

We Were Soldiers

We Were Soldiers is a violent and bloody movie, starring Mel Gibson, that covers the first major battle that involved Americans during the Vietnam War. The story takes place in the year 1965 as Lt. Col. Hal Moore prepares and leads his troops, a helicopter soldier unit called the 7th Cavalry, to the "Valley of Death" (Ia Drang Valley, Vietnam). Col. Moore promises his men that he won't leave anyone behind. Another storyline follows the lives of the wives of the soldiers left behind, portraying war from their perspective. It reveals their sense of companionship as they join together for support while their husbands are away. After the battle begins they begin to receive condolence letters by taxi delivery. This is the only notice of the death of a loved one.

Lt. Col. Hal Moore was depicted correctly in this film as far as I can tell. In a personal interview he affirmed his stated commitment to his men that he wouldn't leave any one behind, dead or alive. His interview comments included the following statement: "We were a family of fighting men. Before we left for Vietnam, I gathered all my men on the parade ground at Ft. Benning, Georgia, just like in the movie, and I told them that we're going into battle far from home against a tough enemy on his own turf. I told them: "Some of us are going to die ? maybe me, certainly some of you. But I promise you this: If you go down, I'm going to bring you back. And if I go down, I hope you bring me back." (Jasper, 2002). There are however some claims that he didn't keep his word as shown in the following quote: "Yes, we did return to the Ia Drang. ++In fact, we air assaulted back into XRay. ++It was quiet." ++The mission was to search for and retrieve the remains of some MIAs.(Missing in Action) ++We found them. The battlefield had been cleaned up pretty good by both sides. We found a scattering of stuff and I noticed the

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remains of one NVA soldier near the "Ant Hill" that sheltered the command post during the battle" (Moore, 2006).

The film was very accurate in its portrayal of Col. Moore's wife Julie. As depicted in the film, she "challenged and stopped the Army's impersonal practice of delivering these notices (of combat deaths) by taxi" and assumed her responsibility as required "by her position as the commander's wife, [and] personally comforted each bereaved family and attended every funeral of every soldier lost in combat under her husband's command"(Bratproud, 2005). "She also raised un-shirted Hell with the Pentagon about so callous a method of notifying the families. Within two weeks the policy was changed and a new one instituted, requiring that an officer and a chaplain personally deliver the news" (Galloway, 2004).

This film included a short storyline that followed a reporter Joe Galloway, starred by Gary Pepper, who went to the la Drang Valley to witness, as a war correspondent, the war in Vietnam. As far as I've been able to find, his story was also very accurately portrayed as well. In the words of Col. Moore, "I looked over and saw Joe Galloway sitting with his back against a small tree, camera in his lap, rifle across his knees. I knew why I was there. I'm a professional military man and it's my job. But what the hell was HE doing there? Turned out he was doing his job too" (We Were Soldiers, 2011). Galloway is the co-writer, along with Hal Moore, of the book "We Were Soldiers Once and Young" on which this movie is based. He was awarded a belated Bronze Star with Valor for actions depicted in the film which "is the only such medal of valor awarded to a civilian by the Army during the Vietnam War" (We Were Soldiers, 2011).

This film portrays the story of American troops in Vietnam. It is therefore consistent with the study in our class of US involvement in world dynamics and our history as a nation.

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Although we haven't covered the Vietnam War in class yet, I assume that we will shortly. This battle in the Ia Drang Valley is certainly a part of our history.

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