

There is no “good war.” World War 2, if any would be the best war, we were there for a reason. We, with several other countries stepped in to stop a few countries from trying to take over the world. Vietnam on the other hand, was the United States jumping into a conflict we didn’t really need to be in and not making the situation any better. This essay will contrast and compare the two movies I viewed about these conflicts.

In *Saving Private Ryan* we enter at one the bloodiest days in human history, the D-Day invasion of Normandy and the aftermath of one man losing his three brothers. It follows a group of eight men that go searching through France to try and find Private Ryan. Their job is to get him home. The movie itself focuses entirely on the war and what they are going through to find this young private. It really shows what was happening in world war two. The men that were there and just trying to survive and also what war will do to you. When they finally get to the top of Normandy beach after surviving the slaughter that was the storming they get to the German holdouts and use flame throwers to burn them out and one person yells “don’t shoot them, let them burn.” On the other side of this when Captain Miller lets the German soldier go after Wade gets shot he explains “every man that I kill, the farther away from home I feel.” This contrast is very interesting. On one side you have pure hatred for what the Germans did or were doing and you have Captain Miller who is clearly just exhausted. He’s sick of fighting, he’s sick of losing men. He’s done with the whole thing.

We Were Soldiers on the other hand was more about the relationships that were happening than the war itself, besides the beginning of the movie. There is no actual movement by American forces to close to an hour into the movie. The first forty-five or so minutes are spent on character development and storyline development. Though once it gets going it is a story about the first major American altercation in the Vietnam war. Where two thousand North Vietnamese outnumbered some four hundred American troops in combat on what amounted to the size of a football field. The story follows several men in the 1/7th Air Cavalry division. They were trying something that had never been done, dropping men into war from helicopters. It follows the men in this unit as they go into war, and examines their families instead of just what they personally were dealing with.

I think to compare these two wars wouldn’t do either justice. On the surface they were both conflicts to stop a country from invading another, but at the start of Vietnam there was no Pearl Harbor. There wasn’t a massacre that no one saw coming. The Gulf of Tonkin was a means to an end, to get us over there. World War 2 had fighting on six out of the seven continents. Vietnam was pretty much only in and around South East Asia. They also both started in different points in their respective wars. *We Were Soldiers* started at the very first, American, campaign of the war. They were the first ones to really come under fire and a lot of them had no idea what they were going into. In the scene on the ridge where they tune into what’s coming in over the radio from the South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese conflict a lot of the men in the shot look dumbfounded by what they are about to walk into. Whereas in *Saving Private Ryan* those men, by the time they hit Normandy, had been there for a while. They weren’t “green recruits fresh out of basic. They had been fighting for some time, or so you are lead to believe.

Another key difference was how the movies were framed. The backdrop is roughly the same between the two

movies, soldiers going into the unknown in another country to fight because that is what soldier's do. But *We Were Soldiers* is framed in a more movie way. It was written to show the love interest, the conflicts they have about men going, and the aftermath as far as what happens to families. *Saving Private Ryan* is framed in a more documentary way. They don't add in all the "fluff" to make it easier to digest. They didn't need a love interest or to show how families react, aside from the main plot about the other three brothers dying so having to get Ryan home. They jumped in during the conflict and showed the men who were at that point confused and exhausted. When they are going through the dog tags and looking to see if Ryan's was one of them they are laughing, they are so detached from the situation that they couldn't help but joke as they tossed, effectively, dead men between them. That would not have been the case in *We Were Soldiers*. The dead men that they showed were yellow letters that were being hand delivered in a montage by Colonel Moore's and Lieutenant Geoghegan's wives.

While both movies at their core are about conflicts that have happened in the past, they both start at different times in those conflicts so it is really hard to compare them. *Saving Private Ryan* accurately showed what that pivotal point in World War 2 was like. The men, the tension, the exhaustion whereas *We Were Soldiers* showed men fresh out of boot camp at the start of a conflict they didn't really understand how to fight. They both are highly regarded movies about their respective wars, and they both show how much of a massacre a situation can be if we don't know what we are walking into. War as they say "is hell" and both of these movies accurately show that point.