeanine. "Translating War: The Combat Film Genre and *Saving Private Ryan*." *Perspectives: American Historical Association Newsletter*. Vol. 36, no. 7 (October 1998): 1, 43-47

Bostdorff, Denise and Steven Goldzwig, "Idealism and pragmatism in American foreign policy rhetoric: The case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam." In *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. vol. 24, issue 3 (Summer 1994): 515-521.

Jacobs, Lewis. "World War II and the American Film." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 7 (Winter, 1967-1968): 1-21.

Roeder, Jr., George H. "War as a Way of Seeing." In *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, edited by J. David Slocum, 69-80. NY: Routledge, 2006.

Ryan, Michael and Douglas Kellner, "Vietnam and the New Militarism." In *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, edited by J. David Slocum, 239-256. NY: Routledge, 2006.

Schats, Thomas. "World War II and the Hollwood 'War Film.'" In *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, edited by J. David Slocum, 147-156. NY: Routledge, 2006.

Williams, Doug. "Concealment and Disclosure: From "Birth of a Nation" to the Vietnam War Film." *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, Vol.12, No. 1, The Politics of Art/Art et politique (Jan., 1991), 29-47.

Wills, Garry. "Bully of the Free World." *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 2 (March 1999), 50-59.

Winkler, Carol. "Parallels in Preemptive War Rhetoric: Reagan on Libya; Bush 43 on Iraq." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Volume 10, Number 2 (Summer 2007), 303-334.

Books Cited

Adams, Michael C.C *The Best War Ever: America and World War II*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.

Adler, Selig. *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction*. New York: Free Press, 1957.

Basinger, Jeanine. *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Brokaw, Tom. *The Greatest Generation*. NY: Random House, 2005.

Bernard, Dick F. *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985.

Doherty, Thomas. *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Fleming, T. *The New Dealers' War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War Within World War II*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Fussell, Paul. *Wartime: Understand and Behavior in the Second World War*. NY: Oxford UP, 1989.

Gerstle, Gary. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Graubard, Stephen. *The Presidents: The Transformation of the American Presidency from Theodore Roosevelt to George W. Bush*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2006.

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975*. NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1979.

Hess, Gary R. *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.

Kail, F.M. *What Washington Said: Administration Rhetoric and the Vietnam War: 1949-1969*. NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1973.

Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire: in the Making of U.S. Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Kracaur, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

McWilliams, John C. *The 1960s Cultural Revolution*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Moss, George Donelson. *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*. Fourth Edition, NJ: Pearson Education Print, 2002.

O'Brien, Tim. *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up And Ship Me Home*. New York: Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1989.

Rydell, Robert W., and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill In Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922*. Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2005.

Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. A. *Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* Houghton Miffin, 1965.

Schulzinger, Robert D. *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam 1941-1975*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Shull, Michael S., and David Edward Wilt. *Hollywood War Films, 1937-1945*. NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996.

Stone, Norman. *The Atlantic And Its Enemies: A History of the Cold War*. NY: Basic Books, 2010.

Terkel, Studs. *"The Good War" An Oral History of World War Two*. London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1984.

Tomes, Robert R. *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975*. NY: New York University Press, 1998.

Wells, Tom. *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

White, David. and Richard Averson. *The Celluloid Weapon: Social Comment in the American Film*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

Electronic resources

Bodnar, John."Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America." *The American Historical Review*, June 2001.
http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/106.3/ah000805.html

Bush, George W. "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11," September 20, 2001. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*.
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=64731 (last accessed May 21, 2012)

Bush, George W. "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2005. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*.
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58745 (last accessed, May 21, 2012)

Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Address at Annual Dinner of the American Society of Newspaper Editors." April 21, 1956. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley.

The American Presidency Project. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10786 (last accessed May 28, 2012)

Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Radio and Television Address to the American People on "Our Future Security." November 13, 1957. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10950 (last accessed May 29, 2012)

Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Remarks at the Civic Auditorium, San Francisco, California." October 21, 1958. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11267. (last accessed May 29, 2012)

Eisenhower, Dwight, D. "The President's News Conference." April 7, 1954. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10202 (last accessed May 28, 2012)

Ford, Gerald R. "Address at a Tulane University Convocation." April 23, 1975. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4859 (last accessed June 6, 2012)

Ford, Gerald R. "Address to a Joint Session of the Congress." August 12, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4694 (last accessed June 3, 2012)

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin." August 4, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26418 (last accessed May 28, 2012)

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise." March 15, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26805 (last accessed May 21, 2012)

Johnson, Lyndon B. "The President's News Conference." April 1, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26859. (last accessed May 30, 2012)

Johnson, Lyndon B. "The President's News Conference." October 24, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29201 (last accessed June 4, 2012)

Kennedy, John F. "Conference on Vietnam." held on June 1, 1956. Online at *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum* http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/JFK-Speeches/Remarks-of-Senator-John-F-Kennedy-at-the-Conference-on-Vietnam-Luncheon-in-the-Hotel-Willard-Washing.aspx (last accessed May 28, 2012)

Kennedy, John F. "Inaugural Address." January 20, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8032 (last accessed May 30, 2012)

Kennedy, John F. "The President's News Conference." February 14, 1962. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9003 (last accessed May 28, 2012)

Nixon, Richard. "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia." April 30, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2490 (last accessed June 3, 2012)

Nixon, Richard. "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam." November 3, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303 (last accessed June 3, 2012)

Roosevelt, Franklin, D. "Address at Chicago." October 5, 1937. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15476 (last accessed, May 27, 2012)

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War with Japan." December 8, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16053 (last accessed May 20, 2012)

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union." January 6, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16092. (last accessed May 20, 2012)

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Message to Congress Urging Repeal of the Embargo Provisions of the Neutrality Law." September 21, 1939. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15813 (last accessed May 20, 2012)

U.A. "Army Presidential Unit Citation." *The Institute of Heraldry* http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Awards/army_presidential.aspx (last accessed June 7, 2012)

U.A. "Silver Star." *The Institute of Heraldry* http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Awards/silver_star.aspx (last accessed June 5, 2012)

Weber, Mark. "The 'Good War' Myth of World War Two," on Institute for Historic Review, http://www.ihr.org/news/weber_ww2_may08.html

Films

Arise, My Love. Dir. Mitchell Leisen. 110 min. Paramount, 1940. DVD

Beast of Berlin. Dir. Sam Newfield. 87 min. Producers Releasing Cooperation, 1939. DVD

The Bridge at Remagen. Dir. John Guillermin 115 min. Wolpers Pictures Ltd., 1969. DVD

Confessions of a Nazi Spy. Dir. Anatole Litvak. 104 min., Warner Bros, 1939. DVD

The Dirty Dozen. Dir. Robert Aldrich. 150 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1967. DVD

The Enemy Below. Dir. Dick Powell. 98 min. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1957. DVD

The Great Escape. Dir. John Sturges. 172 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures, Inc., 1963. DVD

Patton. Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner. 172 min. Twentieth Century Fox, 1970. DVD

The Thin Red Line. Dir. Andrew Marton. 99 min. Security Pictures, Inc., 1964. DVD

Other Documents

Kennedy, John F. "Advance Copy Report on His Trip to the Far East by the Hon. John F. Kennedy, Rep. 11th District of Massachusetts Over Mutual Broadcast Network From Station WOR, New York, New York," 15 Nov. 1951, Boston Office speech files, 8/16/47-11/51, Pre-Presidential Papers: Box 95, John F. Kennedy Library.

Miller, Arthur quoted in "The Face in the Mirror: Anti-Semitism Then and Now," *New York Times Book Review*, October 14, 1984

U.S. Department of State, "Neutrality act of 1935," *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S., Government Printing Office, 1943): 265-271