

Anti-War Film To End Them All

There have been pro-war films and there have been anti-war films, but now comes what some people think is the ultimate propaganda weapon: the anti-war-film film.

"My idea was to make an anti-war film which would in no way glorify war. I believe that previous so-called 'anti-war' films in some way encouraged war, in spite of themselves, by making war seem glamorous or tragic and thus noble. I did not want to make a film that was a tank opera, but one that would make the next war film a little sillier."

The "idea" belonged to film-director Richard Lester—known mostly for the two Beatles films he made—and it has resulted in "How I Won the War," a film that is certain to provide considerable heat during the coming cold months.

When it opened in London recently, police had to be called in to subdue a brawl after a woman shouted, "The National Front denounces this Communist filth," a reference to the opinion that the film is anti-patriotic and unreasonably pacifist.

In the U.S., the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures concluded that "the film's targets are decidedly not love of country or religious belief. It takes, rather, a debunking approach to the belligerent patriotism fostered through speeches, slogans and songs." Lester, NCOMP said, "has managed brilliantly, in a youthful idiom, to portray the humanitarian's view of war. An heroic film in its own way, and controversial, it merits attention and reflection."

NCOMP's use of the word "youthful" is significant, for much of the debate on the film is likely to center on its impact on young men and their opinion of military duty. The film is expected to draw a large teenage audience if only for the top-billing given to John Lennon, the Beatle who is making his dramatic debut in the film as a naive young man who believes that war is all fun and games and stirring slogans.

Later, as he is dying from a gorily photographed stomach wound, the character played by Lennon suggests that war is a tragic bill of goods sold to the civilian, who has but three reasons for fighting:

"One gets you in it," he says. "There's another while you're fighting, which is to stay alive, and the third is the one they will think up afterwards. I

won't be around to hear it, but I'm sure it will be a good one."

While director Lester regards those as being among the key lines in the film, most of "How I Won the War" is supposed to be a serious satire on the heroics seen in typical war films, particularly those of the John Wayne "guts and glory" genre.

One example of the film's switch on the usual war epic is that while the latter often contains scenes showing "extras" being killed during invasion scenes, no one but the principals die in "How I Won the War."

"I did not want one casual death in this film," Lester explained. "I did not want death to seem so unimportant. One of the gross obscurities about war is the average war film, though of course there are exceptions. War on the screen has usually been treated as a great big adventure. The disregard of the expenditure of human life is appalling. The capitalizing on death as a means of 'entertainment' revolts me as much as the real thing."

Stogenering is ridiculed in the film, particularly in one sequence in which a Churchill-like speech comes from the mouth of a doll in the hands of an old and unbalanced soldier-veteran.

"What a shame," commented Lester, "that the phrase 'our finest hour' should refer to killing and being killed."

After classifying "How I Won the War" as A-2, morally objectionable for adults and adolescents, the Catholic film office observed that in "this flawed but effective" film, Lester's framework to isolate the war syndrome, proceeding with wit, verve and technical ingenuity to ridicule its every aspect. He succeeds in evoking a view of war as irrational, absurd, inhuman and ultimately futile, by showing it as such.

"He amuses the viewer with many caricatures and charades and then juxtaposes reality—in the form of genuine and simulated newsreel footage—until one comprehends the horror for himself."

(Catholic Press Features)

TV Life of Christ

Fort Worth—(RNS)—A telecast of "The Vine," an hour-long color special on the life of Christ, will be carried by the National Broadcasting Company on Jan. 7 at 4 p.m. EST.



John Lennon as a naive recruit in "How I Won the War."

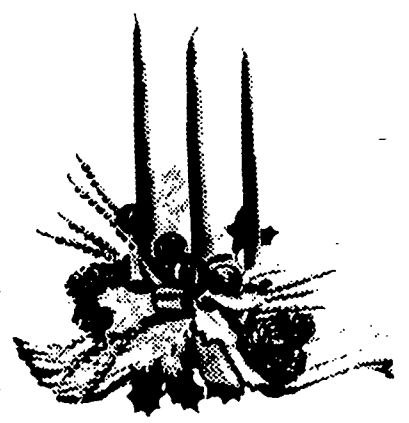
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