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Fakulta přírodovědně-humanitní
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Po stopách dobrého vojáka: Reprezentace amerických vojáků zobrazených ve vietnamských a amerických filmech

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Faculty of Science, Humanities
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- 2) porovnat reprezentaci amerických vojáků z pohledu amerického a vietnamského válečného filmu
- 3) analyzovat použití symbolů k vytvoření "dobrého" a "špatného" vojáka.

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Anotace:

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením vojáků ve filmech, které zachycují válku ve Vietnamu. Dva analyzované filmy jsou *The Abandoned Field* od režiséra Hong Sen Nguyen z roku 1979 a *We Were Soldiers* Randalla Wallace natočeného v roce 2002. Tato práce se skládá z několika částí. První teoretická část představuje základní informace o zemi Vietnam, válce ve Vietnamu a s tím spojené filmy, a filmové hnutí Third World Cinema. Poté se zaměřuje na příběh obou filmů a na zobrazení hrdinů, které jsou v nich ztvárněny. Práce porovnává oba filmy i jejich hlavní postavy, na základě čehož zaznamenává stejné a rozdílné prvky. V poslední části jsou filmy rozebrány z hlediska kompozice příběhu spolu s praktickými příklady z obou filmů. Závěr práce odhaluje, že nepřátelené strany, mají přes zjevné důvody mnoho společného.

Klíčová slova: voják, válka ve Vietnamu, film, zobrazení, hrdina.

Abstract:

The paper deals with a depiction of soldiers in films about the War in Vietnam. The two analysed films are *The Abandoned Field* directed by Hong Sen Nguyen in 1979 and *We Were Soldiers* by Randall Wallace released in 2002. The first theoretical part introduces basic information about Vietnam, the Vietnam War and related films and filmic movement Third World Cinema. Then it focuses on the story of both films and its representation of heroes. The paper compares both films and its main characters and thus captures common and different features. In the last part the films are analysed from the point of view of story composition along with examples from the films. The final part reveals that even belligerent sides have a lot in common despite obvious reasons.

Key words: soldier, the Vietnam War, film, representation, hero.

Content

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Representation of American soldier in the American and Vietnamese war film ..	3
2.1	Information about Vietnam	3
2.2	The Vietnam War	4
2.3	Vietnam War in films.....	6
2.4	Story in film	6
2.4.1	The Abandoned Field	6
2.4.2	We Were soldiers.....	7
2.5	American Soldiers in the Vietnam War	9
2.6	War film history	10
2.7	Third World Cinema	11
3	Composition of main characters	12
3.1	Strong versus weak heroes	15
3.2	Superhero character.....	16
3.3	The depiction of the American Soldier in The Abandoned Field	17
3.4	The depiction of the American Soldier in We Were Soldiers.....	18
3.4.1	The Portrayal of Women	19
3.4.2	The Enemy.....	23
4	Story composition	24
4.1	Story basis	28
4.2	Extreme and contrast.....	29
4.3	Surprise	31
4.4	Conflict in film.....	32
4.5	Additional features	32
5	Evaluation	33
6	Conclusion	35
7	References.....	37

1 Introduction

Wars have always been part of the human history. There were wars over territories or ideological points of view. Along with countless battles, new genres have been evolved: war songs, legends and novels capture the events of wars. One of the latest of these genres are war films, thanks to their masterful direction and acting, as well as thanks to their use of visual and sound effects, can have a meaningful influence on the public.

This world-known conflict gave rise to a range of emotions which were seized and captured by film makers and writers. It led to a wide scale of books and films with war subjects from Vietnam. In fact, the Vietnam War, based simply on the amount of films produced, could be considered as one of the central topics of a certain decade of the American cinema.

A theme of films and film adaptation is engaging for every person in our modern world, even though it is more likable to some than to others. Yet, while the American representation of the Vietnam War is often discussed in academic studies, it is rarely put in the context of contemporaneous films, produced in Vietnam. The purpose of this paper is to partially fill in this gap and compare the Vietnam War in a film from Vietnam and another from the United States, namely *The Abandoned Field* and *We Were Soldiers*.

First, the paper briefly mentions information about Vietnam, war in Vietnam and war films shot in Vietnam. Furthermore, the reader is given information about composition of the main characters with particular focus on soldiers in *The Abandoned Field* and *We Were soldiers*. It is followed by a story composition that introduces surprises in a story, story basis and conflict with application onto stated films.

The theoretical part pictures the war film history and presents a filmic movement called Third World Cinema. It also focuses on the context in which the films were shot.

Then it provides an overview of the two films in which one can learn about the characters and plots.

The comparison is evaluated in the end. The main goal of this study, however, is to compare and contrast the portrayal of the American soldier in the Vietnam War, as depicted in the two films. In order to do so, the paper deals with several common features of *The Abandoned Field* and *We Were Soldiers*: there is a portrayal of the enemy, the representation of women and symbolism of helicopters in the motion pictures.

My intention is to demonstrate that the Vietnam War film depicts American soldiers as cruel and incompetent to enter their country. On the other hand I expect the American film to focus only on heroic American soldiers without any deeper concern about their enemy counterparts. In my final paper I applied method of comparison in particular whilst comparing the two films and characters. Further I used description and analysis.

2 Representation of American soldier in the American and Vietnamese war film

2.1 Information about Vietnam

Along the fact that films were made in the surroundings of Vietnam and that their directors had to take into consideration local conditions, here is a brief part about geography and history.

Vietnam has 4000 years of eventful history which had been affected by culture of Southeast Asia and it had also been submitted to strong Chinese influence. Thousand years of Chinese dominance had made its mark into the life of Vietnam. Apart from negative influence in the shape of the communist ruling, there are many positive features. Vietnamese people gained from the Chinese various scales of knowledge, e.g. about building dykes or irrigation systems. Mentioned skills were utilized for cultivating rice and increasing harvest.

An important period which strongly affected the Vietnamese culture was the beginning of 19th century, during which most of Vietnam was occupied by the French. The worst period, however, was the American which will be carried on through many lives.

The north of Vietnam lies in the subtropical climate, and the south belongs to the tropical climate. The climate is variable – from freezing winters in the highlands all the way in the north leading to the equatorial climate of Mekong delta in the south. The average year temperature in low altitudes is 27°C in the south and 21 °C in the north. The climate in Vietnam depends on the geographical location. The weather in Vietnam is affected by the monsoon flow. The winter monsoon enters from the north-east and lasts from October til March - it brings cold wet winter to the north of the country, and oppositely on the south with warm and dry weather. On the tropical south there are

mainly two seasons, and that is the wet season from May til November. Months with the highest percentage of rainfall are June, July, August. The second season is dry from December til April. February til May are the hottest months of the year (Eurovina 2012).

Aspects of Vietnamese climate have an impact on people who arrive into the country, which was the case of the American soldiers during the war. Training American soldiers can be thorough but they could never have the advantage as the native inhabitants, that is the knowledge of local environment and the skill to move around and live in it. Excessive humidity and heat affected the American soldiers, their organism, which resulted in lack of alertness and performance. American soldiers were more tired and distracted. Irritating insects were a great deal of burden too.

There were moments in both films where soldiers were obliged fight against the nature. In case of *We Were Soldiers* there is a moment where an annoying fly sits on a soldier's face. Another moment is when the soldiers fall into a trap (Wallace 2002, 46:26). In the case of *The Abandoned Field* there was a situation where a soldier is scared to step out of helicopter because of a snake (Nguyen 1979, 59:06).

2.2 The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War is connected with the rise of nationalism. Yet, the Vietnamese have been aware of themselves as distinct people since ancient times: the earliest mention of their existence is in the first millennium before the Christian, era as agricultural people (Langer 2005, 3).

The United States' involvement in the area dates from early 1945, and the last year of World War II in general, when a handful of Americans parachuted into Pac Bo and into the mountains in the northern part of the country. These people were led by Major Allison Thomas and they were all members of the Office of Strategic Service, a forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (Westheider 2007, 1).

During World War II, Ho contacted American OSS agents stationed in southern China (Westheider et al. 2007, 1). The United States kept the conflict with Vietnam going for ca. 30 years from 1944 to 1973. The American military and political engagement were the most controversial; it was also one of the longest-standing operations ever. The mentioned involvement can be divided into three phases:

The first phase is the covert operations phase which was from 1944 til 1954 and meant the phase of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. This phase was from the end of World War II when there was the cooperation with Vietminh (tiny group of revolutionaries). They fought against Japan and were seen as a potential threat of the beginning of the Cold War:

The Vietminh, which was the abbreviation for Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, or Vietnamese League for Independence, was founded in May 1941. It was technically an umbrella organization under which the nationalists, socialists, peasants, students, and other organizations combined to fight the Japanese, who had taken control of the country from its colonial overlords, the French. In reality, the Vietminh were led by a small handful of Communists, two of whom would figure prominently in America's war in Vietnam. The First was Vo Nguyen Giap, one of the principal founders of the Vietminh and leader of its tiny military force. The other was Ho Chi Minh. (Westheider 2007, 2)

During Franco – Vietming War increased the American involvement. USA supported France in resubjugating the former colony and to extend communism.

Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh controlled the country and proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Then USA tried to support the creation of a rival Vietnamese state in the south of the country. They also assumed the responsibility for arming, training and advising the new South Vietnamese army as well as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

The second phase was from 1954 and marked the beginning of the advising phase. South Vietnam was collapsing militarily as well as politically by 1965.

The second phase followed on the third phase, which means a direct influence of the United States' forces in Vietnam. The war in Vietnam was escalated by the USA. But after the 1968 Tet Offensive, the USA released. By 1973, the USA had withdrawn from South Vietnam. Since then it had been possible to say that America's long-standing involvement was over. The Vietnamese civil war after that ended in 1975 (Westheider 2007, 22-23).

2.3 Vietnam War in films

Many war films were shot in Vietnam, which is understandable since it captured the world-wide known conflict that cost many lives and took place in recent history. A lot of films were shot here in the sixties, and later on in the eighties that intervened with the war already. These films, which include *The Abandoned Field* or *We Were Soldiers*, range from works that show the war as heroic (*The Green Berets*) to those that portray the war as hideous (*Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*).

2.4 Story in film

A story in a film is the essence that engages viewers' attention. For this reason there will be a section that monitors basic elements concerning a film. First, let me introduce a story of both films as such.

2.4.1 The Abandoned Field

The Abandoned Field is a film made in Vietnam in 1979, directed by Hong Sen Nguyen. It is about a young couple and their infant son who live in South Vietnam, in the so called "free-fire zone", which was a term used by U. S. troops for an area from which all friendly forces had been cleared out and anybody unidentified was considered as an enemy combatant, therefore, soldiers were allowed to shoot anyone after curfew

without first making sure if they were hostile (Simons 1999). The family's location is on the borders of the zone, occupied by the Vietcong on one side and on the other by the U. S. and the South Vietnamese army. The U. S. troops already resettled all the residents so that they can locate the presence of the Vietcong.

Ba Do and his family find a shelter in a tree house built above the water surface of the rice field, which is flooded almost all over the year. The house is covered by the leaves of trees and they hide their boats under the house.

Both Ba Do and his wife Sau are Vietnamese guerrillas who support the Vietcong. Their job is to take the Vietcong soldiers from their area to the part of land occupied by the United States. The film shows their daily routine, their job as guerrillas and above all their struggle with U. S. airborne attacks.

The first airborne attack is on Sau when the helicopter gunman spots her boat and destroys it, however, he does not see her because she is hidden in the water further away. They also shoot at the house but the whole family is hidden in the rice field so no harm comes to them. Ba Do and Sau would have an almost idyllic life if it was not for the helicopters coming day and night.

The pilot, Jean, report to his boss, Mitscher, that they discovered and destroyed the boat showing him the pictures that they took. Mitscher decided to keep searching the area. One day, during another air surveillance, the pilot spots Ba Do in the field. He gets shot while hiding under water. Sau runs to him, takes his gun and along with other guerrillas they shoot down the helicopter, and both the gunman and the pilot die in the wreck of the chopper.

2.4.2 We Were soldiers

The American war film *We Were Soldiers* was made in 2002 and directed by Randall Wallace. This film opens with the defeat of the French unit in 1954 by the

Vietnamese army led by Colonel Nguyen Huu An, who will later on encounter the US troops.

One of the main characters is Colonel Hal Moore, who is a Catholic, and a father of five children; according to his superiors he is also a good soldier who is respected by his colleagues for going into dangerous missions with a calm head. And that is why he is given the opportunity to go to Vietnam to fight the local army with which no American soldiers have fought before. He trains the soldiers and tries to prepare them for the unknown territory.

The film portrays the battle of Ia Drang Valley, which was chosen for its landing zone, where a new method of fighting is used – the troops are dropped from helicopters and left in the terrain. It captures a three day fight in 1965. On the first day, one of the troopers captures an unarmed NVA soldier who reveals some very bad news about their landing place which is right under a bunker in a mountain.

Three hundred and ninety five American soldiers meet an army of four thousand Northern Vietnamese. The U. S. troops are outnumbered and their situation is hopeless. Colonel Nguyen Huu An has his underground military base in a hill by the valley and he keeps sending his units to crush their enemy. The North Vietnamese soldiers are very skilled in hiding, they attack from nowhere, they are invisible in the high grass and therefore effective in their assaults. The main task for the U. S. troops is to protect the landing zone and search the surroundings. All platoons are under attack and the situation seems very desperate. Colonel Moore's cavalry has suffered a big loss. Nevertheless, it is able to resist thanks to air support and heavy bombing of the Vietnamese soldiers.

A significant time is given to the families of the U. S. soldiers, mainly to their wives who at the begging are left to wait for their men. In the middle, they receive

military telegrams of sympathy for their loss, and in the end some of them can welcome their husbands coming back home.

The battle of Ia Drang Valley ends by defeating the last line of Vietnamese soldiers who defended the underground base. Colonel Nguyen commands to abandon the bunker, and after the U. S. troops left, he takes care of the dead and wounded. The American soldiers then return to the United States. Both sides seem to think they have won.

2.5 American Soldiers in the Vietnam War

Military training focuses on how to teach soldiers to be able to conquer the enemy and defend their own lives. Understandably, in the eyes of the American army, the bodies of American soldiers were more valued than Asian ones (Park 2007, 13).

The financial funding of armed forces was problematic. Funding of the military in North Vietnam and Viet Cong was not sufficient in general, besides they had difficulty with proper equipment. In my opinion, this was a crucial disadvantage compared to the American army, which was contrarily well supplied and funded. This benefit on side of the American army consisted of weapons, ammunition, clothes and overall provision of the operation course.

Opposed to it there was a poor Vietnam whose government could not secure sufficient monetary resource to provide weapons and to ensure running of the affair. They lacked air support such as helicopters that meant the upper hand for the American army. However, Vietnamese army had their advantage in their natural environment such as knowing people, the language and the terrain. Vietnamese servicemen were greatly inventive in this conflict which made them a strong opponent (Lawrence 2008, 91).

Local climate, humidity and heat caused troubles to heavily dressed American troops and complicated their task. Outdoors American soldiers faced leech, mosquitoes,

spreading malaria, ticks, ants, venomous snakes and other faunas to which Americans were not accustomed of.

Another noticeable advantage for Vietnam was their experience in war with France that provided practice in battle against a powerful state. Basically, Vietnam applied the same strategy to fight the American army. Their experience could be accounted for training. Vietnam also had training centres focused on war tactics and partisan strategies.

Even though American soldiers featured with good equipment, theoretical knowledge and a base, their experience was faint in contrast to Vietnamese soldiers. American recruit often passed only elementary training that should have been followed by specialized course that was oriented into a specialization. If it was not for the surroundings, Americans represented the most powerful aggressive battle line.

2.6 War film history

According to Ronald Bergan (2006, 171), battle scenes and war have been filmic subjects since the dawn of cinematography. He claims that war film as a separate genre emerged during WW1. War films frequently express an anti-war attitude, just as they can serve as propaganda to gain support from the public.

American participation in the War in Vietnam was highly unpopular (Parkinson 1996, 122). Due to its unpopularity everyone avoided the topic for the duration of the conflict. John Wayne was an exception with his film *The Green Berets* in 1968. As soon as the nation recovered from the shock of the defeat, film makers started to investigate the conflict from the point of view of ordinary soldiers who, in most cases, were still adolescent. The information that came to the surface was an image of inferno held against the local landscape and climate more than against the enemy (Parkinson 1996, 122). Hollywood was not able to ignore the War in Vietnam as an important topic for an extended amount of time and *The Deer Hunter* appeared on the big screen in 1978. It is

a film capturing the extent of the impact of the war on the physical and psychological state of the people involved, similar to other significant artworks, such as *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*.

But Vietnam has made many war films as well. Since the 1960s until the late 1980s the War in Vietnam continued to be a living reality for Vietnamese. It is understandable that moving pictures were used to cope with the difficult situation. Vietnamese war films focused on nationalism, especially since the country has always been controlled by other states. There were two film studios in Vietnam. Hanoi studios produced mainly propaganda films. Saigon production focused on war-themed films. In 1970 *Vinh Linh Rampart* appeared on the big screen containing real footage from battles. *The Abandoned Field* was released in 1979 depicting human suffering created by the war.

2.7 Third World Cinema

Third World is a label for colonized or decolonized nations. The main difference between the First (and Second) World and the Third World is the economic status as well as the political situation. As the First World one understands North America together with North European countries. The Second World represents Central and Eastern European countries, the former Soviet Union and China. The cinema production of the First World is far more technologically advanced than that of the Third World. Third World Cinema refers to the filmmaking of countries outside the United States and the Soviet Union which primarily emerged during the early years of the Cold War (Hayward 2013, 389).

The First World as the dominant cinema used to approach the “other world” with stereotypical images of non-Western people. For example, a member of a minority group rarely had the role of protagonist, they were recognizable more as villains or comic figures. This means that their depiction was, as a rule, negative and defaming.

According to Hayward (2013, 397), Third World Cinema intended to reverse their false representation of race, class and gender. It is not surprising, however, that in the past films made in the Third World hardly ever reached a Western viewer, and vice versa. However, the situation has changed and American studios now face Third World Cinema with its fully developed film industry (Stam and Shohat 1994, 291).

Third World Cinema expanded in the 1960s with a number of low-budget films. The films were mostly black-and-white with only a few takes. Actors were often non-professionals chosen for their appearance to resemble certain types. In *The Abandoned Field* the American pilot Mitscher, for example, was really a Russian actor who was hired for his Western look because it was impossible in Vietnam to find and cast an American. In case of the Vietnam cinema the main purpose of films was propaganda. The idea was strongly political: anti-colonist and anti-imperialist.

The militant Third Cinema accurately mirrored spectators' everyday problems and, as a result, they easily identified with the social consciousness and the political stance of the film's actors (Cristian et al. 2007, 111).

3 Composition of main characters

Every film maker intends to introduce to his viewers a persuasive hero. It has to be a character that possesses a certain charisma to which the viewers can identify with and admire at the same time. The hero himself can evoke a feeling that he is one of us, yet he is better and more capable than we are. On the other hand, one can imagine the opposite where a negative character was forcefully created to pull the viewers to admiration despite his moral motives. In this case we talk about an antihero (Plencner 2013, 37). In both films, which means *We Were Soldiers* and *The Abandoned Field* there are no negative main characters.

A film character represents a person that has coherent existence within a dramatic plot. Then it does not matter if he belongs to the real or unreal world, but is defined by his affiliation with the actuality of the plot (37). In both films these are defined in relation to the plot, thus all main characters appear in war environment surrounded by fear and threat.

The audience learns about the character only that much, that is indicated in the piece of work, only as much as the author wished to reveal. Moral fibre is the most important of a certain character, that is the summary of their personal individual features. A character denotes a natural, summary of moral attributes, also unique traits of the character, which are expressed in relation of a person to a social environment. It shows a system of certain traits which are crucial in the dramatic story and which play a major role determining further evolution. Determinative factor in creating and forming a character is a core, that means conscious or unconscious course of a man to his life's goal (37).

In film *We Were Soldiers* the core lies in Captain Moore's behaviour that is religiously directed, and yet he has a military experience in Korean War (Wallace 2002, 04:40). The core in film *The Abandoned Field* rests within both characters. Ba Do and his wife Sau are the main characters whose course is connected with their sons' upbringing and helping guerrillas. According to Plencner (2013, 37) a hero needs a complex vision that can be divided into two segments:

1. Idea of „heroism“ as a unique and valued personality fact or a specific activity,
2. Image of the dramatic characters.

In case of *We Were Soldiers* with captain Moore it is more about the idea of heroism, whereas in *The Abandoned Field*, in my opinion, both segments are interconnected with the image of dramatic character prevailing.

According to Plencner (2013, 37) that is how a classical hero represents the highest social ideals, assets and values. It integrates more functions which simultaneously are personal ideals, dramatic figures, cultural symbols and psychological archetypes that is why he can become a strong model of a certain role. A classic hero is then the bearer of a good conduct within society. The model in this case is Captain Moore as a Catholic who cares for his wife, children and neighbours (Wallace 2002, 21:10).

Plencner (2013, 37) furthermore adds that his hero serves as his moral mirror and often embodies creative solution to conflicts which are typical for this community (in case of film *We Were Soldiers* war), which fits captain Moore exactly.

A hero can be a legendary character from ancient mythology, however it does not apply to either of the films in my paper. Or there is a hero as a famous warrior or general and a man of noble qualities, which is a better match for my use. It can also be an ordinary man who steps out with an unordinary act that requires great courage, which agrees with both films.

It is essential to define the main characters in each of the films. In the case of war films, most of the common heroes are either good or evil. Heroes can be also war victims as it is e.g. in *The Abandoned Field* Ba Do and his partner or the whole family.

American theory distinguishes stories driven by characters, i.e. character-driven, and stories driven by plots, i.e. plot-driven. Film *We Were Soldiers* and its main character Hal Moore represents a story driven by a character, i.e. character-driven. Film was emotionally arranged but it strikes as a unit, although it is a story driven by the integrity of the character. The whole film was formed around the main hero and the whole film evolves around him, despite the fact there are many soldiers and soldier's wives. It is basically possible to claim that the film evolves around Hal Moore and his wife.

The second film *The Abandoned Field* is for a change driven by the plot. Main character is in conformity of the whole plot. As the plot generates its course, so do the characters. Apart from the war and its conditions, there is nothing else in action.

3.1 Strong versus weak heroes

Contemporary film heroes can be securely distinguished from different types of heroes. However they are not entirely self-sufficient with them, since they follow hero images from the past era. In some of their features, one can observe clear continuity of mythological or literal hero images, in others there are evident attempts for modernizing and innovation. The image of the hero is after all always a result of an actual society-wide crisis. It embodies not only widely spread conflicts, but also aspirations to dreams.

Provided that they should be convincing psychological type, their character must also depict wider social group. It is curious to observe how throughout history the preference of the strong and weak heroes meets during the time period of certain era.

In recent history, there was e.g. an action hero basically invincible with no weakness, he did not show emotion nor sensitivity. He got rid of every enemy, their personality could be defined as narcissistic. Below there is a difference between classic heroes and a narcissistic heroes. This is where original internal qualities change into the collection of inner symbols (Plencner 2013, 41).

Classic hero – narcissistic hero:

- Moral greatness – narcissistic greatness;
- Capability and courage – skilfulness and cunning;
- Activity despite obstacles – activity without obstacles;
- Spiritual victory in case of real defeat - total victory no matter;
- Personal bravery – absence of fear;
- Care for others – care only for self/manipulation with others;

- Persistence – inexhaustibility;
- Self-confidence – self-adoration;
- Optimism – cynicism (Plencner 2013, 42).

Individual features partially mix in both films, even though they are not all present. In case of captain Moore one talks about moral highness, skill and bravery (activity despite obstacles for example (Wallace 2002, 32:45)), feeling of sadness over loss of his men (1:58), spiritual courage in case of real defeat, personal bravery (for example 1:49), care for others (for example 1:45), persistence (for example 1:42), self-confidence, optimism (self-confidence appears throughout the film, optimism appears less). All of these features are represented in the film. In case of film *The Abandoned Field* the viewer can find bravery (Nguyen 1979, 22:11), courage, fear (25:30), love (34:10), happiness (25:32) and sadness (1:28).

3.2 Superhero character

It is no surprise today that the mainstream film of the first decade of the third century introduces an image of a hero that re-gained his self-confidence. However, he is not the sure invincible hero, on the contrary, he appears as a vulnerable character that keeps believing in people and patiently follows socially beneficial goals. He represents not only the widest conflicts but also an inspiration and dreams (Plencner 2013, 42). It is not different in the case of captain Moore in *We Were Soldiers*, where evidently there are activity despite obstacles (Wallace 2002, 32:45) or persistence (1:42).

Among films with vulnerable heroes belongs to e.g. a high-budget film *Avatar* year 2009 from James Cameron. It is about collision between two worlds and the main hero is at first sides with common civilized world, and then crosses to a protected imaginary world. Here, a disabled soldier Jake Sully, the hero, faces the darkness of mankind in form of thoughtlessness (Plencner 2013, 44).

Thoughtlessness can be also found in *The Abandoned Field*, featuring pitiless soldiers who have dominance over locals thanks to helicopters. Helicopters make soldiers more powerful than the ordinary population.

3.3 The depiction of the American Soldier in The Abandoned Field

The Vietnamese war film, *The Abandoned Field*, depicts U. S. troops as evil, careless and coward people. Not only they have the advantage of flying in a helicopter and shooting from the air, their target in this case is a family with a baby son who has to hide and be cautious at all times. The first time viewers notice it is when a gunman destroys a boat from a helicopter not knowing that Sau, the main female Vietnamese protagonist, is hiding in the water nearby. The scene develops dramatically as the viewer sees several mid-shots of the helicopter circling around the boat. In a close-up one notices Sau's worried face full of expectation of what is going to happen.

In contrast to her, there is a close-up of a determined American soldier in a helicopter. He pulls the pin of a grenade by his teeth targeting the boat (Nguyen 1979, 18:48). As if the grenade was not enough, in a wide shot scene bullets from a machine gun hit the water surface for a few moments. Unfortunately, it is not just an empty boat that the Americans shoot for fun, they sense that there are still people in this area and that is why they keep searching and bombing an abandoned field. In a medium close-up on Sau in the rice field viewers watch her stand up and walk towards wrecks of her vessel. She is sad and disappointed (Nguyen 1979, 20:19).

Another scene in which the viewer can see American soldiers is when one of them climbs down the rope ladder from the helicopter in an attempt to catch Ba Do in the rice field. He barely touches the surface of the water when he spotted a snake. There is a medium close-up of the soldier's terrified facial expression (Nguyen 1979, 59:06). He screams and quickly climbs back up, leaving the area. In contrast, Ba Do catches the snake without a blink of an eye and bear-handed kills it. A cut-in shot points out his

bare hand (1:00:59). He grabs its tail and spins it above his head laughing. There is a certain resemblance with the rotor blades of a helicopter. His wife is laughing too. Maybe he puts on a little act to ease their otherwise difficult situation.

Following day there is one more similar attempt of an American soldier to climb down but this time he changed his mind half way down. He is looking around. There is no close-up of his face, only a wide shot of him climbing back up, accompanied by something that sound like a faint wailing. This might have indicated fearfulness caused by the snake. It also shows how big a disadvantage the terrain was. Americans have never fought on a similar ground.

Last but not least, there is a portrait of U.S. troops even less flattering and that is when they have a birthday party for Jean's son who is of course a lot of miles away. They hold a party at their base the night before their planned search for Vietcong. They had all the comfort, music and champagne (1:20:30).

3.4 The depiction of the American Soldier in We Were Soldiers

The very first scene of the Vietnamese soldiers is when they slaughter the French army (Wallace 2002, 02:00). The viewers can see them as cold-hearted and cruel. They did not take any prisoners for one simple reason – “if you kill them all, they will stop coming” (Wallace 2002, 03:22). Unfortunately, eleven years later the Americans invaded the territory which meant that the same thing could happen to them.

American troopers were mostly young draftees. Before leaving, the whole division is lined-up during a ceremony (33:05). The United States army consisted of whites, blacks, Asians, and Gentiles or Amerindians. Some of them more experienced than others, yet the U. S. soldiers come to an unknown land. They came with good weaponry but they were forced to face a close combat too. Shortly after landing, there is a scene showing how reckless they could be (48:28). It is when they spot a Vietnamese

soldier and they chase him deep into the forest until the whole patrol falls into an ambush. The whole platoon is lost and it takes almost a day to rescue them.

In the case of Colonel Moore, one can notice that he is a soldier with experience and excellent commanding skills. His orders are right and effective and he is able to predict the moves of his enemy because as he says that is what he would do (Wallace 2002, 1:52:10). There is an over-the-shoulder shot of Colonel Moore's troubled and tired face, in the dark surroundings of the night one can see it in his eyes.

Similarly, as with different war films, in film *We Were Soldiers* it is difficult to determine the orientation of character for the audience when most of the less important characters can be securely identified by the viewer only after their death. On the other hand, at some points, the story has too much of a steep flow, therefore it can be said that a common viewer will not be bored by this film.

3.4.1 The Portrayal of Women

The representation of women in *The Abandoned Field* portrays U. S. women on one side and Vietnamese on the other one. A close-up picture shows a photo of Jean's wife Linda. At Jean's party American women here have dark hair and "Asian" appearance. The explanation could be that Nguyen was not able to find American looking women in the war, or possibly he did not need them because women at the party are drinking cocktails and smoking cigarettes which supplement their "Western" look.

Very important female character throughout the story is Sau. Apart from her being a mother, wife and housekeeper, she is a guerrilla fighter. It was not rare that Vietnamese women fought alongside men. Many close-ups show Sau in her daily routine, e.g. as she lights a fire and cooks. Then in one instance, she plays with her son, in the other she holds a gun in alert. In moments of danger her face is fearless. The last battle shows the importance of female participation in the war. Her husband Ba Do seems to be shot down, she runs to him and finds him dead. Promptly, she takes a rifle

and shoots the gunner in the helicopter and probably hit the engine. After the helicopter crashed, she returns to Ba Do and, not for long, burst into tears. Their son is crying. She picks him up and walks toward a camera. She looks forward with a determined face. As the battle is over, Sau and her son represent the significance of female fighters.

North Vietnam has taken up some of the steps to improve conditions for women. It happened within years 1950 and 1960. Polygamy had been banned, marital right with under aged and arranged marriages had also been banned. Cooperative farms were established which enabled women to work outside their home and get paid for their activity. All this had led to independent women who were becoming equal to man:

The state needed new Vietnamese women to harmonize and domesticate the imported ideals of socialist egalitarianism and scientific progress. Thus, nurses were “heroic” for mothering the nation’s wounded, female engineers stood for “progress” as long as they served the masses, and female factory workers had “equality” as long as they maintained the proper “Vietnamese style. (Pettus 2003, 10)

It sure was a step forward for women to gain certain rights and to improve their situation in the family and in the eyes of the man. The idea connected to tender role and national role fell under the socialist regime which caused the women rights movement full of contradictions. As Katherine Verdery (1996) claimed:

Despite claims about the “fetus as social property,” newspapers under Ceaucescu extolled “women’s noble mission as bearers of children and guardians of the nation’s future,” while the regime promoted large families as an expression of the “the most beautiful traditions of the Romanian people” (Verdery 1996, page quoted in Pettus 2003, 10)

A similar situation was noticeable in Vietnam, as well. As Donna M. Conolly (1991) states, women and women's right became representative during the war in Vietnam:

Yet, the discourse of the Vietnam War ultimatum „other-ed“ women and identified femininity with something alien that had to be negated and destroyed. Women were objectified to the degrees that they were viewed in the same representations as the enemy – by the same token, the enemy was viewed as feminine. (Connolly 1991, page quoted in Park 2007, 35)

In fact, women in Vietnam are currently still discriminated to some extent as it is described in various publications, books or on the Internet. Women were considerably discriminated during the war.

Therefore, in the majority of Vietnam War representations, most of which are by male writers, women are objectified, marginalized and treated as “the others”. (Park 2007, 35)

Not only Vietnamese women suffer from discrimination in aspects of their lives and so it happens that all the house work falls on them with no entitlement for recognition or reward. It is a work like any other, in some cases even harder. However, the struggle between men and women about housework could form a separate thesis, there has been a development towards brighter days.

Revolutionary codes of femininity became a priority shifted from the socialist construction. It became as well as national defence in the years 1950-1960 for national reunification and recovery in 1970 and during 1980 in socialist Vietnam. Vietnamese women represented the nation and reconcile competing needs is intense as Vietnam entered the post-war period of economic collapse and later the ideological uncertainty. This meant when the normative demands for increased state sex for women at a time when women were not able, and were less willing to meet with them. This triggering

repressive all the techniques and state control. The failure of the socialist past years, determined the dramatic change in the orientation of the economic policy. The same was with the government's tactics, which started the market reforms at the end of 1980. The global integration became a capitalist turn to women in new ways to ensure the material as well as spiritual requirements national modernity (Pettus 2003, 10-11).

The status of women in our era reached higher level. In Vietnam women do not have to go to work so that they have enough time to spend it with their family and children (Saltzman et al. 2000, 63).

Contemporary Vietnamese society is rather patriarchal, and women are the imaginary neck that moves the head. Marriage emancipation for women was legalized in the twenties. Women were appreciated for their hard work during the war. Women were factory workers and they were part of fundamental activities such as covering roads with asphalt. Women are currently housewives, they look after the fields or sell on markets for example sea food. Significant positions in the government are mostly occupied by man (Knodel et al. 2004, 8).

In the past, education was also provided primarily to men. This has been changing as well. Women are educated, they have possibilities to have better jobs. They can leave home to seize opportunities.

Wallace's women do not participate in fighting, however, if the war happened on the U. S. ground women would probably hold a gun too. Nevertheless, women in *We Were Soldiers* do not shoot enemies, they contribute in their own way. It is one of the features that distinguishes the two films. In Wallace's plot women fight at the home front.

It is important to show that while Lt. Col. Moore deals with the rough battlefield situation, his wife deals with a rough situation too. She handles telegrams saying "Secretary of the army regrets to inform you..." She insists on doing one at a time

knowing that one could have been for her. The door scenes, where she delivers telegrams, reflect women of different race and age, from whom some have children. These scenes express the unbearable instant where the envelope itself carries horrible news. Women here also represent a home, a family that soldier sometimes involuntarily left behind and where both of them know they might never see each other again.

3.4.2 The Enemy

In the two films, both sides have one essential thing in common – they put a great emphasis on the family. In *The Abandoned Field*, Ba Do is very concerned about simple matters, such as shelter and food for his wife and son. There are scenes when they are having meals, they are asleep or they play with their child. Even the US soldier, Jean, is happy when he receives a photo from his wife and baby (Nguyen 1979, 1:20:18). Jean is stationed at a base in Vietnam and his child is having a birthday back in the United States, and naturally, as he cannot be with them, he celebrates this event with his companions.

At the very end, the American pilot dies in the helicopter cabin and not far from him lies a photo of his beloved wife and child (1:29:14). In this Vietnamese movie, even though the enemy is mainly depicted as heartless, viewers are awakened by the fact that he was also just a man and by killing him, his family is left fatherless.

We Were Soldiers portrays a family from the beginning, as Colonel Moore travels to the base and he has a car full of singing children (Wallace 2002, 05:01). Before his five kids go to bed, he prays with them (14:10). An interesting close-up is on his combat boots when he is praying with his little daughter with her bare feet beside him. The war boots are in contradiction to her tiny feet symbolizing the misfortune of what is happening. Later on, he also prays in a chapel with his subordinate, Lieutenant Geoghegan, who has just become a father. Lieutenant questions the war, he is thinking about his newly born daughter and he hopes that his job is to protect the orphans, not to

make any more. Colonel Moore then says his prayer out loud, asking for God's blessing. After the battle breaks out in Ia Drang Valley for the US troopers, they go back to United States where one after another, telegrams of condolences arrive to wives of the fallen soldiers. The viewer can feel the pain in both countries.

The NVA soldiers are not only an anonymous enemy in this film, either. As well as their American counterparts, they carry with them photos of their beloved ones and they write diaries and letters. One of the diaries is found on the dead body of a Vietnamese soldier, it is translated as most personal correspondence with a photograph of a young woman inside. After it is all over, Colonel Moore sends it back to that young woman, showing his sympathy over her loss.

4 Story composition

A character is an essential part of a story that forms the core of the story. From a general point of view there are differences between protagonists. According to Aristotle three types of characters exist: unqualifiedly good, unqualifiedly evil and noble. These three protagonist types can be part of six types of plots. Generally, it is possible to find following characteristic figures:

an unqualified good hero fails: this is shockingly incomprehensible to us, since it violates a probability; a villainous protagonist fails; about his downfall we feel smug satisfaction, since justice has been served; a noble hero fails through miscalculation, which arouses our pity and fear. In the realm of the fortunate: a villainous protagonist succeeds; but this causes us to feel disgust, because it violates our sense of probability; an unqualified good hero succeeds, causing us to feel moral satisfaction; a noble hero (like Orestes) miscalculates, but only temporarily, and his ultimate vindication is satisfying. (Chatman 1978, 85)

If one takes a closer look at the development of individual characters, it is obvious that in case of *We Were Soldiers* the main character Hal Moore combines first three statements:

a noble hero (like Orestes) miscalculates, but only temporarily, and his ultimate vindication is satisfying. (Chatman 1980, 85)

This claim can be demonstrated on the event when Hal Moore and his unit get to Vietnam and they are shocked by the power and speed of the counterattack by Vietnamese soldiers (Wallace 2002, 48:30). Hal Moore feels weakened at first and he seems to have lost his way. This condition is only temporary but it raises emotions such as fear and worry. The positive character of Hal Moore intensified by the fact that he is deeply religious Catholic (21:10) and a Korean war veteran (04:40), that is praiseworthy mostly for the American audience and it probably raises his prestige, more so that he is loving father to his (04:58). This character is positive for the American audience because the majority of viewers are religious too.

An unqualified good applies mainly to the hero Hal Moore, because he is a worldly person obeying orders and commands, law-abiding, apart for war obviously. The unqualified evil are in this case soldiers of Vietnam who fight against the American army and mercilessly shoot their opponents (Wallace 2002, 03:14, and 47:32). And yet they have feelings too, hidden from their enemy.

There are two main characters in *The Abandoned Field* and they are both positive that is Ba Do and his wife Sau. However, it does not seem that both of them represent the unqualified good. The contrast is e.g. when Ba Do hits his spouse (Nguyen 1979, 42:41). On the other hand there is a completely evil character representing US army. Particularly an American soldier determined to catch Ba Do and his family. This character is depicted as a villain, nonetheless in the eyes of Vietnamese people while watching this film he makes the same impression of an evil character (40:22 or 1:23).

On the other hand this soldier as many others do their duty in the attempt to win the war. It is then the evident where everyone is determined to fight their country for. *The Abandoned Field* with its characters Ba Do and Sau suggest the following statement throughout the film:

an unqualified good here succeeds, causing us to feel moral satisfaction.
(Chatman 1980, 85)

When it comes to Sau then the above statement is proved at the end where she is the one that wins. Ba Do unfortunately does not have the same fate, he is killed. Ba Do is linked to the following proclamation:

an unqualifiedly good hero fails: this is shockingly incomprehensible to us,
since it violates probability. (Chatman 1980, 85)

The main characters in *The Abandoned Field* Ba Do and his wife have a mission. Ba Do is stricter as a man which one can observe e.g. when Sau takes care of him before he leaves for evening surveillance. She quietly does as expected of her by her husband. She does not object. This is the role of Sau as a mother caring for their household.

Yet Sau is brave and that is captured in a scene with helicopters flying over her head (24:40). Sau dives under the water's surface and hides. Her boat is destroyed and it seems that the enemy is bombing very close to her. She takes a certain risk staying there. But she seems to be lucky enough to remain without a scratch. Once she hears her baby crying, she does not hesitate and moves towards him. She could have been detected easily, but again luckily for it did not happen.

Another feature that shows the extremely brave woman is while commuting to a different place, where she meets helicopters on daily basis. The woman risks constantly. Apparently the greatest risk she takes is in the end whilst crying for her dead husband, she moves to shoot soldiers in a helicopter.

All these constituents lead to the fact that the woman is a hero in the true sense, brave and proud. At the same time she is sensitive towards her vicinity e.g. when their baby falls into water by accident and her husband hits her in the face (Nguyen 1979, 42:41). The woman bursts into tears (43:55), yet not so much because of the slap but because of the awareness that she could have lost her child. Both characters are mainly concerned about the well-being of their baby and their duty. Sau takes up an additional task of taking care of her man, as if there was nothing else in the world. Their life is very quiet and obedient. The whole adaptation of the film is not overflowing with words. Most of the scenes are without any talking. Sau talks to her husband very little - as if they understand each other either way.

The unqualified good fits the representation of these two characters who seek to help their family, fellow neighbours and partisans. The unqualified evil in this film are seen in the helicopter crews who create a constant shadow above the area.

As for *We Were Soldiers* and its main character Hal Moore is remarkable for his courage to face the enemy. This quality is expressed at the beginning of the film where the whole unit fall under attack. Hal Moore keeps his calm and leads the unit into battle as a leader. But deep down in his heart he is afraid and he wishes for the war to be over already (Wallace 2002, 6:23). It is not easy to express this in a film but take into consideration his lifestyle, love for family and all the good deed, his deepest thoughts are transparent. On the outside he seems calm and fearless.

As it is usually in films with a propagandistic interest, the counterpart is evil. They are depicted as treacherous, they take pleasure in making one's life miserable and go for the kill as shown at the very beginning of the film where Vietnamese general gives an order to kill every one of the French army (Wallace 2002, 03:15).

As stated before the main characters in *The Abandoned Field* are depicted as simple rural people who cherish their home and living but also as great patriots. Their

opponents from the American army in helicopters are presented as dull, fearful and treacherous in action. From this point of view it may seem as if the Vietnamese director generalized soldiers and assigned them with negative values. The rural people then take up traditional values, order and diligence (5:26), female obedience (42:41), togetherness with community (1:21) (McMillan in Mandal 2013, 339). The author wanted to demonstrate the difference between Vietnamese and American values, he meant to lay stress on their significance because these belong to the typical parts of Vietnamese mentality.

4.1 Story basis

Every story basis has to be introduced with elementary topics that are used in a story. The most common one of the topics is love (romance, feelings, desire, sex, and erotica), it is followed by birth (child, hope), labour (money, career, and personal prospects), power (strength, victory, self-realization) and death (health, risk, passing). Individual topics are widely used in a story, it can be only one topic or combination amongst the topics. They can be connected or stand alone. In war films these topics are more thematic, such as fight for life, gaining territories or power, topics as justice, anger or affirmative ones as love for family and country.

The Abandoned Field is filled with love, labour, power and death. Love joins Ba Do and Sau, love and togetherness was the bond between the married couple and their fellow villagers, by extension they shared love for their country.

In sense of a birth there are many scenes in the film where Ba Do and Sau rush to their child and protect it whenever helicopters got close. Labour is vital, they risk their lives on a rice field to have means of subsistence. Power is implicated in the whole film. There is an obvious power aspect in superior equipment (helicopters) which provides certain dominance. Yet, the Vietnamese villagers had power too in knowing their homeland. Power for them was believing in brighter future and in their victory.

Film *We Were Soldiers* has all the above mentioned topics. There is love, death, birth, labour and power too. Hal Moore loves his family a lot, and his home not less. Then there is death which is inevitable and frequent. Passing appears more often in this film than in its comparison *The Abandoned Field*.

4.2 Extreme and contrast

Viewers are generally thought to be interested in extreme situations which increase the attractiveness of the story. It is preferable to have a hero who is reckless or the opposite, a hero who is the best lawyer, e.g. (Dočekalová 2009, 76). The same is required in the case of war films which simply have to depict a positive and attractive hero. E.g. Hal Moore represents a calm, wise father, religious man and a soldier at the same time. It makes him a hero in the purest sense, the hero that Americans required.

Hero in the original meaning came from mythology; he was idealized with extraordinary powers to do good deeds (e.g. Hercules in ancient Greek myth). The word hero had been used freely to express main characters in books or films. Hero is now also a title for a person who did something unique in everyday life, someone who was selfless or stood up for somebody else (Oxford Dictionaries 2015).

A war hero has its specific features. A war hero recognizes moral values, just as Hal Moore. He is a natural-born authority to whom it is easy to identify, he is sympathetic to both women and men.

The character connects with category of the plot, where on one hand the character can be entirely subordinated to the plot. On the other hand the plot can be subordinated to the description and genesis of the character (Mukařovský 2006, 14). The same is also required when it comes to war films which ought to have war heroes, people who suffer as it happens in *The Abandoned Field*.

Contrast is a very important tool as well, since it helps the author to express what she/he needs. Placing something into contrast leads to fast understanding. It is an

efficient way to tell a story which enables to distinguish characters and to comprehend the time and place which the story takes in. Nowadays, more contrasting features appear in a story. What was considered as an extreme situation twenty years ago is currently considered as ordinary and unappealing. On the other hand, there is a variety of extreme situations with a lasting effect, and it is possible to observe that a piece of work displaying these extremes is most likely to be classified as timeless (Dočekalová 2009, 79).

Contradictions in *We Were Soldiers* appear in the film not so frequently. There are contradictory situation. One of which is the religious praying man Hal Moore who leaves to carry out such evil deeds, in particular, the moment when he decided to go to war (Wallace 2002, 06:25). Nevertheless, such is the duty for a soldier. Privates go to war to serve, yet they do not want to lose their families. On the other hand, they are patriots determined to protect their country risking their lives (21:47).

In film *The Abandoned Field* there are elements of contrast when the whole family lies down and when the baby fell into water. The child dropped his toy into water and he falls right behind it (Nguyen 1979, 42:16). Ba Do and Sau feel stressed and a great relief after pulling their son out of the water. This is turned again to worse when Sau gets slapped for lack of alertness (42:40). But Ba Do then felt sorry for his reaction (42:51), Sau humbly accepts his apology. It is about the contrast of love and fear and the complex escalation of life's events. Their day than switched calm when they laid down.

If one takes a look at *We Were Soldiers*, contrasting situations can be found from the beginning. Privates that were trained for combat in Vietnam are instantly caught off guard by the climatic conditions to which they are neither used nor trained for. There is a turn when the Vietnamese troops attack immediately upon arriving and show the force. On the other hand *The Abandoned Field* is overall a more quiet film and to some

extent lengthy which could discourage the audience. The most curious contrast happens in the end of the film when Ba Do was killed and despite that his wife kept her serene and fired upon the enemy. She seems to be very calm which may be given by local mentality.

4.3 Surprise

Every viewer is looking for an element of surprise, for something new and unexpected to happen in the film. The following could be considered as the usual forms of the way a surprise appears:

The protagonist discovers something new and unexpected himself which then affects his actions and the main storyline.

A secondary character surprisingly influences the protagonist and his actions. There is surprising news (usually bad) which is essential to the protagonist and his actions. (Dočekalová 2009, 86, my translation)¹

In my opinion both films are full of surprises. There is no good film without one because the viewer would lose interest while watching it. In order for the surprise to work as effectively as possible, it should ideally happen in a structured and organized manner, integrated into the plot. American concept for writing a novel denounces this theory:

The first great surprise should appear in the last section of the first act, i.e. in the closing part of the situation. It should consist of a startling progress in the plot line of the main character. (Dočekalová 2009, 87, my translation)²

In *The Abandoned Field* surprises its audience when a husband gets into water to search for his wife, but leaves his son crying in a basket in the waters near their house

¹Hlavní hrdina sám objeví něco nového a nečekaného, co ovlivní jeho další počínání a hlavní dějovou linku. Jiná postava zcela nečekaně ovlivní hlavního hrdinu a jeho situaci. Objeví se nová, zcela překvapivá (a většinou špatná) zpráva, která má velký význam pro hlavního hrdinu a jeho situaci.

²První velké překvapení by mělo nastoupit v poslední části prvního dějství, tedy v závěru tzv. situace. Mělo by se jednat o nějaký překvapivý vývoj v dějové lince hlavního hrdiny.

(Nguyen 1979, 19:36). Son kept crying and his father evaluated his steps. He could choose between his son and his wife who was further away unseen and under a helicopter attack (Nguyen 1979, 20:35). In the end, they were united, both are very happy (24:48). Scenes keep the audience present because they want to see how it ends.

4.4 Conflict in film

It is important to mention a conflict as discord of characters that have diverse, contrary relations and their direct collision that leads to various goals, will form a substance of drama and its determinative element.

Conflict in its core represents the means of maintaining viewers' attention. In case of *We Were Soldiers* there is a clear conflict in war between Americans and Vietnamese. There is also the inner conflict of Captain Hal Moore which consists in the urge to stay close to his family and the necessity to protect their homeland. There is a conflict in the very plot of *The Abandoned Field* too. Conflict was introduced as a war of evil Americans against Vietnamese. Main heroes are the Vietnamese people and that is why the film focuses mostly on them, their everyday struggle, their family and assistance to fellow men.

4.5 Additional features

Both films are accompanied by music. *The Abandoned Field* is backed up by music most of the time but there are also scenes in total silence or with sounds of dripping water, baby cry and other. Adaptation of this film is a simple black-and-white execution.

We Were Soldiers disposes of larger scale of modern movie sounds. It was shot in colour by which is easier to grasp the viewers' eye.

Both directors used helicopters plentifully in the two films. It is not a coincidence because helicopters carried a message, they are symbolic for the War in Vietnam.

Helicopters brought the war to another level, there were strategies that have never been used before.

Nguyen portrays helicopters in close-ups, medium shots and long shots from the beginning to the end of the film. It is a depiction of American combat and tactics. Helicopters are the top danger. In *The Abandoned Field* they threaten the family every day. Most of the scenes do not capture the machine instantly. First thing to notice is the dreadful sound approaching, followed by sounds of shooting and bombing. The family is hopelessly trying to find a shelter and stay hidden. Every encounter with the helicopters can be lethal for any member of the family or combat. The victory is enhanced by the fact that even such an enormous machine can be knocked down with a rifle.

We Were Soldiers uses helicopters as a crucial means of transport. As it proved with the French vehicles some years before, they were powerless against the impervious terrain. However, coming from the sky gave American troops the edge they need. These machines can easily harm anything that moved and target poorly armed Vietnamese soldiers. This film has several scenes of overhead shots from the helicopter which are very unusual but grasp perfectly the battlefield from bird's eye view. They are also vital during the final attack on the base camp in the mountain where they appear from the sky and slaughter the last enemy line.

5 Evaluation

Comparison dealt with important elements within the two war films, these are *The Abandoned Field* and *We Were Soldiers*. Both films were skilfully adapted, regardless that *The Abandoned Field* is black-and-white. There have been significant search in terms of comparison.

There are several differences between the two films. The point of view of the war differs in the two adaptations since each had another director. It is understandable that the Vietnamese director introduces and celebrates his people, and so does the American one. It is then only logical that *We Were Soldiers* was focused on American privates and spoke of them positively. *The Abandoned Field* showed positive characters in Vietnamese villagers who were oppressed.

Film *We Were Soldiers* was rather about the fight, sudden attacks, victory and loss. On the other side *The Abandoned Field* is more likely an expression of the feelings and emotions of the two main characters and their struggle to stay alive.

Female characters mentioned in *The Abandoned Field* was a young Vietnamese woman named Sau who covers several roles throughout the film. Her character combines roles of a woman, mother, wife, farmer and last but not least a strong combatant and enemy. The image of such woman represents a model for men. One talks about so called superwomen who handle her business without fail. There was no mention in the film about Sau complaining, she accepts life as it happens.

Film *We Were Soldiers* is more focused on combat scenes. Film *The Abandoned Field* targets family life of villagers. Both films are equally touching, you feel concerned and you anticipate how the situation ends up. Films bring you closer to the real settings of the war in which they were shot.

Helicopters took part in both films. When it comes to frequency of appearance then *The Abandoned Field* uses them in almost every scene.

The representation of privates in both films was taken from different angles. *The Abandoned Field* portrayed American soldiers as evil and yet cowardly at the same time. Their lack of courage was shown during an attempt to climb down the helicopter to kill a villager. However this endeavour was ruined by a snake, once the

American soldier notices it, he screams and climbs back up. The villager is amused by this outcome.

An American soldier in *We Were Soldiers* was caught off-guard and unprepared. He was mostly surprised by the surroundings, weather and the strength of Vietnamese opponents. He was not perceived as cowardly though, not as in film *The Abandoned Field*.

6 Conclusion

The thesis of my paper was to compare representation of an American soldier in the American and Vietnamese war films. It held the form of a comparative essay based on American and Vietnamese war films. The paper dealt with two films, those were *The Abandoned Field* and film *We Were Soldiers* - both were set into the War in Vietnam.

The main goal of this study, however, was to compare and contrast the portrayal of the American soldier in the Vietnam War, as depicted in the two films. In order to do so, I compared two films and characters that appeared in them. I can ascertain that both films have distinctive and strong characters.

Surprisingly, both directors showed the basic human sides of their counterparts. I did not expect director Nguyen to expose American soldier as a family man, although it was in the very end, in the scene when the American pilot died and a photo of his wife and child fell out of his pocket. Director Randall Wallace many years later chose the same outline to his film because in the last moments there is a scene with a Vietnamese woman who received and cried over a diary of her dead husband.

It was indicated that in *We Were Soldiers*, the soldiers were only doing their job and that both belligerent sides most wished to return to their homes and families. On the other hand, the villagers in *The Abandoned Field* became soldiers against their will, they did not have any other choice. Yet, both films capture common men and women as

soldiers even though they were depicted differently in each film. The paper hence demonstrated that also ordinary people may become soldiers when forced.

I reckon that my paper brought up many useful facts and information. The topic is rich and extensive, and it is limited by the extent of the paper to explore individual scenes and characters in more detail. Despite that I think that the analysis was as detailed as possible to provide coherent information about the films, main characters and environment in which it took action.

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