

Women in the WWII War Zone & Four U.S. Cavalry Movies

Jonathan Lighter

Two Films: Women in the WWII War Zone *SO PROUDLY WE HAIL! (1943)*

Released in September, 1943, producer-director Mark Sandrich's well-made but often mawkish *So Proudly We Hail!* was the first of two Hollywood pictures to capitalize on the activities of American women in the midst of defeat in the Philippines in World War II. Favorable timing has bestowed landmark status on Sandrich's film over its successor, Richard Thorpe's "*Cry 'Havoc,'*" which appeared in November (double-decker quotes and all). *Proudly* was an original screenplay; playwright Allan R. Kenward's *Cry Havoc* (no quotes), however, had been one of the year's most widely performed stage dramas.¹ Though nursing behind the lines in World War I was the subject of 1930's downbeat *War Nurse*, the two films of 1943 introduced to the screen the theme of noncombatant nurses and nursing volunteers working heroically under continual threat from the enemy. All three movies publicized the unswerving work of able American women in a war zone.

Unfortunately, Hollywood wasn't ready, in 1943, to cut out its usual helpings of sentimental hokum. The naïve female audience wooed by *Proudly* was evinced by posters touting "The First Great Love Story of Our Girls at the Fighting Front!" (Military calamities weren't a selling point, regardless of the '43 movie's dramatic elements.)

So Proudly We Hail! takes its inspiration from the story of "Eight American girls – Army Nurses" who narrowly escaped the disastrous defeat in the Philippines.² Neither character nor

incident, though, gives us any reason to believe that specific nurses with real biographies are portrayed, rather than concoctions based on “women’s fiction” in slick magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall’s* – something James Agee noted acerbically at the time.³ For Allan Scott’s screenplay is shot through with tiresome melodrama, facile characters, and schmaltzy situations. Predictably for wartime, the regular-army nurses (“just kids from all walks of life”) endorse the American one-for-all “melting pot” through surnames like “Schwartz,” “Armstrong,” and “Dacelli.” Lieutenant Larson (Barbara Britton) gets a tearful farewell from heavily accented, immigrant parents. Flirty Lieutenant O’Doul (Paulette Goddard), who makes a point of always packing her musette bag with a fetching negligee, comically dumps *two* fiancés in San Francisco just as the unit heads east a few days before Pearl Harbor. Lieutenant Davidson (Claudette Colbert in her familiar quiet, warm-hearted persona) is the imperturbable big sister. At sea on December 8, steaming for the Philippines, new arrival Lieutenant D’Arcy (Veronica Lake) is rescued from a torpedoed ship that explodes on screen suddenly and effectively. Surly and uncommunicative, D’Arcy eventually screams that she wants “to kill Japs!” – all of them if possible, but at the very least “every blood-stained one I can get my hands on!” It seems she watched *her* fiancé killed at Pearl Harbor by “sixty bullets” from a single Japanese plane, “Sixty!” (she repeats). But getting a covert opportunity to bump off some wounded prisoners, she can’t do it. “I didn’t have the guts to, I suppose,” she weeps to Davidson, “I couldn’t even kill a wounded *rat*!” But Davidson “sets her straight” with understanding, and she turns conscientious and nice. When they were ordered to Bataan, someone had said, “I only hope it’s got a decent beauty parlor. My hair is a mess.” So it’s no surprise to be invited to chuckle when, besieged, bombarded, and cut off on the Peninsula, the girls have to don men’s coveralls, clodhoppers, and underwear – everything an unflattering “size 46.” As rations dwindle, steak from an army

mule is sort of funny too: "so stubborn it stuck in your throat!" As the Japanese close in, Lieutenant Peterson (Ann Doran) shouts prophetically and uncomfortably at the audience, "Do you know what the Japs do to women? I was in Nanking! I saw what they did! They fight over women like dogs!" D'Arcy walks out to feign surrender and atone for her previous unprofessional attitude by blowing herself up with a tucked-in grenade, buying time for the rest. Sonny Tufts, later a no-good sidewinder in *The Virginian* (1946), is a big, gawky marine named "Kansas," who comes and goes to supply romance for O'Doul – and more comic relief when she bops him on the noggin to drag him off Bataan with her.

From start to finish, *So Proudly We Hail!* is Hollywood's idea of a "woman's picture" made topical by combat settings and brief patriotic and idealist speeches ("And *this* time, if we don't make it right,...all our dead [from both world wars] will rise up and destroy us"). There's throwaway, racist propaganda too, when a pet capuchin monkey wearing toy spectacles is named "Tojo...Because he looks like him." Though a Spanish-Filipino surgeon (Ted Hecht) philosophizes on body versus spirit as he delivers a baby whose mother is dying from a Japanese bullet, the whole exercise adds up to a tear-jerking exploitation of Bataan and Corregidor that poses as an ode to the American and Filipino courage displayed there. Any charitable doubts of the film's three-hankie mission vanish when the previously unmentioned son of the nurses' matronly Captain (Mary Servoss) suddenly appears in a jungle hospital, fatally wounded. (Worse, the lad has a three-month-old child he's never seen; worse yet, his father too had died in World War I, but at least Ma is fortuitously there to comfort him.) Naturally, though, there's worse than that. A handsome enlisted patient (George Reeves), a professor in civilian life, wins Davidson's heart. The chaplain marries them in spite of regulations, they spend a few wonderful hours' honeymoon under the stars in an artillery emplacement, but then.... Well, it's

all laid on with a spatula. When, after the American-Filipino collapse, a doctor reads aloud the deceased Reeves's final letter to Colbert, who's on shipboard catatonic from grief and shellshock, there's not a dry eye on deck: a violin sobs, and all seven of her colleagues break down in tears. Still silent, Colbert begins to revive and smile. Her face brightens as the sun breaks gloriously through storm clouds above the Pacific. The orchestra swells. The End.

(Reeves's letter, by the way, encloses the deed to his family farm, now Colbert's; evidently he carried it everywhere, like Paulette Goddard with her negligee.) On the positive side, Goddard got an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress, Sonny Tufts was promoted to her co-star in 1944's *I Love a Soldier*, and the final Japanese night attack on Bataan is sufficiently hellish for the '40s, as are the scenes on Corregidor. Also a virtue is the frequent sense of chaos and fear as crowds of Americans and Filipinos strain at the bits of discipline and self-control to keep from devolving into a maddened stampede. So it's fair to say the schmaltz isn't quite unadulterated: it's just that the realistic passages exist mainly to keep the romance from happening all at once.

"CRY 'HAVOC'" (1943)

Thorpe's "*Cry 'Havoc'*" is touted by the trailer for its "11 *Glamorous Stars*," italics in the original. Under the smiling faces of the movie's three stars, the posters read "Girls Who Live Dangerously!" Sounds like it could be a lark, but this movie treats the lives of American women on Bataan more grimly and intensely than one might have thought. Scriptwriter Paul Osborn improves considerably on Kenward's stage play, which improbably had found time to expose a German-American nurse as a Nazi spy.⁴ The remaining screen scenario is sufficiently persuasive despite a residual stagey feel. It can seem stifling at times, particularly for a generation accustomed to busier sets and ever roving, ever jiggling cameras. But that confined feeling

reflects in a small way the very real confinement of the characters, particularly as the enemy closes in, as well as in contrast to the sporadic scenes outside.

Except for three Army Nurse Corps professionals (Marsha Hunt, Fay Bainter, and Margaret Sullivan), these women are all civilian volunteers from Manila who represent the usual potpourri of American regions and classes, not excepting one Filipina (Fely Franquelli) in a small role. Independent of *So Proudly We Hail!*, "*Cry 'Havoc'*" similarly features an ensemble of capable American women functioning heroically under Japanese bombardment. (It differs in a minor way from other films about women in a combat zone, including *So Proudly We Hail!*, by keeping the masculine apex of a love triangle entirely off camera: this focuses all our attention on the women. More to the point, however, while the crew in *Proudly* are Regular Army nurses, in *Havoc*, all but two are untrained civilians, officially solicited to aid Sullivan and her military colleagues. And they rise quickly to the soon-to-be-hopeless occasion. As in *Proudly*, the Production Code and audience sensitivity protected the soldier patients from really shocking wounds; but while *Havoc* likewise protects the paying customers from visual horror, it does deal in more sobering talk and handles its theme with greater assurance. The story – set mostly underground, like *Journey's End* – forgoes preliminaries: in scene one Sullivan is already headed for a breakdown from overwork and malaria (a little something only men get in the other movie). Scene two brings in some of the theoretically required comic relief as the volunteers appear, helping to shove the farm wagon that was supposed to convey them through the deep mud. There are laughs when Grace (Joan Blondell) arrives at the dugout that serves as their claustrophobic bunkhouse announcing she's a burlesque queen who can peel like a banana and trots daintily about to give the idea, while Alabama belle Nadia (Diana Lewis) is predictably goofy, and Pat (Ann Sothorn) is a snarky, seen-it-all hash-slinger. All are sadly predictable comic

types. But the laughter soon dies, pretty much definitively, as veteran nurse Captain Marsh (Bainter) advises the newcomers that "Any time now, a hell beyond anything you ever imagined will break loose." *Will*, not *might*. Dysentery, malaria, and beriberi are rife. As the enemy closes in, rations become "horse meat, mule meat, and monkey meat. Quite a variety." Nobody finds new love or comments on the unflattering coveralls. Japanese planes repeatedly bomb the nearby wood frame hospital. One of the women's non-medical duties is to inventory the personal effects of the dead, little bags containing wallets, photos of loved ones, a rabbit's foot. The young idealist (Dorothy Morris) goes missing during an air raid and her sister (Heather Angel) searches frantically "among all those stinking bodies...picking up pieces of flesh...pieces of flesh that might be Sue!" before learning that Sue's been buried alive for four days in a collapsed dugout with a number of dead GIs. When they dig her out, she's insane. As the noose tightens around them, Lieutenant Smith doesn't think the volunteers can hold up; to Marsh she says, "They're Americans, Cap. They believe in the happy ending!" "*I'm* an American," Marsh replies. "I don't."

By later, tougher standards of cinema, *Havoc*, like *Proudly*, tilts toward soap opera, if less crazily; yet, like many World War II era movies, its flaws are those of style, not concept. *Proudly* doesn't exactly "glamorize" war: it cheaply sentimentalizes it by accentuating mostly imaginary positives and populates it with some frivolous bachelorettes. *Havoc* goes easier. It finds nothing positive beyond the extraordinary (and so often unsung) guts and dedication of the caregivers. The brief, obligatory flag-waving (if that's what it is) comes in simple and honest terms: "We're fighting for our lives." At the end, the altruistic women are led off to captivity by the Japanese, hardly the "happy ending" they supposedly believed in. In spite of changes in times and methods, "*Cry 'Havoc'*" – thanks in part to strong work by Sothorn and Sullavan – standouts in a

generally fine cast – is still a rewarding and occasionally moving motion picture. You may not even notice the violins, though Agee must have: he called the film “fourth-rate.”⁵

It’s easy, of course, to criticize such pictures. But America was at war in 1943 and uncertain of victory. Audiences, young and old, male and female, were fascinated by affecting images of the war zones where their friends and relatives served. Industry executives, like anyone else, hoped for a prompt victory and didn’t have to be pushed into fitting some emotional patriotism in their movies. Films like *So Proudly We Hail!* showed horrors of war that were laundered and romanticized and rationalized enough to be borne by audiences seeking diversion from (among other things) World War II itself. But if Paramount, the studio behind *So Proudly*, had been interested solely in entertainment – to the exclusion of morale-building and enlightening if superficial imagery – it would have made a screwball comedy instead. War movies in both world wars often functioned a little like the tear-jerking parlor songs of the American Civil War: the emotions displayed were stylized and predictable, and formulaically conveyed, but these mediated versions represented emotions of grief and patriotism felt by multitudes. The Philippines Campaign of 1941-42 was a catastrophe, resulting in Japanese control of the Commonwealth and the largest surrender of U.S. forces in history. As both films show, personnel were reduced to eating mule and carabao meat on Corregidor with scant medical supplies. Nurses and doctors worked under falling bombs, as the Japanese, non-signatories to the Hague and Geneva Conventions, targeted clearly marked hospitals. Ordinary people like D’Arcy sometimes became monsters – or heroes. Nanking was real and worse than O’Doul says. American women proved again (as they had on the frontier, in the Civil War, and in World War I) that when the future was at stake, they could and would be as tough as men.⁶

NOTES

¹ Kenward's play debuted in November, 1942, on a Hollywood stage, and *Life* magazine published an appreciative two-page spread (November 16, 1942, 124-125). It was retitled *Proof Thro' the Night* on Broadway, where, owing to conflicts between playwright and producer, it closed after only ten performances before going on the road under its original title and subsequently being staged by theater groups around the country: Barbara Seaman, *Lovely Me: The Life of Jacqueline Susann* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 132-133.

² On May 3, 1942, eleven American army nurses and one navy nurse were evacuated from Corregidor to Australia by the submarine *Spearfish*. Dozens of others, not so fortunate, were held in a Japanese prison camp till the end of the war. See "Nurse Tells of Bataan Hospital Raid," *Chicago Sun* (July 10, 1942), 1; Melissa R. Rosenbaum, "A Navy Nurse Remembers," *U.S. Navy Medicine* (June, 1981), 22-25. For the story of the real rescued nurses, see Elizabeth M. Norman, *We Band of Angels* (N.Y.: Random House, 1999).

³ He wrote in the *Nation*, "This is probably the most deadly-accurate picture that will ever be made of what war looks like through the lenses of a housewives'-magazine romance": James Agee, *Agee on Film* (New York: Obolensky, 1958), 52.

⁴ That whole subplot is gone from the film, along with some daringly sympathetic lesbianism – which was resolved for the audience by a gunshot from the spy: Albert Wertheim, *Staging the War: American Drama and World War II* (Bloomington: U. of Indiana Press, 2004), 63-67.

⁵ Agee, 62.

⁶ Neither film, be it noted, was made in response to the infamous Bataan Death March of April, 1942, which resulted in the deaths from illness, sunstroke, and sadistic abuse of some 600 American and 10,000 Filipino POWs. The March, now one of the best-known incidents of the Second World War, was not publicized by Washington until January, 1944: "Survivors' Statements on Japanese Abuse of Prisoners on Bataan," *New York Times* (January 28, 1944), 6.

Four U.S. Cavalry Movies

Fort Apache

John Ford's name is synonymous with the Hollywood western. From his first feature, *Straight Shooting* (1917), through the classics *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), Ford helped define the western and guide it to maturity. With *Fort Apache* (1948), he introduced the "cavalry movie" as the Hollywood western's military arm. With two further films, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *Rio Grande* (1950), he perfected the cavalry genre. In this he was aided by screenwriters Frank S. Nugent (former film critic of the *New York Times*), James Kevin McGuinness (writer of Ford's wartime documentary *Midway*), and James Warner Bellah (novelist, Army Air Forces colonel, and contributor of frontier tales to the *Saturday Evening Post*).

But of course Ford's *Fort Apache* didn't entirely lack precedent. So early as 1909, Francis Boggs had directed the histrionic, two-reel *Boots and Saddles*, in which the cavalry conspicuously arrives "in the nick of time" to save soldier captives from being burned at the stake by diabolical "redskins."¹ In the same year, Boggs's *On the Little Big Horn* tried to turn the death of Custer and some 270 men of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry into thrilling melodrama. In 1912 Thomas Ince produced a spectacular dramatization of *Custer's Last Fight*, which starred – and was directed by – John Ford's older brother Francis. It might be argued that cavalry movies got seriously underway with the 1942 release of Raul Walsh's *They Died with their Boots On*, starring Errol Flynn and Olivia De Havilland in a fantastical hagiography of George Armstrong Custer; but, strictly speaking, Walsh's movie belonged to a different, long established category: the

unapologetic, legend-burnishing frontier biopic in the manner of *Davy Crockett* (1916), *Wild Bill Hickok* (1923), *Frontier Marshal* (1939: a story of Wyatt Earp), *Jesse James* (also 1939), and *Kit Carson* (1940).²

Irrespective of roots, Ford's *Fort Apache* and its two sequels remain distinct from what came before. Unlike earlier films, these three center on life – including family life – at army posts in the desert southwest in the 1870's and '80s, where idealized Americans face familiar challenges of the West, and the U.S. cavalry, when properly commanded, is the only effective force for civilized order. While frankly fictional, all three are romantic-realistic rather than sensationally pulpy.

John Ford was a resolutely pictorial, unalterably middlebrow auteur, whose depictions of the Old West are frequently as classic as any other pop cultural product. Whether *Fort Apache* (1948) or its first sequel, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), is – of Ford's trilogy – the *Casablanca* of the frontier cavalry must remain unsettled. Adroit direction of talented performers aided by pacey plots, starkly beautiful landscapes, stirring scores by Richard Hageman, and a persuasive (if not quite accurate) attention to period detail help place both films on Ford's impressive list of popular film classics. Their success, plus that of the highly entertaining but perhaps less substantial *Rio Grande*, led to a stream of no less than 75 imitations throughout the '50s and '60s in theaters and on TV, the vast majority undistinguished in both plot and dramaturgy. But thanks to John Ford and his colleagues, who almost alone brought the romanticized image of the western soldier to magical consummation, the U.S. cavalry tale had become a genre in itself.³

Top billing in the three films goes to Ford's favorite star, John Wayne – tough, smart, amiable, and efficient in some of his best roles. All of Ford's prominent characters are splendidly acted by an A-list of talents; besides Wayne, they include Henry Fonda, Ward Bond, George

O'Brien, Ben Johnson, Harry Carey, Jr., Mae Marsh, Shirley Temple, Joanne Dru, and Maureen O'Hara. All three films feature light-hearted moments and occasional shenanigans by Victor McLaglen as a tippling, stage-Irish first sergeant, and all three are concocted with enough filmmaking skill to prompt repeated viewings.

Playing decidedly against type (as he had as a violent loner in 1947's *The Long Night*) is Henry Fonda as *Fort Apache's* unbending Lieutenant Colonel Owen Thursday. He'd sooner crack a whip than a smile. West-Pointer Thursday, a bitter martinet newly assigned to the command of a distant Arizona fort, has lost his reputation after a defeat in the Civil War precipitated by the alcoholism of Captain Collingwood (George O'Brien), who – by familiar Hollywood accident – is now one of Thursday's company commanders. Their falling out, however, is decidedly secondary to Thursday's essential arrogance and thirst for the kind of Indian-fighting glory that will restore his reputation. Against the strong objections of Captain York (Wayne), who knows and sympathizes with the Indians, Thursday's hardheaded recklessness leads him into a needless battle with the Apaches of Cochise (Miguel Inclán), in which Thursday's fierce ambition and lack of judgment wind up destroying him and much of his command in a Custer-like debacle. The script, moreover, gives Thursday ample depth of character. He conscientiously and angrily shuts down a corrupt Indian agent who's been selling whiskey and rifles illegally to the Apaches; but his paternal love for his nineteen-year-old daughter Philadelphia (Shirley Temple) is shown as neurotically possessive through his extreme class and ethnic snobbery against her suitor, Lieutenant O'Rourke (John Agar). He may be insufferably self-righteous and fatally reckless, but his courage is unquestioned.

The film concludes two or three years after Thursday's debacle, as his successor, the competent and decent-tempered York, entertains an interview with reporters about the late

Colonel, whose portrait hangs in York's office. Because of his "glorious" death in battle, Thursday (again like Custer) has become a national hero. A "magnificent" painting of "Thursday's Charge" hangs in Washington.

Though he knows the truth of it, York emphatically endorses the newspaper falsehood of Thursday's consummate greatness ("Correct in every detail!"). It's presumably more for the sake of the unit's reputation and for the idea that the public needs glamorized, inspirational heroes than out of respect for Thursday, whom he detested – but the script doesn't elaborate. York instead affirms that the fighting spirit of the "old" cavalry – Thursday's troopers – has never died. Fourteen years later, in Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, scenarist James Warner Bellah – with collaborator Willis Goldbeck – encapsulated York's calculated view at the end of *Fort Apache* in one of cinema's most quoted lines: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Like the glorification of Custer at the Little Big Horn, the journalist's "heroic Thursday" is the legend that will become a "fact": history, as it were, written by and for the losers.⁴

When *Fort Apache* opened in 1948, Donald Kirkley of the Baltimore *Sun* wrote that the makers had dealt fairly with their chosen period of "America's shameful, preventable Indian wars," stressing equally the "cruelty and irresponsibility" of the Indians and the "extreme provocation given them by cheating, greedy, swindling, treacherous politicians in Washington and in civil posts on the reservations." Kirkley also noted that when various senior officers "of the better type" tried to ameliorate the condition of the tribes, they "were blocked at every turn by the politicians." (Decades later, that Native "irresponsibility" is more accurately recognized as "refusal to surrender their traditional nomadic life and culture.")⁵

She Wore a Yellow Ribbon

Ford's next cavalry picture, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) is far more optimistic – a hard-to-resist confection of sentimentalism about the Old West, the Old Army, old persons, young sweethearts, masculinity, tradition, leadership, horsemanship, personal responsibility, heroism, close-knit feelings encouraged by isolation, danger, adventure, and postbellum North-South unity – all of it brought to fruition by a busy plot and, as in *Fort Apache*, helpings of humor both slapstick and dry. It brings to Technicolor life (with the aid of at least eighteen stuntmen) a historical moment – the two weeks or so after the Custer massacre of 1876 – that was neither colorful nor especially significant in the Southwest, quite unlike the enjoyable, unmitigated fantasy realism presented here. There's even a moment when a crusty but unusually self-aware John Wayne as Captain Nathan Brittles, just hours from retirement, growls straight at the audience, "Old men should *stop* war!" Brittles proves as good as his word, averting a Cheyenne attack at the last instant by leading his troopers in a bloodless raid to stampede the Indian ponies and make war impossible – at least for the rest of this movie. The script benefits from the talents of writers Frank Nugent and Laurence Stallings. (Stallings, wounded in World War I, was co-author of *What Price Glory?*, the first realistic stage play about Americans at war.) The basis of the story comes once more from *Saturday Evening Post* tales by the prolific J. W. Bellah. While sophisticated audiences may now recoil at the once standard two-dimensional treatment of Native Americans (and Irish), the film shows the elderly Pony- That-Walks (Chief John Big Tree) and the other chiefs as powerless to keep the reputation-seeking young men (the Dog Soldier society) from going to war on the coincidence of Custer's defeat and a prophesied return of the buffalo herds to the southwestern plains.

Brittles wants to retire as a success. (After forty years in the army and a Medal of Honor from the Civil War, why is he just a captain of cavalry at a lonely desert post? Ford doesn't tell us. It's a movie.) His musclebound, whiskey-guzzling First Sergeant Quincannon (MacLaglen), who served with him in the war, will also retire in a few days, and to keep him from risking his life in the imminent raid, Brittles railroads him into the guardhouse for ten days (specifically "without charges" – so Quincannon won't lose his pension).

At least a half-dozen American themes of the '40s and '50s are crammed into the film's two hours, many of them likely to irritate opponents of Ford's ideology of quiet patriotism and wholesome sentimentality. National military leaders (like those of World War II) are pictured as wise and benevolent: a grateful Brittles exclaims in the finale that "Phil Sheridan! William Tecumseh Sherman! And Ulysses S. Grant, President of the United States of America!" have signed his appointment as civilian "Chief of Scouts," thus rescuing him from a lonely retirement and keeping him with the Army that he loves. Brittles himself is a gruff but beloved leader and more interesting than many movie leads: he's resourceful, confident, courageous, independent, romantic, touchingly "religious" (he communes at trying moments with his dead wife at her graveside), dedicated to the service, given to broad humor, avuncular, knowledgeable about his adversaries, strict but sympathetic toward the men of his command.

Though peace is not quite its profession, peace in Ford's army is preferable to war and American military leaders are more interested in averting wars than in fighting them. Sergeant Tyree (Ben Johnson) is a good-loser ex-Confederate officer; in a bit part, another trooper is a Confederate general enlisted incognito (evidently a secret to few). As D. W. Griffith had naively contended in *Birth of a Nation*, former Rebs and Yanks have patched up their differences and, Ford implies, joined together for the good of the country: a notion more persuasive, perhaps, in

1949 than it would have been in 1876 or is today. The film exonerates "old men" from the familiar, post-1914 charge of warmongering and says that some wars are started by young men seeking glory ("fueled by testosterone," in the recent cliché). Ford is acutely aware that "old men" like Neville Chamberlain had tried unsuccessfully to "stop war" at Munich and elsewhere, while younger men of the Axis nations had no such compunction. Writers Nugent, Stallings, and Bellah call their plains cavalrymen "dog-face soldiers in dirty-shirt blue," a phrase that deftly unites the Old West (blue uniforms) with the Second World War ("dogfaces"). The U.S. cavalry played a key if checkered historical role in the "winning of the West" as Ford's generation innocently called it, a role which, as the film's narrator says, was by 1949 "a cold page in the history books."

Ford's lavish images, realized in 1948 by Archie Stout in black and white and in '49 by Winton Hoch in color, evoke Frederic Remington's and Charles Schreyvogel's paintings of the West and of American cavalrymen in particular. Ford's riders gallop over and through elemental landscapes on the border of Utah and Arizona, men and horses continually dwarfed by the sagebrush desert, volcanic cores, and tremendous buttes of Monument Valley, his favorite location for filming westerns.

Rio Grande

Rio Grande, the final entry in the Ford-Wayne-McLaglen trilogy, suffers in comparison mainly from excess slickness. The pop-western vocal group The Sons of the Pioneers, for example, shows up in uniform periodically to harmonize on songs like "Aha, San Antone" (words and music by Dale Evans, 1948) and "My Gal is Purple" (Stan Jones, 1950). The script, too, may have one subplot too many. Its military angle is the cavalry's risky, illegal, and unsuccessful

attempt to pursue Apache raiders into Mexico. But when the Indians, unabashed villains, recross the Rio Grande, strike the fort, and kidnap a passel of army wives and children, Wayne's taciturn Colonel Kirby Yorke (distinguished by an added "e" from the Kirby York of *Fort Apache*) leads troops to the rescue and, after much gunplay, drives the remaining Indians away. Of greater interest is the domestic tension between Yorke and his fifteen-years-estranged wife Kathleen (the always excellent Maureen O'Hara), who's trying to extract their son, a West Point flunk-out, from the enlisted ranks. Her presence allows the singing of "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen" (T. P. Westendorf, 1875 – refreshingly appropriate to the period).

But John Ford's West is not exactly history's West. Shortly after Columbus made landfall at the island he named "San Salvador," the curtain went up on the war of conquering Europeans and their descendants against the several million people who called the New World home. The Indian Wars of North and South America were a complicated, vengeful tit-for-tat, centuries long and generated by mutual suspicion (often well-founded) and affinity for violent solutions; they were inextricably entwined with a zero-sum need for resources and territory and made more hideous by epidemics of lethal European diseases like smallpox, to which the Indians had little acquired immunity. These conflicts were characterized by shocking brutality on both sides.

Public understanding of them was extensively reoriented from the Euro-American to the Native American viewpoint by Dee Brown's narrative history, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, published in January 1971.⁶ But several months before *Bury My Heart*, Hollywood released two features that were at least partly inspired by playwright Arthur Kopit's reorienting theme in his postmodernist satire *Indians* (1968) of Native extermination and a morally corrupt white society. Each of these films – Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* and Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* – includes a historically inspired, ruthless massacre of Native Americans by the United States Cavalry.

Evaluating the state of white-red relations on the frontier, General Philip Sheridan, whose administrative command included Colorado Territory, site of the 1864 Sand Creek massacre that inspired the climax of *Soldier Blue*, wrote in 1870 to General William T. Sherman, Commanding General of the U.S. Army:

So far as the wild [i.e., "hostile"] Indians are concerned, the problem which the good people of the country must decide upon is, who shall be killed, the whites or the Indians; they can take their choice.

Since 1862, at least eight hundred men, women, and children have been murdered within the limits of my present command, in most fiendish manner, the men usually scalped and mutilated, their ----- cut off and placed in their mouths; women ravished sometimes fifty and sixty times in succession, then killed and scalped, sticks stuck up their persons before and after death. I have myself conversed with...[two] of these women."⁷

While Western armies regard such acts as crimes to be punished, the Indians of the Americas – like non-state societies in general – commonly inflicted atrocities on and mutilated the bodies of their foes, to wreak vengeance, express contempt, and (as explained by Chief Dan George in Penn's *Little Big Man*) to cripple their victims in the spirit world.

It was in response to Indian attacks and to forestall others that the western army launched a number of attacks between 1860 and 1890 on Native encampments, not all of them hostile. Sand Creek was the most infamous.

At dawn on November 29, 1864, a column of 550 troopers of the First and Third Colorado volunteer cavalry, supported by about 125 infantry from New Mexico, drew up near Chief Black Kettle's village of Cheyennes and Arapahos on Sand Creek. Black Kettle, the

conciliatory chief of the Southern Cheyenne, had placed his people under the protection of the U.S. Army and had recently reaffirmed his commitment to peace to Governor John Evans. But besides Indian attacks on mail coaches and the rustling of livestock, a number of settlers, including women and children, had earlier been killed and mutilated by Cheyenne “Dog Soldiers” and allied Arapaho raiders. These were young men who, by custom, owed no deference to the advice, warnings, or commands of any chief. In June, the terribly mutilated bodies of the Hungate family – including two dismembered infants – had been hauled into Denver in an ox-wagon for public view.⁸ There was no doubt that Indians were responsible. But which Indians?

In command of the column was Colonel John M. Chivington, a former missionary and a Presiding Elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He saw himself as a kind of avenging angel, and to him – as to most white Coloradans, especially after the Hungate murders – Indians were more than fair game. Chivington came to Sand Creek with one purpose: to kill as many Native Americans as possible. He was reported to have declared publicly in Denver a few months earlier his intention to “kill and scalp all, little and big. Nits make lice.” According to later Congressional testimony, Chivington admonished a subordinate moments before the order to attack that “he had come to kill Indians, and believed it to be honorable to kill Indians under any and all circumstances.”⁹ The Third Colorado had been raised specifically to fight the Plains tribes.

So it was that at Sand Creek American soldiers untouched by pity killed mercilessly some 160 Native people – about two-thirds of the camp; the rest, including Black Kettle and his wife, managed to escape. No prisoners were taken, and more than half the dead were women, children, elderly, and infants. Native resistance with arrows and rifles was sharp, however, and fighting lasted seven or eight hours. (It was not the saber-waving cavalry blitz of *Soldier Blue*.)

Of the 500 or so troopers actually engaged, some 24 were killed and 52 wounded – for a 15% casualty rate, typical of many Civil War engagements in the East.¹⁰ What gave the event the name of massacre, moreover, was the unprovoked attack on a peaceable village, the indiscriminate killings of “big and small,” and the shocking mutilation of the dead. To Congressional and Army investigators, soldier witnesses recounted nearly unthinkable atrocities visited on the Indians, alive and dead, of which the killing of children and the scalping of virtually all victims, irrespective of age or sex, were not the most revolting.

The Congressional investigation concluded in mid-1865 that Chivington had planned and carried out a “foul and dastardly massacre” of non-threatening people: “It is difficult to believe that, being in the form of men and wearing the uniform of the United States, soldiers could commit or countenance the commission of such acts of cruelty or barbarity as are detailed in the testimony.” Senator Benjamin Wade, chairman of the joint investigating committee, called for the removal and punishment of any official connected with the incident in order to uphold “the honor of the nation.” The *Chicago Tribune* called Chivington a “psalm-singing butcher of nursing papooses and pregnant squaws” and noted that the Army’s independent investigation detailed acts “more horrible than anything published by the [Congressional] committee.”¹¹

By way of contrast, in January 1863, at Bear River in present-day Idaho, soldiers from California had killed 250 hostile Shoshonis, the highest battle toll on either side of the Plains Wars – yet they pointedly refrained from killing the 150 women and children, leaving them a small provision of wheat for sustenance. In terms of cold-blooded atrocity, Sand Creek, where mutilation of the dead and dying continued for two hours after the last shots had been fired, stands alone.¹²

Soldier Blue

The radical *Soldier Blue* makes Sand Creek into a microcosm of Washington's Indian policy since 1787, and even if most of the savagery is saved for the final minutes, it was advertised as "The Most Savage Film in History" and "The Most Gut-Clutching Film in History." In total rejection of John Ford's romantic cavalry mythos, *Soldier Blue* climaxes with wanton slaughter and barbaric mutilations of the innocent and good carried out by white American servicemen. Nelson is especially known as director of the sentimental *Charly* (1968), the even more sentimental *Lilies of the Field* (1962), and the exceptionally violent western *Duel at Diablo* (1966). *Soldier Blue*, however, is a horse of a different color. Like Robert Altman's *MASH* (1970) and Arthur Kopit's postmodernist *Indians*, Nelson's *Soldier Blue* was instantly read as a "parable" or "allegory" of the Vietnam War, My Lai in particular. Nelson, however, called that idea "poppycock," asserting that *Soldier Blue* was at bottom about "war – all war."¹³ (He also said, curiously, that *Soldier Blue* is "not violent" but "savage" – as on the posters – adding "I had no intention of making it about My Lai" but, because war news had numbed people, "I wanted to shock.") Nelson described *Soldier Blue* as "more than a rousing action film," but most of the movie is much less than that, and one may hope that few audiences find its brutality "rousing,"¹⁴

Thus *Soldier Blue* touts itself as a bold attempt to show long-concealed truth stripped of denialism. But in contrast to Ford's crew of interesting actors in sturdy roles, Nelson hands us cartoon people and a minimal plot: a one-note Private Honus Gant (Peter Strauss), a two-note Cresta Lee (Candice Bergen), a surfer-looking Chief Spotted Wolf (Jorge Rivero), a sociopath of a gun runner (Donald Pleasence), a drunken sociopath of a colonel (John Anderson), and a frothing pack of American soldiers from some zombie apocalypse.

Yet the BBC judged *Soldier Blue* "one of the most significant American films ever made," and – a box-office smash overseas – it became the third-most popular movie in Britain in 1970.¹⁵

Publicists, not the director, turn out a movie's ads, but those for *Soldier Blue* never hinted at a pacifist theme – which, it must be said, is not readily detectable on screen. Instead they asked portentously why Nelson showed "in *the most graphic way possible* [my emphasis] the rape and savage slaughter of American Indians by American soldiers." The answer: "Because now, more than ever, is the time for truth."¹⁶ But no witness testified that Chivington had given orders to rape. Nor were rapes reported.

Honus is a *naïf* who believes blindly in the army and the American way: he recites inapplicable lines of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" to memorialize his comrades slain in the opening Cheyenne ambush of an army pay detail. The soldiers were also transporting Cresta, recently a Cheyenne captive, to her soldier fiancée at a nearby fort. Cresta is, naturally, Honus's complementary opposite, a resourceful, uninhibited smarty, who's popped in, it seems, from Haight-Ashbury after a stint at a wilderness-adventure school: she nicknames him "Soldier Blue," and they're the sole survivors. They're also just the pair for a hip, frontier romcom – which, astonishingly, is how most of *Soldier Blue* plays out despite its announced educational mission. Yet the comedy and adventure aren't much fun, especially when one sees that the trite (albeit feminist) love story and the perilous run-in with Donald Pleasance as the evil "Isaac Q. Cumber" merely kill time between spillings of blood. Bergen's energetic Cresta is a saving grace but, like the clarity of Cree singer Buffy St. Marie's trademark vibrato in her song "Soldier Blue," it isn't enough to make the movie resemble a good film.

Behind Ford's cavalry trilogy is an unposturing, sometimes skeptical, but more often affectionate humanity. Ford means to "prove" nothing. Nelson, in contrast, has a proclaimed, if

dodgy, agenda: to make Sand Creek the symbol of “all war,” which would seem to be reducible to non-negotiable, irremediable savagery among and across cultures, with no deeper motives than blood and vengeance and with little societal result but the slaughter of innocents. War, even combat alone, is more highly fraught than that. But given the script’s twin focus on soldiers versus Natives and on the problems of Honus and Cresta, no reviewer seems to have caught on that *Soldier Blue* was conceived as a pacifist film.

Cresta tries to clue Honus in to Washington’s Indian policy – which seems to be obsessive, unabashed genocide, committed by “good, brave lads comin’ out here to kill a real, live Injun,” but who, in reality, are mad dogs. Cresta absolves the Indians of killing and mutilating their white enemies as she mockingly (and incorrectly) claims that they learned to scalp from the whites, who, she says, are more naturally depraved than any Indians.¹⁷

Nor has she any hard feelings toward the Cheyennes who wiped out all but one of her trooper escorts. The reason is that after the same Indians kidnaped her two years earlier, she fell in love with their rational, nurturing society and eagerly married Spotted Wolf. But lately she’s run away because, as she eventually explains:

...they talk different. They dress different. And they eat different. Because I am not a Cheyenne, Soldier Blue, and I never will be.¹⁸

Culture and ethnicity, this implies, are destiny: yet the idea goes down the memory hole almost before you can notice it. The claim that sustained, effective empathy between most members of rival groups may be impossible is, however, worth pondering – even if the script of *Soldier Blue* doesn’t invite you to do so.

Whether it's about "all war" or (effectively) just the Plains Wars or (according to some) Vietnam,, Nelson and writer John Gay want to shake people out of their stupor of historical complacency. Cue, therefore, the advertised, blood-soaked climax, a one-sided orgy of horror cut down from the pre-release version by about *twenty minutes* of still greater atrocity.¹⁹ But there's plenty left. For example: a soldier trotting past with a baby stuck on his saber, a close-up gang rape and murder, troopers whooping while waving severed arms and legs, and a naked young woman strung up on a wooden frame and disemboweled – all of it done by wildly rejoicing American soldiers having the time of their lives.²⁰

Nelson's most striking, non-blood-soaked image undoubtedly comes when Spotted Wolf rides from his village bearing a streaming American flag and a white token of truce. Colonel Iverson's response is to open fire. Nelson then bathetically zeroes in on the galloping hooves of cavalry mounts pounding Old Glory into the mud – much as he's had Iverson (John Anderson) carol "The Battle Cry of Freedom" while hitting the bottle on the way to the massacre.

In light of such thematic and artistic mediocrity, radical politics alone must have led Dotson Rader, in the *New York Times*, to call *Soldier Blue* one of the "most honest American films ever made." Sand Creek, he writes, "was a forerunner in a line of American-directed massacres running from the Civil War...through Dresden and Hiroshima into Vietnam." It was "The same army. Different victims." (Not to mention different people, motives, causes, assumptions, and circumstances.) Rader compared his "liberating" feelings of "horror" in the theater to those – he thought – of a "good German" of 1945 confronted with the corpses at Dachau. (One doubts that many felt "liberated" by either experience.) Thus, the often violent racial, military, and settlement history of America is supposedly distilled and encapsulated into a bacchanale of sadism – much as in Norman Mailer's manic, novel-like screed *Why Are We in*

Vietnam? (1967). Both works insist that the essence of America is a leering mass murderer aching to cut loose.²¹

Kevin Kelly of the *Boston Globe* was so moved by Ralph Nelson's achievement that, like Dotson Rader, he had to write two separate reviews. Kelly confessed that *Soldier Blue* "left me physically sick," shaking with "rage...pity and fear," but he praised the film's "heartbreak and irony" and was grateful that "right now, there is rising a generation willing to protest against brutality and war and inhumanity, a generation raising its voice for peace and love."²²

Nelson's climactic, Grand Guignol sermon supposedly provides the world with real edification, not trivial entertainment like John Ford's prettied-up substitutes for history. Ford thought he'd found something quintessentially American in the Plains Indian Wars, with a melting-pot U.S. cavalry standing in for the actual determined – if far less picturesque – pioneers. Nelson, however, looks at the same era and finds a different America – an unstoppable march of blood-lusting, colonizing white devils. Charles Champlin in the *Los Angeles Times* asked cogently if there's "some sort of chastening, ennobling gain to be realized through watching this sickening carnage."²³ Nelson may have hoped so, but Champlin says otherwise: *Soldier Blue* is "appallingly and unforgivably vile." Even describing *Soldier Blue* as simply "Pro-Indian" is a stretch, since the killers of the paymaster's detail nearly match the savagery of the whites (though Nelson keeps the visuals discreet in that case). Like the soldiers later on, Spotted Wolf's warriors disdain a white flag and, in Cresta's words, "They're gonna be messin' with those bodies down there for hours." Midway through, when Honus fortuitously wounds an ambushing Kiowa warrior in a fair fight, the man's two companions dispassionately cut his throat and take off. These scenes might support the stereotype of Indians as kill-crazy demons; but the army's attack on the Cheyenne village says when it comes to kill-crazy, nobody can beat the U.S. Army.

Whatever Nelson's intention, calling *Soldier Blue* antiwar is like calling the soft-porn, torture-centric *Ilse, She-Wolf of the SS* (1975) antifascist.

Cresta's defense of the Cheyenne, moreover, betrays a considerably skewed cultural viewpoint: she elides the fact that while Cheyenne tradition (and others) actually commended the scalping and torture of enemies, the army's atrocious actions at places like Sand Creek, the Washita (replayed in *Little Big Man*), Wounded Knee, and elsewhere were deplored – though hardly universally – in governmental, intellectual, and journalistic circles. Condemnatory editorials and Congressional and military investigations all manifested a widespread repugnance for barbaric acts, even when perpetrated by one's own. (The *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, for example, in denouncing the "most barbarous and diabolical crime recorded in the annals of American history," observed that Chivington "sought to credit to American valor what was a disgrace to the American name." The *Chicago Tribune* urged that "Col. Chivington ought to be tried by court-martial and shot like a wolf."²⁴

Nelson avoids mentioning the revulsion of officers and men who refused to take part in the carnage. When, for example, Captain Silas Soule and Lieutenant Joseph Cramer of the First Colorado heard the order to attack, they took the extraordinary step of commanding their men not to fire. Indeed, once the mutilations began, "It was all our officers could do" (wrote Isaac Clarke of the First Colorado) "to keep us from turning our artillery loose and we would have done our best to kill every hundred-day (3rd Colorado) man in the batch." He also regretted that Chivington had not "been left there with the dead Indians."²⁵ A letter from Soule to Major Edward W. Wynkoop at Fort Lyon recounted the orgy of atrocity, and the outraged Wynkoop then launched the first of two army investigations; and one month after the massacre Congress announced its own investigation, based on reports that "Indians were killed after surrendering,

and that a large proportion of them were women and children.”²⁶

Territorial governor John Evans had set the stage for the outrage. The summer before Sand Creek, Evans had issued a proclamation that called on every Coloradan to “kill and destroy, as enemies of the country, all...hostile Indians,” without offering guidance on how to tell the hostile from the friendly or encouraging any citizen to let the friendly be. The standing Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War found Governor Evans’s testimony on Sand Creek to be filled with more “prevarication and shuffling” than that of any other witness they had questioned in four years of Civil War. Evans resigned. Chivington – who had boasted in his official report of a hugely inflated body count of 500 warriors, rejected any suggestion of wrongdoing, and denied that any women or children were killed – had left the Army at the end of 1864 and thus could not be charged. The Colorado 3rd, which was mainly responsible for the atrocities, had been disbanded at the end of its hundred-days’ service. No one was held legally accountable.²⁷

In one of the first cavalry tales released in Ford’s shadow, Irving Reis’s *New Mexico* (1951), an explicitly Indian-hating colonel starts a war with peaceable Natives by insulting their chief, rather like Colonel Thursday in *Fort Apache*. In the climactic battle following a long pursuit, the heroic Captain Hunt (Lew Ayres) and his former ally, Chief Aroca (Ted de Corsia), die melodramatically only a foot or two apart – and moments later, in a final symbol of futility, the troopers’ position in a ruined church on a wasteland butte is blown sky-high by gunpowder. But before this, a soldier cynically shoots an Indian child in the back, saying “Little ones grow up to be big ones” (i.e., “Nits make lice”). The Indians in turn bury a terrified judge up to his neck in desert sand and gallop their horses over him.

The low-budget *New Mexico*, however, is mediocre: Max Trell’s script is slow, the plot

unsubtle, the direction routine, the stock characters of little interest. It's worth mentioning, though, because it shows undeniable atrocities committed on both sides in an Indian war, nearly twenty years before *Soldier Blue* and does so without fanfare or tendentious claims to a "truth" carefully buried by schoolbook historians. For Nelson and Gay, the events at Sand Creek – simplified to the point of propagandist caricature – are among the most salient and revealing in American history, not just the Pearl Harbor of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, but a diagnostic revelation of the hushed-up American soul. The truth of the diagnosis seems doubtful. (So far from being a closely guarded secret, the Sand Creek massacre was, for example, the subject of condemnatory TV dramatizations in 1956 on two prestigious anthology series: the first on NBC's *Goodyear Television Theater* and the second on CBS's *Playhouse 90*.)²⁸

A nuanced film about Sand Creek as an unlikely microcosm of war, or just as a thought-out meditation on American history, might raise questions of enduring concern: the pressures of expansionism, issues of societal coexistence, the allure of vengeance, the thinness of the veneer of civilization, the age-old concept of collective guilt, military and political corruption, bureaucratic failure to punish gross crime, the ability of people like Soule to resist and report mass criminality. And so on. *Soldier Blue* has little to say about any of these things. The murder of the Hungates and its psychological effect on Coloradans goes unmentioned as does further panic in and around Denver as the Indians cut off deliveries of food and supplies from the East. Also elided is the understandable Native response to the Sand Creek outrage: a Cheyenne-Lakota-Arapaho alliance that escalated the Colorado War and that resulted in the destruction of several ranches and the burning of the small settlement and stagecoach way station at Julesburg early in 1865.

Long after *Soldier Blue*, novelist and Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien wrote, "As a first rule

of thumb...you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil." In characterizing the Plains Wars, that's where Nelson's absolute allegiance lies. Ford, in contrast, divides his romanticized cavalry between the Indian-hating Thursday and the Indian-respecting York and Brittles, and, similarly, Ford later cast John Wayne as an Indian-despising avenger in *The Searchers* (1956) and Richard Widmark as an officer sympathetic to the Indians in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), Ford's final western. None of these dramas try to approach O'Brien's narrow standard of "truth." But despite its claims, Nelson's vision of a past America, perhaps surprisingly at first blush, seems less "true" than Ford's.²⁹

NOTES

¹ See the detailed synopsis in *Moving Picture World* (March 20, 1909), 344.

² In the misleadingly titled *Cavalry* (1936), the U.S. army takes a very secondary role to the secret-mission, Wild West gumshoeing of star Bob Steele.

³ The picturesque wide, yellow suspenders worn outside the blouse are an affectation of the wardrobe department, as are the nearly universal yellow neckerchiefs and the anachronistic, post-1885 beige campaign hats. These eccentricities became iconic in later films. On television, 38 episodes of *Boots and Saddles* ran in syndication from 1956 to 1958, besides 164 episodes of *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* (for kids) from 1954 to 1959. The entirely slapstick *F Troop* lasted for 65 episodes from 1965 to 1967.

⁴ The "Custer myth" was largely the creation of Frederick Whittaker (1838-1889), dime novelist and ex-lieutenant of Union cavalry, in his 600-page *Complete Life of General George A. Custer* (N.Y.: Sheldon, 1876).

⁵ "'Fort Apache' on Screen," *The Sun* (May 6, 1948), 16.

⁶ Holt, Rinehart & Winston. Brown, significantly, had written to Frank Nugent in 1949 to compliment him on the accuracy and sensitivity of *Yellow Ribbons*' depiction of the Apaches. *AFI Catalog of Feature Films...1893-1993*.

<https://catalog.afi.com/Film/25545-FORTAPACHE?sid=23387733-4351-4ddb-a6c8-9c8d402c5374&sr=11.581474&cp=1&pos=0>.

⁷ "Piegan Indians," *U.S. Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives, Ex. Doc. No. 269* (1870), 9. Sheridan (played by J. Carroll Naish in *Rio Grande*) also wrote, "We took away their country and their means of support, broke up their mode of living, their habits of life, introduced disease and decay among them, and it was for this and against this they made war. Could anyone expect less?" *Report of the Secretary of War...Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.G.P.O., 1878) I, 36.

⁸ "Indian Troubles in Colorado," *Providence [R.I.] Evening Press* (August 11, 1865), 2.

⁹ The “nits” remark was recalled by E. S. Brown, U.S. District Attorney for the Territory of Colorado, “United States Indian Commission,” *New York Herald* (June 30, 1868), 8; [U.S. 39th Congress] *Condition of the Indian Tribes: Report of the Joint Special Committee Appointed under Joint Resolution of March 3, 1865* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.G.P.O., 1867), 73, testimony of Lieutenant Joseph Cramer.

¹⁰ American Battlefield Trust, “Sand Creek”: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/sand-creek> ; U.S. 39th Congress, 74; Gregory F. Michno, *The Three Battles of Sand Creek* (El Dorado Hills, Calif.: Savas Beatie, 2017), 219.

¹¹ Aug. 25, 1865, 2.

¹² “The Massacre of the Cheyennes,” *New York Times* (July 1, 1867), 2.

¹³ P. B. Hurst, *The Most Savage Film: Soldier Blue, Cinematic Violence and the Horrors of War* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 25.

¹⁴ “*Soldier Blue* Recreates Famous Cavalry Massacres,” *Las Vegas [Nev.] Sun* (January 8, 1971), 15; Norman Goldstein, “From ‘Soldier Blue’ to Child’s Play,” *Evening Times* (Trenton, N.J.) (Nov. 26, 1970), 15.

¹⁵ Hurst, 1; Frank Javier Garcia Berumen, *American Indian Image Makers of Hollywood* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2020), 187.

¹⁶ “Soldier Blue” <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/soldier-blue-1970>. (Accessed March 3, 2022).

¹⁷ Crow Creek, South Dakota, was the site of a massacre of some five hundred men, women, and children around 1350 CE; nearly all of the victims had been scalped, and most had been mutilated or dismembered in ways suggestive of the butchering of game animals: P. Willey and Thomas E. Emerson, “The Osteology and Archaeology of the Crow Creek Massacre,” *Plains Anthropologist* 38 (1993), 227-269. Plains cultures were shaped over centuries by tribal raids and extreme violence.

¹⁸ Lee’s affection for the tribe that abducted her, and her idyllic life with Spotted Wolf, are far from the experiences told of in women’s Indian captivity narratives, an autobiographical genre that began with Mary Rowlandson’s *Narrative* (1682); in them, white captives are sexually abused, routinely beaten, and frequently traded as slaves to other tribes. The testimony of twenty-four-year-old Lucinda Ewbanks, taken captive with her children by the Cheyenne in August, 1864, is similarly harrowing: [U.S. 39th Congress], 90-91.

¹⁹ Hurst, 117, 120, 138-140, tells us what was chopped.

²⁰ The film implies (and subsequent pop culture accepts) that extermination of Natives was the substance of the U.S. government’s Indian policy during the nineteenth century. This implication is false: confinement to reservations was the policy. The carnage meted out by the U. S. cavalry to non-hostile Native people at Sand Creek, the Washita (1867), and Wounded Knee (1890) was exceptional and was the subject of Congressional investigation in each case. Abuses and killings of peaceable Native Americans were typically perpetrated by settlers and civilian vigilantes unaffiliated with government authority.

²¹ D.H. Lawrence may have been the first to think so, offering his oft-cited opinion that within the “American soul” dwells “a killer,” and that “American Democracy” is a “form...of murdering somebody else”: *Studies in Classic American Literature* (N.Y.: Thomas Seltzer, 1923, 92). Scott Cooper’s *Hostiles* (2017), a recent, conciliatory army-and-Indians movie, even quotes Lawrence in its epigraph.

²² “Indictment booms angrily in ‘Soldier Blue’ movie” (Aug. 23, B29); “Soldier Blue” (Aug. 27, 43).

²³ “Blood Flows in ‘Soldier Blue’” (Aug. 14, G1).

²⁴ “Col. Chivington Dissected” (May 19, 1866), [1], citing the *Atchison Champion*; “The Sand Creek Massacre,” *Chicago Tribune* (July 26, 1865), [3]. Six Denver clergymen in an open letter, however, hoped for “the repetition of like battles with the same results” : “The Cheyenne Massacre Defended,” *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* [St. Paul, Minn.] (Aug. 11, 1865), 2.

²⁵ Christopher Rein, "Our First Duty was to God and Our Next to Our Country: Religion, Violence, and the Sand Creek Massacre," *Great Plain Quarterly* 34 (2014), 217-238.

²⁶ National Parks Service, *Sand Creek Massacre*, "The Life of Silas Soule,"

<https://www.nps.gov/sand/learn/historyculture/the-life-of-silas-soule.htm>; Soule's Congressional testimony is readily accessible at *Kansas Memory: Testimony of Captain Silas S. Soule* <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211149/page/2> (both accessed April 19, 2022); *Rocky Mountain News* (Dec. 29, 1864), 2.

²⁷ "The Cheyenne Indian Massacre," *Chicago Tribune* (July 25, 1865), 3; "The Congressional Committee on the War," *Salt Lake City Semi-Weekly Telegraph* (June 19, 1865), 1; "Our Indian Troubles," *N.Y. Times* (July 23, 1865), 2; Denver Public Library, "The Final Chapter of the Sand Creek Massacre" <https://www.denverlibrary.org/blog/research/dodie/final-chapter-sand-creek-massacre> (accessed March 21, 2022).

²⁸ Donald Kirkley, "Look and Listen," *Baltimore Sun* (Dec. 31, 1956), 6.

²⁹ Twenty years after *Soldier Blue*, the immensely popular *Dances with Wolves* (1990) was to some degree more inventive and less violent in its comparable theme of drunken, stupid, sadistic, incompetent, crazy soldiers against noble, prudent Indians. More nuanced and respectful of history is *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993): it depicts both the Apache chief Geronimo (Wes Studi) and Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood (Jason Patric) – instrumental in securing Geronimo's surrender in 1886 – as individualized, believable figures.