Braveheart Vs. Full Metal Jacket Essay, Research Paper

Cinema Combat: Braveheart vs. Full Metal Jacket

War is an ever-present entity in the world of cinema. The films Braveheart and Full Metal Jacket show strikingly similar, yet different aspects of war. Braveheart is an epic tale of love lost and how the circumstances surrounding that loss contributed in sparking one man’s emotions, eventually leading to a bloody rebellion and his country’s emancipation for a dictatorial England. Set in 13th century England and Scotland, the film portrays the legend of a man named William Wallace, a commoner bent on unifying the Scots and leading them to their freedom. Throughout the film Wallace is identified as a demigod, with stories ranging from his height being seven feet to his presumed ability to shoot balls of fire from his eyes as seen in the dialogue at the battle of Falkirk.

“Sons of Scotland, I am William Wallace,” proclaimed Wallace in an attempt to rally the Scottish troops.

A young soldier contested, “William Wallace is 7 feet tall.”

Wallace responded, “Yes, I’ve heard. He kills men by the hundreds, and if he were here he’d consume the English with fireballs from his eyes and bolts of lightning from his arse. I am William Wallace, and I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What will you do with that freedom? Will you fight?”

In some ways he is a god to his people. He unites them to fight against insurmountable odds in the English, something no other Scottish lord could do. His contrast in savagery and nobility is astounding. In battle he has no equal, yet in his willingness to die for freedom he is most impressive.

Full Metal Jacket, a masterpiece directed by the late great Stanley Kubrick, tells a story of a somewhat different kind. Full Metal Jacket is first set in Parris Island Boot Camp, as a platoon of new recruits make ready for their deployment to Vietnam. The camp plays a pivotal role in the movie, as the story of the lives of the recruits becomes more intricate. One recruit, nicknamed Private Pyle by the Sergeant due to his inadequacies, goes insane after the weeks of emotional and physical abuse. The catalyst of his insanity occurs as the platoon has had enough of paying for his mistakes. They return the favor by holding him down and beating him with bars of soap encased in towels. This leads to his insanity and ultimately the murder-suicide of the Sergeant and Pyle. The first half of the movie is an understandable reflection of the terror that would eventually enter the lives of these soldiers during war.

These movies portray very different, yet strikingly similar aspects of war. Granted, both have savage battle scenes with enough blood and gore to make even the strongest stomach turn, yet both lend a sort of subtlety and honor to the notion of war. Freedom is worth dying for, as William Wallace eventually finds out, but the same can’t be said for the marines in Full Metal Jacket. Full Metal Jacket shows the true horror of war, complete with the details of Vietnam veterans’ stories. Women and children were murdered with equal audacity as the men. Villages were destroyed and burnt to the ground. Soldiers were tortured and, when they were of no further use, executed. The movies portray two very real, very different aspects of war.

One factor that separates the movies their underlying story lines. In Braveheart, the real story begins not at the slaying of the nobles but at the execution of Wallace’s secret wife. Wallace kept their sacred bond secret to avoid the doctrine of prima nocta, the English policy of a noble’s right to sexual privileges with a newlywed wife on the night of the wedding. The conflict arises as she denies the advances of an English Lieutenant. He then proceeds to have her arrested, and after learning of her marriage, has her executed. After learning of the death of his beloved, Wallace sets out to sack the fort of the magistrate. This all culminates in an all out rebellion and ultimately leads to larger battles, which in turn leads to the capture and execution of Wallace, but eventually spawns Scottish freedom.

On the contrary, Full Metal Jacket’s underlying story line is one of maturity, although strangely entangled in the sheer horror of war. As previously stated the story starts in Parris Island, South Carolina, at a Marine training facility. The movie actually portrays two different, yet intertwined stories of the effects military service. The maturity process is learned at Parris Island, but the real life experiences come later in the film, as the reality of war is set. American Marines find themselves fighting halfway across the world, for a people they don’t know, and for a government hell-bent on stopping Communism any way it can. The vibe of the experience can best be summed up with a quote from Private Joker: ” I wanted to meet stimulating and interesting people of an ancient culture, and kill them. I wanted to be the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill.” This is only a precursor of things to come.

The nature of war is set very differently in these two movies, although they share some certain characteristics. In Braveheart, war is a result of years of English oppression on its Scottish subjects. In contrast, the Vietnam War is a result of the spread of Communism. Both wars are a result of some higher power’s oppression, but the reasons for involvement of the main characters differ severely. The Scots in Braveheart are fighting for their personal freedom, whereas American troops in Full Metal Jacket are fighting under command of a government that feels it has to be the police officer of the world. The Scottish revolution is a direct cry for freedom by an oppressed people, while the Vietnam War is a civil war in which American troops fought and died for a cause they didn’t share.

The riveting battle scenes are one factor that both films share. The battle scenes in Braveheart make for a compelling side to the drama of Scottish independence. They show what the price could possibly be for freedom, and what men were willing to do to get it. At the battle of Falkirk, Wallace sets in grim detail what might happen to his men, as seen in the quote ” Ay, fight and you may die, run and you’ll live. At least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!”

The battle scenes in Full Metal Jacket are equally compelling. They help to show the true horror of war, not only the physical effects but the psychological and emotional as well. Set in the wake of the Tet Offensive, most of the battle scenes are in urban centers, as opposed to the presumption that all combat took place in Vietnamese jungles. The Marines deal with snipers, landmines, and enemy patrols, most of which came in the form of Russian tanks. An interesting plot twist comes about upon the apprehension of an enemy sniper, who happens to be female. On the other hand, Braveheart never subjected women in the battle scenes, but times have indeed changed.

An interesting difference between the movies is dialogue. Granted, both movies are set far apart in time and take place on opposite ends of the Earth, but the dialogue in both movies makes them equally verbally stimulating as they are visually. Quotes from the scenes tend to set the overall tone for each movie. In Full Metal Jacket the crassness of Sergeant Hartman can be both seen and heard in the boot camp scenes. Quotes such as ” A rifle is only a tool. It’s a hard heart that kills. If your killer instincts are not clean and strong you will hesitate at the moment of truth. You will not kill. You will become dead Marines. And then you will be in a world of s\*\*t. Because Marines are not allowed to die without permission! Do you maggots understand?” show just how real the movie is, and just how demanding the military can be.

Quotes from Braveheart allow the viewer to feel as if they’re standing alongside William Wallace, lying in wait for the English. His previously mentioned motivational speech definitely set the tone for the remainder of the movie. His most memorable dialogue, however, may be his death scream of “Freedom!” The closing credits also feature him saying, ” In the year of our lord thirteen fourteen, patriots of Scotland, starving and outnumbered, charged the fields of Bannockburn. They fought like warrior poets. They fought like Scotsmen. And won their freedom.” showing that all his effort was not in vain.

Both movies are epic war tales complete with everything you would expect in a war movie. Yet both entail dramas not thought to exist in such films, which sets them apart from the rest. In short, both Braveheart and Full Metal Jacket are great films in themselves, but incredible when factors such as dialogue, story lines, and overall screenplay are taken into consideration. These are the reasons that both Braveheart and Full Metal Jacket are two of the greatest combat cinemas of all time.

347