

## **WE WERE SOLDIERS**

Rated R

*"We Were Soldiers"* is a stunning, fast paced movie about the Vietnam War by director Randall Wallace. The film is unique in that its intent is to dramatically show the highest characteristics of humanity in the most inhuman environment ever created; namely, war. The movie leaves the viewer speechless as scenes of heroism, loyalty, love, friendship, and courage take us into the battlefield in the first encounter between North Vietnamese troops and U.S. Soldiers.

*"We Were Soldiers"* is based on true events as recorded by the film's two central characters: Colonel Hal Moore (Mel Gibson), and war correspondent Joe Galloway (Barry Pepper). The film depicts the events that took place on November 14-18, in 1965 in a mountain valley, where unknown to the U.S. military, 4000 North Vietnamese troops were encamped.

The movie opens with Col. Moore, a gutsy, dedicated soldier, preparing his troops for their assignment. His men are an elite group of 395 soldiers and, for the first time in U.S. history, combat soldiers reach the target area by helicopter and dropped to the ground. Col. Moore displays deep loyalty for his men and works to instill them with an overriding commitment to each other. He sums this up by saying, "...in battle your only friend is your fellow soldier." Moore clearly knows the power of this bond and he aptly convinces his men of its necessity in war.

Still, Col. Moore is more than a man of words, he is a man of honor and it is his commitment to his men that makes this movie stand apart from other war epics. As they are about to leave, Col. Moore promises his men, "When we go into battle, I will be the first to step foot onto the battlefield, the last to step off the battlefield, and I will leave no one dead or alive on the battlefield, so we will all come home together." As gruesome and horrific as this battle was, Moore did bring them all home together.

Col. Moore is a very devout Catholic, and throughout the film he prays with his children, his wife, and his men, both on and off the field. His prayers are thoughtful and reverent and portray an individual who depends on his faith to undertake the direst of tasks. In an unusual twist, the film also provides witness to the acts of courage and love stateside; Col. Moore's wife walks along the rows of housing to deliver death notices to the other wives on base. In her terror-filled eyes we see the pain of an ultimate sacrifice.

Another interesting aspect of the film is its humanistic portrayal of the enemy. The North Vietnamese were shown as valiant, dedicated men who sacrificed their lives for their country. And like Col. Moore, the North Vietnamese colonel prayed for his fallen soldiers and offered gratitude for having given their lives in battle.

One could say, with all the love and prayer in this movie, why did this particular battle occur in the first place? Obviously, neither Col. Moore nor the men of the 7th Calvary had a say in starting the Vietnam War. Yet, when asked to risk their lives in service to

their country they did so with all the honor, dignity, and determination befitting men of courage.

The movie is rated R for language and vivid war violence. It is both sensitive and touching at once, and is likely to provoke strong feelings of compassion, even sadness. The fine acting and directing leave you gripping your chair with heart-pounding anxiety. It is a film worth watching. Director Randall Wallace states that the goal of "*We Were Soldiers*" is to help bring healing to the Vietnam soldiers and their families. The movie accomplishes this and much more.

*By Curt Levang*