War in the Tropics

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In the Home Box Office mini-series *Band of Brothers* (2001), one of the soldiers on a troop ship bound for England remarks: "Right now some lucky bastard's headed for the Pacific, get put on some tropical island, surrounded by six naked native girls, helping him cut up coconuts so he can hand feed them to flamingos". This paradisiacal view of the Pacific and tropical areas has existed for centuries, and despite European settlers' developing familiarity with the area, it is a misconception which has continued to be propagated in war films set in the tropics. These war films depict the tropics as antipodean utopias which become corrupted by the ravages of war. Thus, while many of these films attempt to display war realistically, they still hold to the historical view of the tropics as unspoiled and pure—until, of course, war intrudes onto the scene. These films rarely examine the effect of the war on the local inhabitants, but rather deal with soldiers coping with the disjunction between their preconceived notions of the area and the reality before them. Crucially as well, war is depicted as a greater crime against nature (both human and environmental) when fought in the tropics rather than in Europe. This view is promulgated in the representation of battles fought in these films. In films set in the Pacific theatre during World War Two, and more recent ones set during the Vietnam War, the battle for American and Australian soldiers is as much about coping with their surroundings as with fighting the enemy, who are often rarely seen, or only viewed in long shot. War films set in the tropics depict 'war as hell' because of the environment, which is by turns remote, mystifying, and generally rural, rather than urban, 'civilised' and familiar, as it is in the case of the majority of war films set in Europe.

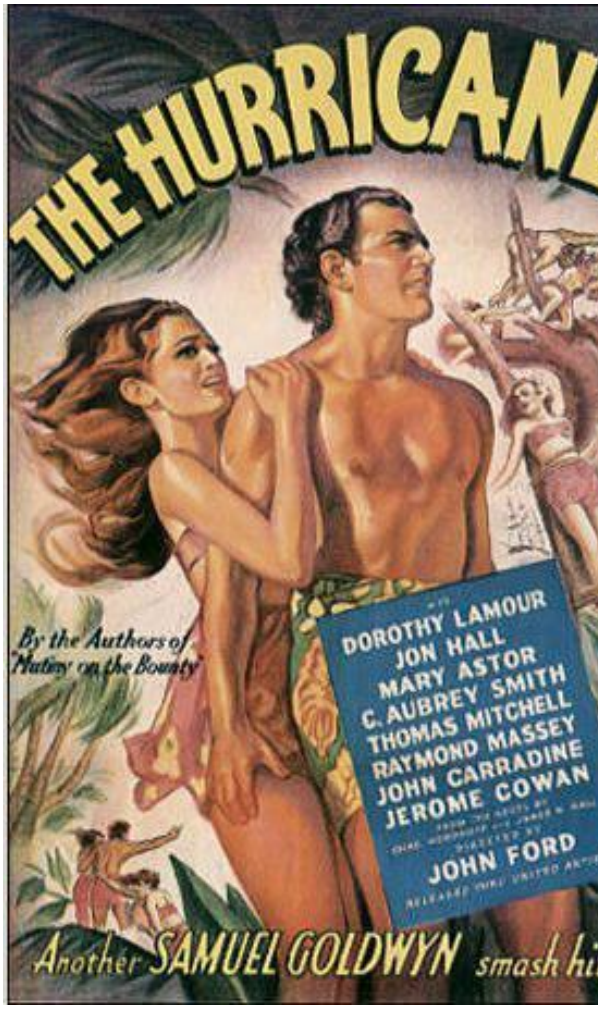
The view of the tropics as an island paradise peopled with 'noble savages' can be traced back to antiquity. In 20BC, Horace wrote of a paradise to the south which was free from the troubles of civil-war ravaged Rome:

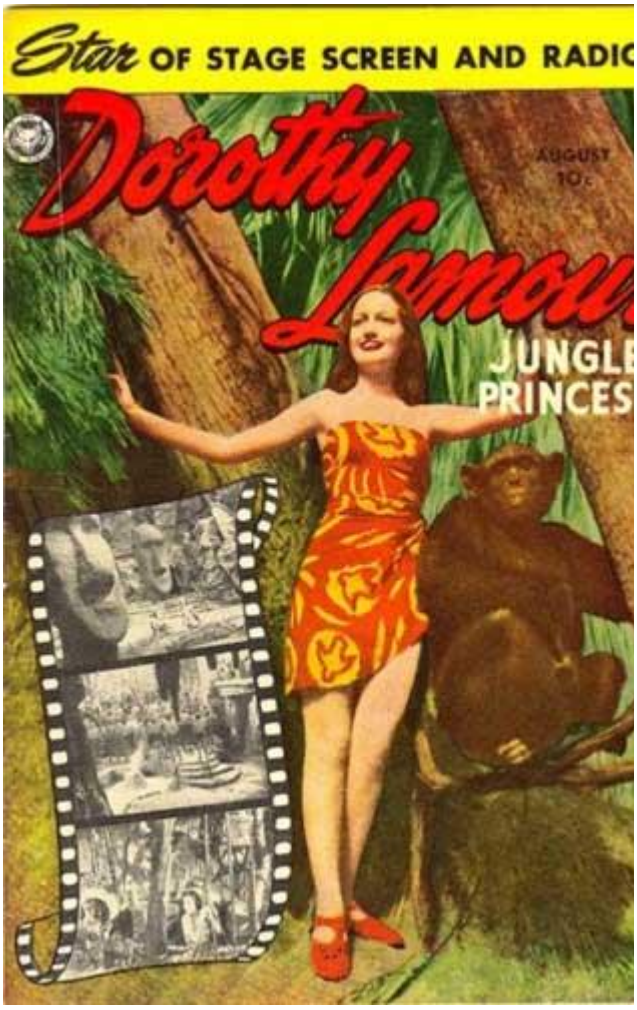
From hollow oaks drops honey, from high hills
The nimble spring with rattling feet distils
There goats uncalld unto the milk pails come,
And faire flock their swoln bag brings home... (Horace 133-34)

Such a view of the tropics—or at least the unknown lands which were to be discovered by Europeans from the 16th century onwards—was scarcely contradicted by those first Europeans to sight these lands. In 1503, Amerigo Verpucci wrote:

I found myself in the region of the Antipodes... This land is very agreeable, full of tall trees which never lose their leaves and give off the sweetest odours... Often I believed myself to be in Paradise... This land is populated by people who are entirely nude, both men and women... They have no law, nor any religion, they live according to nature ...(qtd in Eisler 15-16)

In the first half of the twentieth century, with the advent of film, the view of the tropical islands throughout the Pacific continued to be presented along such lines (though obviously given the censorship of the time the islanders were never entirely nude). Michael Sturma (1997) writes that the difficulty for American servicemen in coming to grips with the reality of the tropics was referred to as "the Dorothy Lamour Syndrome" (26) in reference to the American actress who starred in such films as *The Hurricane* (1937), *Moon over Burma* (1938) and *Aloma of the South Seas* (1941). That Lamour, who was one time Miss New Orleans, came to be known as "the Sarong Girl" gives an indication of the type of scenery—and women—the men of the armed forces were expecting to see upon arrival in the south Pacific (regardless of the fact that they were fighting a war). While an unrealistic view of the tropics might be expected from the generation before the advent of television and frequent international travel, it is the continuation of this view in films after World War Two which is of particular interest. Even up to 1997, in Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, notwithstanding its war setting, the view of the tropics as paradise persists.





With respect to war films set during World War Two, as with the war itself there are two main settings—Europe and the Pacific. There are of course notable exceptions to this rule, such as those set in Africa, for example, *Sahara* (Korda 1943), *The Desert Fox* (Hathaway 1951) and its sequel *The Desert Rats* (Wise 1953). By and large however, the setting for World War Two films keeps to the main two theatres of operations. This also applies to other conflicts. Aside from *Zulu* (Endfield 1964), *Breaker Morant* (Beresford 1980) and Ridley Scott's recent *Black Hawk Down* (2001), few English language films depict any historic or recent conflict in Africa. Similarly, there are relatively fewer American films set during the Korean War than the Vietnam War. Thus the battlefields of war films are sharply divided between the cold climate of Europe 1944-1945 and the tropical climate of the pacific, either during World War Two or in Vietnam. Films set in the tropics draw particular attention to the environment in which the war is fought, whereas those set in Europe often ignore the reality of the period, such as the intensely cold winter of 1944-45 in western Europe. Those films set

in the European theatre of operations also have the added sense that the Allied characters are liberating oppressed peoples and towns, whereas in films set within the tropics, the war is fought in jungles and on largely uninhabited islands, and the soldiers have little sense of why they fight apart from often pointless strategic or politic reasons.

In 1997, two films were released which were viewed as being in direct competition for the favour of both audiences and critics: Stephen Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* were opposed not merely because they were fighting for attention in a crowded marketplace, but also through their different approaches to representation of World War Two. Spielberg's was a tribute to the generation of (American) men who fought against the Nazis, and was presented as a realistic depiction of war; Malick makes no such gestures. Significantly, *Saving Private Ryan* is set in the European theatre of operations, and begins with the landing at Omaha Beach on D Day. The setting of a film which seeks to glorify those who fought in World War Two in the European campaign rather than the Pacific recalls the policy during the war of "Europe first"—the sense that defeating Nazi Germany was more vital to American interests than that of defeating Japan. Similarly, because of the Nazi genocide against Jewish people, Spielberg is able to portray the war as a kind of moral crusade.

Malick's film has no such implications. It does not seek to elevate the generation of men who fought in World War Two above any other generation, and there is no scene which records a famous victory by the allies. Although the action takes place on Guadalcanal, the timing is after the more famous landing and battles fought by the marines, and the operation of the men of Charlie Company is essentially one of mopping up. Were Malick to have chosen to make a more reverential film it is likely (the adaptation of Jones's novel aside) he would have chosen a more famous battle, such as the landing of Iwo Jima, the only battle fought in the Pacific theatre which has close to the same significance to the D Day landings. Malick's film however, is not even as concerned with presenting war in a realistic sense as is the case in *Saving Private Ryan*. While *The Thin Red Line* does contain numerous graphic scenes of soldiers dying, it has no scene which replicates the bloody carnage Spielberg has in his depiction of the Omaha landings. Malick is more concerned with the philosophical nature of war rather than purely showing war as hell.

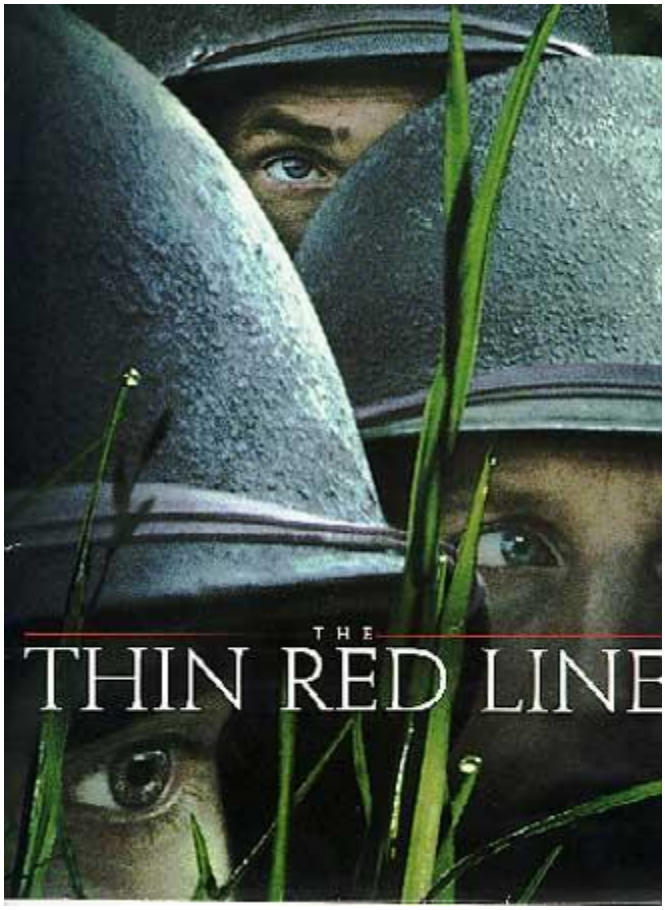
The openings of the two films immediately distil the differences, and highlight the importance of location in determining the intention of the filmmakers. *Saving Private Ryan*

opens not with the landing on Omaha Beach, but with an elderly man walking through a cemetery with his family. We discover that this is a war cemetery for those who died during the Normandy landings. *The Thin Red Line* has no such sense of retrospection, it opens with a shot of a crocodile disappearing into the murky waters of a river, followed by sun streaming through the trees of a jungle. Opening with shots of nature is a common motif in war films set in the tropics: T*he Bridge on the River Kwai* (Lean 1957), *Paradise Road* (Beresford 1997), *South Pacific* (Logan 1958) among many others use this technique. There is no view of major townships or any western presence, all that is shown is a village and scenes of children and adults swimming in the ocean.

Thus the opening of *Saving Private Ryan* invokes the historical significance of World War Two. The visit to the cemetery suggests a pilgrimage to a sacred site, and highlights that the battlefields of France, for both World War One and Two, are now tourist destinations, accessible to all. By contrast, the opening of *The Thin Red Line* contains no evidence that the battle, or indeed war, has any historical importance. Indeed, many of the battle sites of the Pacific theatre remain remote. There are few cemeteries or memorials on the scale of those in France, and while many tropical islands are now holiday destinations, the sites of former battles remain inaccessible because they are protected by the very jungles through which the soldiers had to struggle, and because many of the battles were fought on isolated islands which are still isolated. Consider, for example, Iwo Jima: unlike Normandy, visitors to the island need to be part of a tour which has obtained special permission because Iwo Jima remains a Japanese military instillation. Similarly, for Australians the Kokoda Trail has special significance, but while it is possible (and more and more popular) to walk the trail, it is hardly the easy trip that Normandy is. Even the web site which promotes treks along the trail calls it "rugged and gruelling" and notes that "it is ironic that this area along which WWII was fought and won for Australia... now resembles a forgotten backwater" (*Kokoda Trail Trekking Adventure* 2005)—hardly a comment one would ascribe to Caen or Bayeux in Normandy.

This is partly the result of the fact that (due to the 'island hopping' strategy of Admiral Nimitrz and General MacArthur) quite often the battles fought in the Pacific theatre during World War Two actually occurred in "forgotten backwaters". Aside from the battle to retake Manila (which involved "house to house fighting" (Wheal 291)) few of the major battles of this theatre occurred in cities. Thus there are relatively few scenes equivalent to those such as

the allies liberating Pairs or towns in Belgium to be found in the war in the Pacific. The war films reflect this by, for the most part, showing only small villages, leaving the only sight of cities or populated areas in scenes set well behind the front line.



In *The Thin Red Line* the opening scenes of the villagers going about their day-to-day routine are used to link war with nature; a voice-over asks: "What's this war at the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself?". Malick's approach is at times, as Tom Whalen (1999) argues, rather simplistic. One American soldier Private Witt, who is AWOL in the village, comments to a woman that "the children around here never fight", as though this suggests war is purely a phenomenon of modern civilisations. Yet the women tells Witt that they do fight "sometimes", which suggests that it is Witt's view (and not Malick's) which is misguided. And while the questions asked by the unknown voice-over perhaps tend towards metaphysical hokum, they are questions that could only be asked in a war film set in the tropics. The question for soldiers walking through burnt-out towns and cities in Western Europe (as occurs in *Saving Private Ryan*) is not of war's place in nature—nor indeed man's place in nature—but rather, the tendency of civilisations to attempt to destroy each other in war. The connotations, for example, of a destroyed church are quite opposite to that of trees

and jungle areas being devastated by bombs and napalm (as occurs at the beginning of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). The first is a desecration of a civilisation's history and culture, the second the destruction of a primeval natural world.

The difference in intention of the two types of film reflects the fact that fighting in the jungle was/is a very different experience to fighting in towns or on an open battlefield. Kenneth Slessor, the official Australian war-correspondent in World War Two, wrote of the fighting in New Guinea:

... this is a different kind of war [to the one fought in North Africa and Greece], and it is being fought in the shadows. It is different in almost every way you can imagine.... It is not a battle of men and armour pitted against each other here. It is not a battle of armies; it is a private and personal war of man against man, of small patrols and scattered sections, bursting out of nowhere into nowhere, hiding stealthily in the bush, suffering in silence, shooting and melting away again, sinking for weeks on end into the anonymous green infinities. (Semmler 413-14)

Slessor also noted that the American and Australian soldiers fighting in the jungle

... have long since found that their enemies are not the Japanese alone. Even to get within bayonet length of the Japanese is often a physical challenge which only a young athlete could hope to endure. The jungle has deadlier adversaries than the Japanese... At the end of the trail, the Japanese wait with knives and bullets. But the jungle enlists a thousand enemies before this last enemy of all. It is unending, unrelenting, unforgiving. It is maleficent. It is not made for man. (Semmler 414-15)

War films set within the jungles and tropics reiterate this situation. In *We Were Soldiers* (Wallace 2002), for example, a French officer when surveying the area around him in Vietnam states: "Fucking grass, fucking heat, fucking country". Similarly in *Bridge on the River Kwai*, Major Shears (played by William Holden) declares a radio is "wet, mildewed, rotten—like everything else in this jungle".

In *The Thin Red Line*, the first battle the soldiers fight is pointedly only against the tropical elements. The men initially wait for deployment in a transport ship which is insufferably hot, and when they land on the island, the Japanese are not there, all that awaits them is a long march through the jungle. When they arrive at the base of the hill they have been ordered to take, their artillery shells the Japanese bunkers, however there is no actual sight of these bunkers. For all intents and purposes it seems they are attacking the hill itself. Unlike in *Saving Private Ryan* where the bombardments on Omaha Beach are obviously directed at German fortifications, in *The Thin Red Line*, land and vegetation initially seem to be the only things destroyed. During the first attack on the hill when men are shot we see them disappear as though they are now part of the land; and shots from the Japanese appear to come from smoke. Whereas Spielberg immediately shows the perspective of the battle from the German side, Malick initially only shows the Americans; the enemy is unsighted and it seems incongruous that there is anything in the hills that could cause death. Reflecting this battle against the jungle, the soldiers refer to the fighting as against the island rather than the Japanese. Sergeant Welsh, for example, tells Witt "the whole thing's about property", for they are not liberating any towns, and thus the battle is purely strategic. Even after the battle, the environment suffers as Malick shows a medic washing his stretcher in a stream with the blood colouring the water, and a bird that has been inadvertently shot is seen struggling to fly. Thus, the war is against nature, but Malick posits that war is also natural. Colonel Tall

pointedly tells Captain Status: "Look at this jungle. Look at those vines, the way they twist around, swallowing everything. Nature is cruel, Staros".

Whether Malick is correct or not, is not at issue here. What *The Thin Red Line* shows however is that one can only make those connections to nature in a war film, when that film is set in the tropics. Even those films set during the siege of Stalingrad during the winter of 1942-43 such as *Enemy at the Gates* (Annaud 2001) or *Stalingrad* (Vilsmaier 1993) which highlight the elements, cannot divorce themselves from the urban setting. In those films nature may be cruel, but the battle remains between men in buildings built by men. Malick's intention recalls the old belief that the tropics arc free from the evils of the modern world; nature may be cruel, but for Malick what is worse is man's cruelty amongst nature—as though war is worse when trees and plants are destroyed rather than buildings.

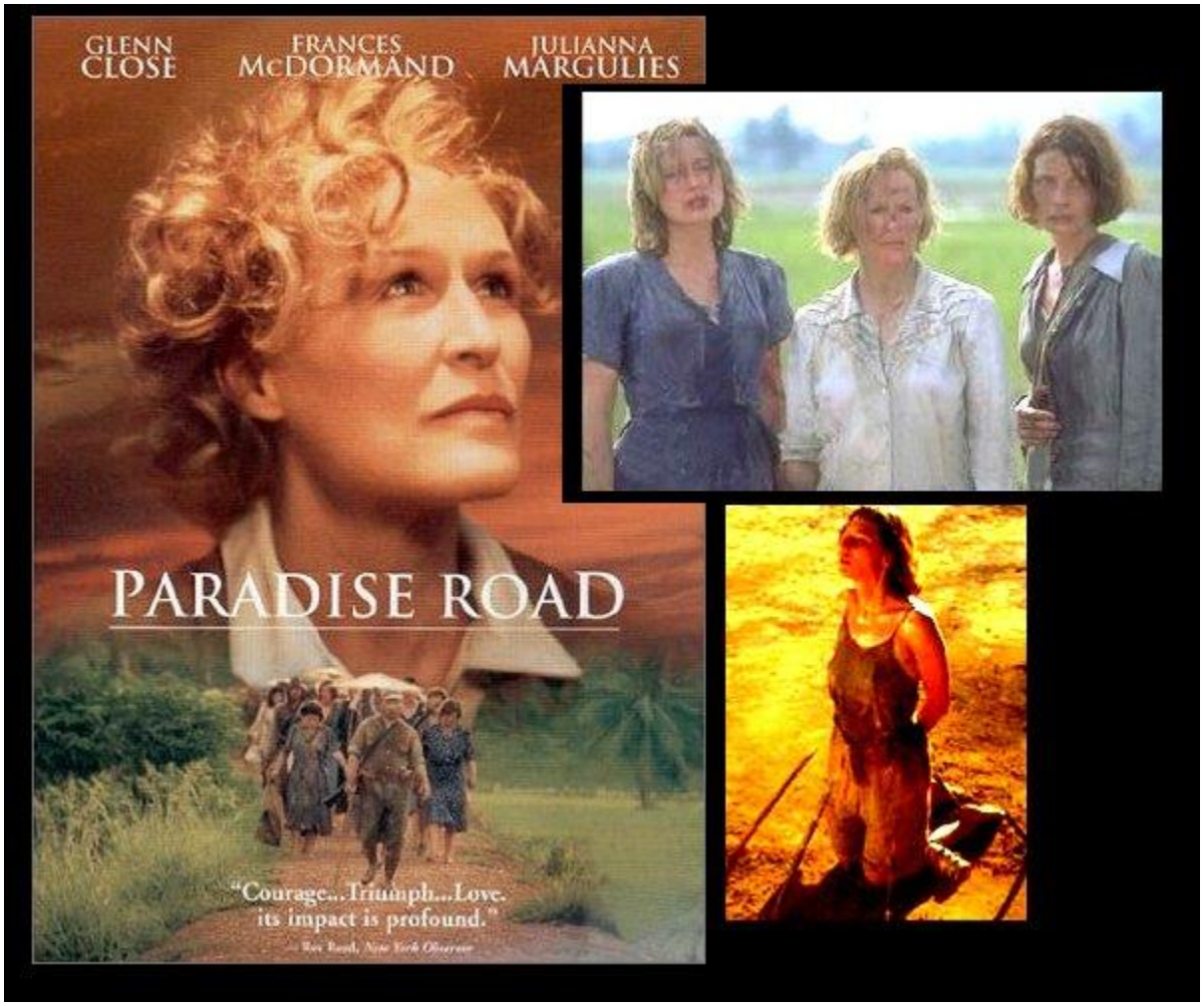
When it comes to World War Two prisoner of war (POW) films, by far the greatest number are set within camps in Europe. *Stalag 17* (Wilder 1953), *The Great Escape* (Sturges 1963), *The Wooden Horse* (Lee 1950), *Von Ryan's Express* (Robson 1965), *The Colditz Story* (Hamilton 1955) and others far outnumber films such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Paradise Road* and *Merry Christmas, Mister Lawrence* (Oshima 1983). *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, by virtue of its winning the 1957 Academy Award for best picture, remains, along with perhaps *The Sands of Iwo Jima,* one of the best known films set in the Pacific theatre of World War Two. The narrative centres around a Japanese POW camp in Burma, comprised mainly of British soldiers. One Australian is seen, though he soon dies in an escape attempt, and the only American in the camp is Major Shears. While the film's main themes are the horror of war and the obstinacy of army regulations, the role of the tropics is crucial. The difference between Lean's film and those POW films set in Europe displays as well the continuing view of the tropics as remote, unknown and primeval.

The film's opening shot of a jungle, and crosses planted next to a train line reinforces the location's connotation. The line is seen as the only link with the modern world. The only other manmade structure are the crosses, which suggest that this link to the life of the 'outside' world—for the jungle appears to be all enclosing—has caused many deaths, and also insinuates that the only outcome for those who remain in the jungle is death. The first shots of the camp reflect the power of the surroundings. The camp is isolated totally from the rest of the world, and unlike POW camps in films set in Europe, such as *The Great Escape*, the facilities for holding the prisoners are primitive. The barracks are mere huts, and the first view of the prisoners is of Shears and an Australian burying a soldier who died of Beri-beri. Both are uniformed only in the vaguest sense: they are shirtless, and sweating more from the heat of the climate than from their labour. When the British soldiers arrive, their uniforms, especially that of Colonel Nicholson, sets them apart from the setting. The camp commandant, Colonel Saito, then informs them: "There is no barbed wire, no stockade, no watch towers. They are not necessary. We are an island in the jungle. Escape is impossible. You would die". This belief is repeated in the 1997 film, *Paradise Road*. In that film, the Japanese commandant tells the female prisoners not to think of escaping because: "You would die in that jungle".

By comparison, in *The Great Escape*, the commandant of Stalag Luft III, Colonel Von Luger, informs the Senior British Officer: "This is a new camp, it has been built to hold you and your men... give up your hopeless attempts to escape and with intelligent cooperation we may all sit out the war as comfortably as possible". Von Luger thus does not attempt to scare the prisoners with the fate that awaits them outside the camp (although of course for fifty of the escapees it would be death) for the reality is that outside the camp is Europe. And a majority

of the prisoners are themselves European, and thus there is no fear of an unknown beyond the camp's perimeter.

The camps and condition of the prisoners are also starkly different. Stalag Luft III in *The Great Escape* has a recreation hall, a library, and the prisoners are given tools "for gardening". Because those prisoners in *The Great Escape* were all officers they are not forced to do any manual labour, yet even in *Stalag 17* which features a POW camp for "630 sergeants" none are shown doing any labour—indeed one scene shows them playing volleyball. In reality, non-officer POWs "were deployed on work detachments away from the main camp. Employment ranged across factory, forestry, construction, and railway work to labour on farms and in mines" (Dennis 475). Stalag 17 does however depict the climatic elements POWs in Europe had to endure. The film shows the camp compound as muddy and the prisoners are often cold. In contrast, the events of *The Great Escape* appear to occur during a rather pleasant spring. In reality, as Paul Brickhill writes in his account on which the film was based, in the period just before the escape: "The compound dust was frozen hard under a foot of snow and most of us tried to keep warm by going to bed during the day" (l36). Similarly, while the film only makes a slight acknowledgment of the food situation (the prisoners are shown growing vegetables and not flowers because as the Senior British Officer tells the camp commandant "You can't eat flowers") in Brickhill's narrative he notes "the German idea of proper feeding wasn't much more than a formality; they fed us on about 1/2d. a week. If you've ever known hunger—not gnawing appetite, but real hunger—you'll understand part of the reason for POW reluctance to endure German hospitality" (8). He also records that one POW lost 40 pounds in his first year in captivity (8).



Film portrayal of POWs under the Japanese make no such effort to sanitize the experience—indeed the atrocities of the Japanese often serve as a base for the narrative. Certainly this is the case in *Paradise Road* and *The Bridge over the River Kwai*. In the first (an account of female non-combatants interned by the Japanese on the island of Sumatra during World War Two) the conditions the women must cope with due to Japanese treatment include beatings, forced labour, sexual submission to officers, and witnessing the murder of fellow prisoners. Although *The Bridge on the River Kwai* does depict Japanese indifference to the welfare of their captives, if anything it underplays the conditions. The British soldiers by and large suffer no beatings from their captors except during a face off between the commanding British Officer Colonel Nicholson and Colonel Saito, although it is insinuated that these have occurred regularly in the past. The barracks in which they live however are rudimentary, the hospital is primitive, and the prisoners are forced to labour for the Japanese war effort.

Yet, as ever, the real enemy is the tropical environment. This is the enemy the soldiers on both sides must face. During a tropical storm a Japanese guard is shown standing underneath

a torrent of water; the commandant's office is cooled by a fan operated by a native, though Saito continues to sweat profusely; and both Japanese and English soldiers are obviously uncomfortable with their surroundings. The tropics as the common enemy is also seen in *None but the Brave* (Sinatra 1965), in which a company of American and Japanese soldiers work together to survive on a remote island in the Pacific. In *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, only Colonel Nicholson shows any ease with the location; he has spent a considerable time in India (he tells Colonel Saito that he "loves India") and thus he is the most prepared of all the soldiers for the environment—yet even he believes that escape is suicidal.

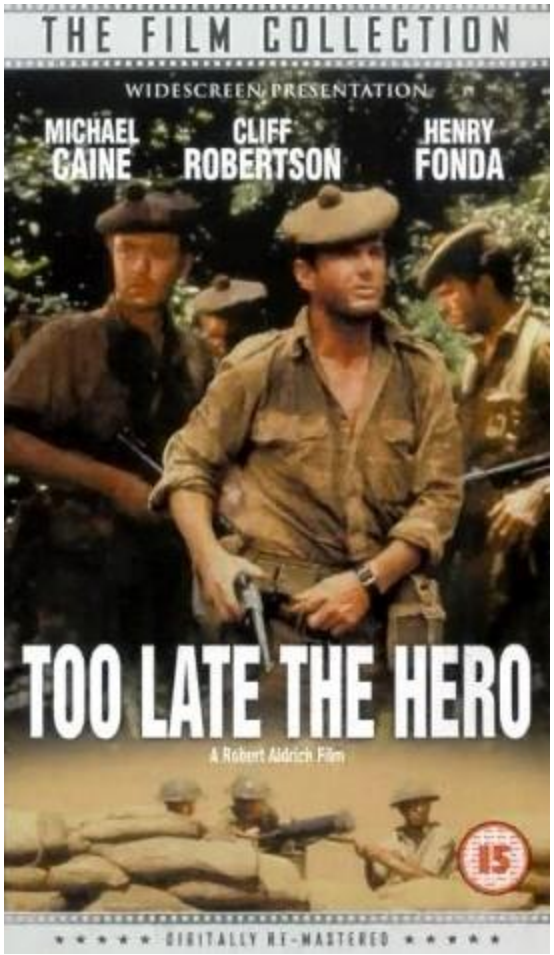
The deterrent to escape is not merely the danger involved with walking through any jungle, but most importantly that it is unknown. War films set in the tropics frequently draw attention to the allies' lack of knowledge of the area. In *The Bridge on the River Kwai* when Shears escapes he does so only through luck and the help of natives. Even after spending time in a local village he is soon in trouble when he leaves, and only survives due to a chance sighting by a reconnaissance plane. He is sent to a hospital on Ceylon, but is forced to return to the

prison camp with a squad of commandoes, because he is the only one who has knowledge of the area. As Major Warden tells him: "Our chief problem is lack of first hand knowledge, you see none of us have ever been there". In *Too Late the Hero* (Aldrich 1970), Colonel Thompson informs an American lieutenant sent on a mission across an island in the south Pacific that he has no idea if there were any natives on the island before the Japanese arrived, but only that there are not any left now. In *South Pacific*, Emile de Becque is enlisted to help the American war effort because he is the only westerner who has knowledge of the Japanese occupied island, Maria-Louise. In one of the first films set in the Pacific, *Guadalcanal Diary* (Seller 1943), the soldiers ignorance of the area is reflected by one marine asking if the islanders are "cannibals". This comment also reflects that many soldiers' only knowledge of jungles was based on Hollywood films—and most likely "Tarzan" films set in jungles of Africa.

No such problems occur in films set in Europe. Characters either have lived in Germany before the war, can speak German or can quickly enlist someone who can. Unlike when on tropical islands, soldiers and POWs in Europe have detailed maps and often contacts with friendly locals. In *The Great Escape*, the prisoners know everything about the location of the camp and the escape routes to Switzerland, Spain or Sweden. They are able to forge documents, speak German, wear clothes that make them blend in with the locals. The only information they do not have is "what lies 500 yards beyond the trees", but this is obtained when one of the prisoners (Hilts) escapes and allows himself to be recaptured.

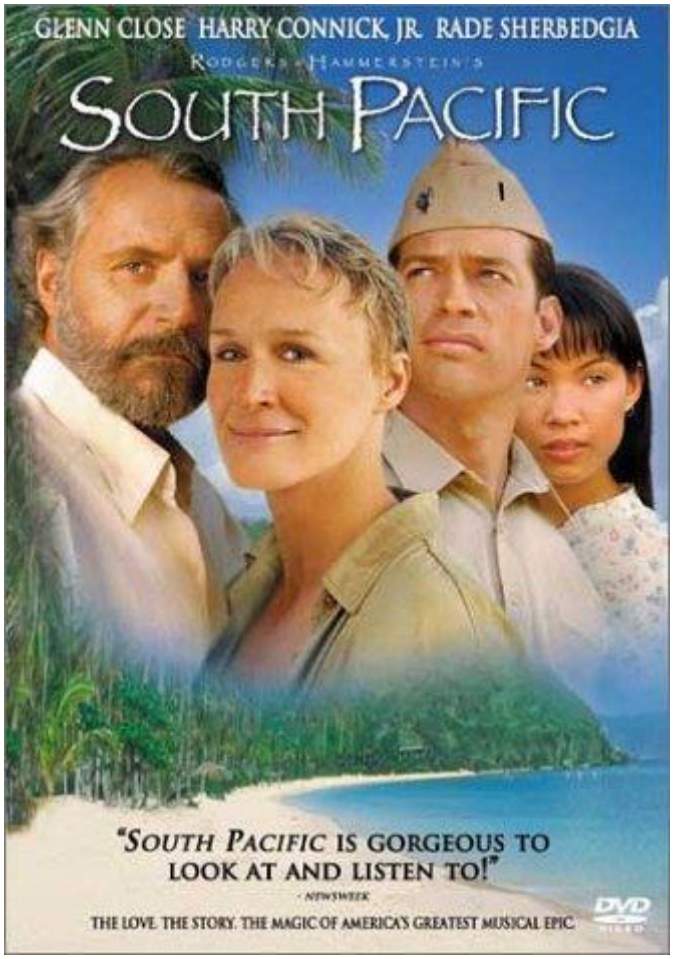
This knowledge of the area, and the ability to blend in with locals also explains why there are so many 'adventure' war films set in Europe. There are no Pacific equivalents of Alistair MacLean's *The Guns of Navarone* (Thompson 1961) and *Where Eagles Dare* (Hutton 1968) or *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich 1967), if only because American actors do not look Japanese, and thus cannot pass for the enemy simply by donning a different uniform. The closest equivalent is Robert Aldrich's *Too Late the Hero*. Yet though Aldrich also directed *The Dirty Dozen*, the two films have little in common aside from both plots concerning a group of misfits being sent on a suicidal mission. Where *The Dirty Dozen* involves infiltrating a luxurious mansion in France, in *Too Late the Hero* the group needs to infiltrate a Japanese base on an otherwise uninhabited tropical island. To do so the group must again deal more with the problems of the jungle, such as not getting lost and the heat, than the Japanese;

indeed they penetrate the base easily, and their only problems with the enemy occur when they attempt to return to their own base.



Too Late the Hero, also, however, depicts the contradiction of the tropics—alien and dangerous but also paradisaical. The film opens with scenes on a tropical island that feature men frolicking on beaches as though they are at a holiday resort. This also occurs in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. While Shears recuperates in Ceylon he spends time swimming with a nurse on a beach that has sailing boats, and he appears to be in all respects on holiday. In *Mister Roberts* (Ford and LeRoy 1955), this dichotomy is highlighted by the film's two main locations. The film opens with the supply ship known as The Bucket located next to a deserted island. While in this location, the crew are mostly bored and going "Asiaatic". They fight the elements—one man passes out in the cargo hold due to the intense heat—and the fact they are so far from the war and civilisation. When they are commanded to resupply their ship they venture to a different island, one which conforms to the more stereotypical view of tropical islands. The ship is greeted by islanders in canoes playing instruments and singing, and the crewmen are presented with leis. The island, though still notionally in the south

Pacific, appears more like Hawaii in nature—a tourist destination, rather than an island in a theatre of war. (This is perhaps not surprising, given that the film location of this island was Oahu, Hawaii. The initial location of the deserted island was actually the Midway Islands, which remain, as they were during the war, remote and largely uninhabited.) Although no closer to the war, the men are happier here not only because they are on leave, but because this island conforms with their preconceived notions of the tropics. This second island gives the soldiers a sense that they are fighting for someone—the island is worthy of defending while the "crummy" island they were first stationed on had no obvious sense of worth.



This divide between the paradisiacal and the desolate, or the beautiful and the dangerous, is vital to understanding films in the tropics. Filmmakers seem unable to merely depict war without depicting the peaceful side. *The Thin Red Line* shows an idyllic village, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* shows restful and resort like Ceylon, *Paradise Road* contrasts the luxury of the Raffles hotel in colonial Singapore with the desolation of the internment camp in Sumatra, *Never So Few* contrasts the vicious fighting in the jungles of Burma with an opulent Shangri-la like mansion behind the front line. Even *None but the Brave*, which is completely

set on one small island depicts the location as idyllic, and more suited to relaxation than fighting. This contrasting view of the tropics is highlighted most obviously in the movie version of the Rogers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*, in which the film depicts three islands: the first is used as the Allies base; the second is inhabited only by the Japanese and represents the war; and the third—Bali Ha'i—is presented as a mystical island of paradise where pleasures of the flesh await any soldier able to reach its shores.

South Pacific, which ironically involves few battle scenes, epitomizes film portrayal of war in the tropics. Filmmakers struggle to depict violence among scenes of natural beauty without resorting to stereotypical views of the tropics as areas alien to westerners and whose inhabitants are happy, fun-loving people with little interest in outside political affairs. Whereas the purpose of the conflict is always clear in films set in Europe, in the tropics, because the enemy is as much the jungle and climate as it is the opposing forces, and because there is little sense of defending or liberating towns or countries, the rationale for the battle is often as impenetrable as the jungle in which the fighting takes place. This allows filmmakers to question the futility of war to a greater effect than in those films set in Europe. In battles in Europe, cities are reduced to rubble and the work of rebuilding is a human effort; in the tropics, battle sites in the jungles are repaired by the natural growth of the jungle, to be all-but forgotten.

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