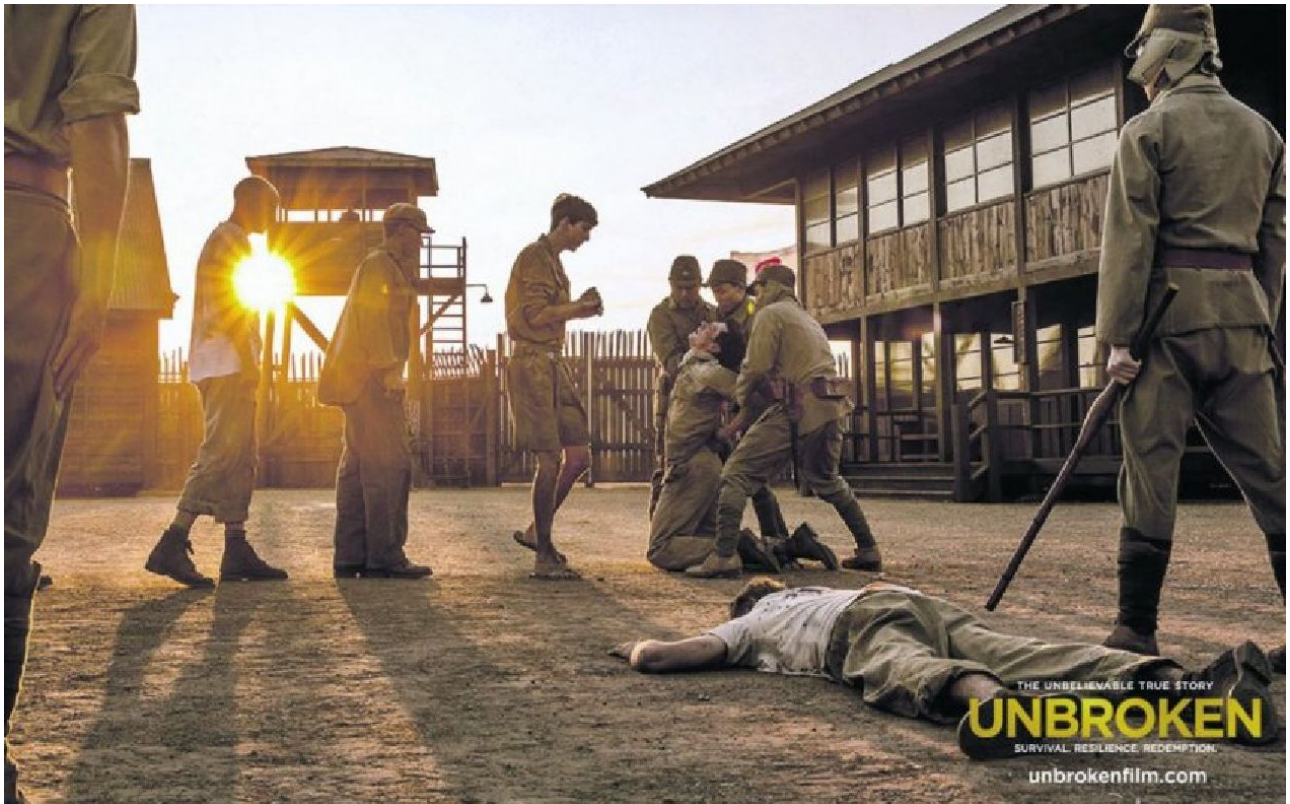


War, Cinema and History

Prisoners of War in 20th Century Conflicts



Author: Mikel Claver Herrera

Director: Santiago de Pablo

Contemporary History

Grade of History

2015-2016



Universidad del País Vasco
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea
The University of the Basque Country

Index

- 1 . Introduction
- 2 . Cinema and History
- 3 . World War I: *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir)
- 4 . World War II: *Stalag 17* (Billy Wilder)/ *Unbroken* (Angelina Jolie)
- 5 . Vietnam War: *Rescue Dawn* (Werner Herzog)
- 6 . Conclusion

Abstract

Since the first films were created, the will of filmmakers to represent the History on the screen has been a constant. War, as a regular and important event, repeated constantly through History, would be one of the main motifs used in movies. Among those war films, the stories of prisoners would be a useful resource to develop a discourse about the conflict, since there, the “good” and the “bad” side of the tale can be clearly shown through the characters imprisoned and the keepers. If we focus on the 20th century, there are three wars that have been the object of several filmic creations: World War I, World War II and Vietnam War. In this text, we are going to summarize some films, which tell us the stories of prisoners of war during those three conflicts, and through them we are going to think over the relationship between these films and the academic History. With Jean Renoir’s *La Grande Illusion*, a film about World War I, we will see, apart of the historical reading of the movie, that the interpretations of a film can change over time. Through the stories about World War II, *Stalag 17* by Billy Wilder and *Unbroken* by Angelina Jolie, we would learn about the shift that the treatment of prisoners of war suffered during WWII: from standard of correctness to widespread mistreatment. *Rescue Dawn*, finally, would confirm that shift, emphasized during the Cold War and specially present on the Vietnam War that is the setting for this film made by Werner Herzog. This movie, otherwise, could be placed into the American narrative created along the Cold War, in which the tales about the Vietnam War are ever-present, even if there are more evident examples on other films. Through the cultural products developed within this narrative there was the will to present the United States as the “good guys”, the guarantors of democracy and defenders of freedom. This kind of creations would be, precisely, one of the major utilities of films, to create a discourse through which a certain cultural consciousness is spread.

Introduction

War has been a constant drive through history; armed conflicts are present in all epochs and it is an evident fact that the world we know is a consequence of the output of those conflicts. Contemporary country's borders are, in their majority, the result of peace treaties made after wars. Winning or losing a war has wrought each nation's character, culture, in the same measure than the natural conditions of their land. If we consider this fact, the importance of the war, we can easily understand the people's impulse to reflect it in culture; armed conflict is a regular motif represented in art, written or painted, sung or acted; it appears in oeuvres through history. In contemporary times, we could take cinema as one of the most important forms of art, as such it didn't forget war when it comes to creating films. Cinema has become an important way to spread historical knowledge among the public, and the vision that contemporary society have regarding certain wars have been created with those movies.

Here we are going to develop some ideas about this relationship between the past and cinema, using war movies to do so. More concretely, we are going to focus on those films representing the situation of prisoners of war in some 19th century conflicts. Analysing how this is represented, seeing if the stories match with the official knowledge about the subject, we are going to approach four different films showing POW's of I World War, II World War and Vietnam War. We have chosen these wars because of the wide narrative created about in the culture of 20th and 21st centuries; the importance of the two World Wars is evident, and the Vietnam War could be one of the historical conflicts most represented on screen. Those films will be Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*, Billy Wilder's *Stalag 17*, Angelina Jolie's *Unbroken* and Werner Herzog's *Rescue Dawn*. Through these movies we can see, among other aspects, the shift in the society from the middle decades of the 20th century to the 21st, being the different forms of narrations of those films a clear example of this.

We should mention here that, since most probably the lecturers are not acquainted with all those films, we would see ourselves forced to do a summary in order to introduce the different topics we are going to learn about in a proper way. It is because of this that the following analysis could be seen as repetitive, since we have used the same format with all the films.

Cinema and history

Nowadays audio-visual communication has an essential role in the creation and diffusion of cultural knowledge among society; the main way to spread news is through Internet and television more than newspapers, and cinema has become a billionaire industry. The impact of a film or a TV show can have in society is stronger than the book's impact, and the reminiscence those images create stay in viewers mind more easily than written words. Historical knowledge has entered into this new world as well, and the usual image of the past among the public has been created through visual media. According to Robert Rosenstone, historians should be aware of this and should have interest to express the past with forms congenial to contemporary sensibility and systems.¹

Since TV has become a parallel school for the newest generations², those products of visual media that use history as basis must be developed in a way that should help the public to understand the past and our relation with it. Cinema plays a central role in this creation of knowledge; as an historical event by itself films have more impact on society. Even if they have a smaller audience, they tend to endure longer in the public's mind than the, usually ephemeral, TV products. Compared with textbooks created by historians, films get over the limitations of words, adding colour, movement, and sounds to the described events³. Cinema has its own tools to represent facts; it creates a particular language through which the filmmaker can elaborate a discourse in a different way than the writer.

Both ways to present history we are dealing with, written or on screen, refer to moments, movements from the past, events set by convention, ideas that some experts take as the real history after studying the available vestiges. A serious attempt to express those ideas in a movie is just a way to change the medium through which are exposed⁴; but it means to change the message as well, at least to change the form it takes. If we overcome the usual opposition of academics to accept those works as serious historical analysis, we must embrace history on screen as an addition to the language in which the past can speak⁵.

¹ ROSENSTONE, R.A., *History on Film/Film on History*, Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh, 2006, from the Spanish version: ROSENSTONE, R. A., *La Historia en el Cine: el Cine sobre la Historia*, p. 34, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, 2014.

² FERRO, M., *Cinema and History*, p. 158, Wayne State University Press, 1988.

³ ROSENSTONE, R.A., *History on Film/Film on History*, Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh, 2006, from the Spanish version: ROSENSTONE, R. A., *La Historia en el Cine: el Cine sobre la Historia*, p. 31, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, 2014.

⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 38

⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 38

Once we have accepted this fact, historians must investigate how films create their own historical world, film's codes and practices⁶. The historical function of those films would be to understand the relationship between society and its past⁷, as well as to transcribe the functioning of the society itself. Filmmakers venture into historians territory, becoming themselves into social and political analysts⁸, giving their particular vision of the world, society, and the past. They create their own interpretation of the subject they treat and at the same time they show the contemporary mainstream ideas about it⁹.

One of the favourite subjects of filmmakers in order to develop their analysis is war. As mentioned before, we can find stories about armed conflicts along history; analysing a war we can observe human beings in an atmosphere that is atypical but natural for them at the same time. Films about prisoners of war would be here a usual resource; it is valid to interpret the human response to a situation that puts him on its limit and it contains the proper elements to develop a classical epic story. Following this idea, we are trying here to understand the relationship between cinema and History through some films about prisoners of war in the 20th century; how they create a discourse about this subject, if it is valid from an academic perspective...

World War I: *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir)

Among the films based on the World War I, which describes the situation of prisoners of war, the most notorious one is Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*. Made in 1937, it narrates the story of some French officers shot down and captured by the German army, and then interned in an officer prisoners of war camp. It was filmed just 20 years after the end of the war, and therefore the facts were pretty close to the contemporary public. Otherwise, the World War II, which started a couple years after the release of *La Grande Illusion*, would break this *illusion*, the idea of WWI as the last great-armed conflict between European countries.

This film gives us one of the best examples when it comes to understand the relationship between films and society; more precisely how new cultural landscape can change the interpretation of a film. When it was released, *La Grande Illusion* was seen as a pacifist and left-wing work; ten years later, after WWII, its interpretation turned into a film that foreshadowed Vichy regime and

⁶ Ibidem., p. 48

⁷ FERRO, M., "Film as an Agent, Product and Source of History" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Historians and Movies: The State of the Art: Part 1, pp. 357-364, 1983.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ ROSENSTONE, R.A., *History on Film/Film on History*, Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh, 2006, from the Spanish version: ROSENSTONE, R. A., *La Historia en el Cine: el Cine sobre la Historia*, p. 49, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, 2014.

French collaboration¹⁰. We would understand this fact after the description of the film.

The main characters are the French officers, Capt de Boeldieu and Lieutenant Marechal, interpreted by Pierre Fresnay and Jean Gabin. The first one is a French aristocrat, and a professional military; Marechal, on the other hand, is a working-class character. They embark on a mission to fly some German positions and take some pictures, but they are shot down and captured by their enemies. After that, since they are officers, German Capt von Rauffenstein (Erich von Stroheim) invite them to lunch, before sending them to a prisoner camp.

The scenes through which these events are staged set some ideas that are repeated along the whole film. It starts in a French tavern where Marechal, among other soldiers, is resting, drinking and listening to music. He talks with a colleague about seeing Josephine, a woman (we can deduce here that is a prostitute) he is going to visit. Then Marechal meets de Boeldieu and prepare for the mission. The next scene shows a German tavern, with German soldiers drinking and listening to music. On a wall there are posters of some women. This would set the motif of the similitude between the two armies; they are enemies, but they do similar things, they both think about women... Together with it, we can see the similitude between de Boeldieu and von Rauffenstein; they both are aristocrats from military families, they have mutual acquaintances and they speak English. Both captains share a common background since they are members of the upper classes.

Once in Hallbach prisoner camp for officers, de Boeldieu and Marechal meet a large group of French prisoners, among whose we can find a Jew, an actor, an engineer... German soldiers persuade them from escape warning that all the prisoners found out of the camp would be shot. Nevertheless the roommates of the characters notify them that they are digging a tunnel to make their way out. The relationship between our heroes and their new friends is good; we can find here solidarity among them (the engineer washing Marechal feet, since he is injured).

We can also see that the camp conditions are good. They receive packages from their families; the group is well fed, as they eat from the packages that the Jew, Rosenthal, shares with them. They have leisure time as well; in one of the packages they get some costumes, women dresses, and they use them to present a musical play, in front of the other prisoners and German supervisors. During the act Marechal learns that the French army has recovered Douaumont, a point taken by Germans few days before. He jumps over the stage and shares the new with his colleagues, then, at the request of an English, they all start singing *La Marseillaise*.

¹⁰ FERRO, M., "Film as an Agent, Product and Source of History" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Historians and Movies: The State of the Art: Part 1, pp. 357-364, 1983.

In those scenes we have the opportunity to learn a bit about the personality and thoughts of the characters, how they interact with their guards and the environment. Some of them are surprised by the honesty of their captors, that they don't steal from the packages prisoners receive; the answer one of them gives is that Germans can't afford to feed them all, so it's better for them to leave the packages be. Otherwise, when they receive the packages with costumes, they start fantasizing with them and with the prisoner that dresses as a woman; "imagination is all we have now" says Marechal. As seen before with the mentioned Josephine and the posters on the German tavern, the thoughts over women are evident among soldiers.

There is a scene where the group saw some young German soldiers marching. When the sound of the music comes to them, de Boeldieu says that he hates that music, but Marechal answers: "what is scary is not the music, but the sound of the steps". Here, once again, we can find the motif mentioned before, the similitude among enemies, since this sound is the same no matter the army. In this same scene we can learn about the personality of the characters as well. They are talking about the escape, and why they want to escape; the actor says that he is bored; the engineer says that since he can't fight all he wants is to fight again. Marechal wants to join his colleagues in the front, do what everyone else is doing; de Boeldieu, on the other hand, says that he wants to escape because that is the function of a prisoner camp, to evade.

Finally, Rosenthal's aim is to defend the wealth his family has accumulated, a heritage he's proud of. With this the films show the social background of each one: Marechal, as a working-class character, wants to be with his comrades. De Boeldieu, an aristocrat, sees war as a game, which is what his family does, fight, and being a prisoner and escape is a part of this game. Rosenthal would represent a Jew bourgeois. His patriotism, as de Boeldieu says, would be a way to protect what his family has achieved.

After singing *La Marseillaise*, Marechal is held in a punishment cell, where he goes crazy due to isolation. He is released on the day the rest of the group is ready to escape, but at this point the Germans transfer them to a new prisoner camp. After staying in several camps, Marechal and de Boeldieu arrives at Winterborn camp, an old fortress where von Rauffenstein is now the commander. They are held there because of the main attempts they have made trying to escape, and the new camp is a castle where escaping is almost impossible.

In the new camp Marechal and de Boeldieu meets Rosenthal again; he is working on a map of the surrounding territory, in order to escape into Switzerland. There are some Russian prisoners in Winterborn as well; they receive a package from their motherland, when they open it, they found books instead of vodka and food, a fact that causes a little rebellion in the camp. Seeing the

mobilization of German guards, de Boeldieu figures out a plan to escape; they are going to ask flutes for every prisoner and play it at the same time. When they do this Germans call for a general meeting in the camp yard; de Boeldieu don't go to it and starts playing the flute at a different part of the camp, which mobilizes the guards following him. At this point Marechal and Rosenthal take advantage of the disarray and escape.

In these scenes we can see once again some, already mentioned, motifs of the film. On one hand, we have the similitude between armies and criticism of the war; it is clear when, after arriving to Winterborn, von Rauffenstein says that in this camp the set regulations are the French ones, in order to avoid complaints from the prisoners. The idea behind this would be that all armies and their treatment of enemy prisoners are inhuman. On the other hand, there is a differentiation between Marechal and de Boeldieu, and at the same time the propinquity between de Boeldieu and von Rauffenstein. When de Boeldieu offers himself to act as a bait, so Marechal and Rosenthal could have a chance to escape, he dresses as he was going to a military ceremony, with the whole uniform. Marechal notices it and he can't understand why. Otherwise the affinity between the French and the German aristocrats is evident; the latter invites the first to his own chamber, where they have a very friendly conversation about the good old times.

In the final part of the movie, once Marechal and Rosenthal have escaped, we see, on one hand, their flight and, on the other hand, the death of de Boeldieu. This last is shot by von Rauffenstein while he is distracting the guards. The German commander regrets having to shoot him and is concerned about de Boeldieu health. The French receives medical attention, but he finally deaths. Marechal and Rosenthal, otherwise, make their escape with great difficulties; the Jew twists his ankle and that delay them and creates some conflicts among them. Finally, they get into a house in the German Alps where they are hosted by a German woman who has lost her husband during the war. She, and her little daughter, takes care of both French soldiers while Rosenthal recovers, and she even has an affair with Marechal. Finally, they leave the house, with Marechal promise that he would return once the war is over, and arrive in Switzerland.

In these last part we can see, once again, the closeness between de Boeldieu and von Rauffenstein; when the French is injured because of the Germans shot, von Rauffenstein stays with him and provides all the medical care he can in order to heal him. De Boeldieu excuses him, saying that he has done his duty, and that for them, the aristocrats, is an honour to die in the war. The motif of the similarities among enemies is present as well; the whole relationship between the German woman and the French soldiers would be an example of it. She knows the crudity of war, since her husband and her brothers in law had death fighting, even so she welcomes enemy soldiers and take

care of them, showing that way the nonsense of war for ordinary people.

In order to conclude this chapter we would like to emphasize some already mentioned aspects, as well to analyse this film with some literature about prisoners of war during World War I. At first, as we have seen, this film advocates for pacifism; by presenting the similarities among the enemies it wants to show the nonsense of war, the conflict as a game that the elites play using the rest of the population for it. While the aristocrats accept the difficulties and even death as an honour, the rest of the characters, even if they are convinced that they are doing the correct thing, because of their patriotism, don't take the game in good spirit. This differentiation among the old and new characters, the change within the society is another motif present in the film. The old elites, the aristocracy, are disappearing, as von Rauffenstein says, he and de Boeldieu are going to be the last of their kind in their armies, while the Marechals and Rosenthals are going to take their place.

We should remember here the political approach of the author, Jean Renoir; he was a leftist director, close to the ideas of the French Popular Front. Following these ideas we could better understand the film, where Marechal, the worker, is characterized with the qualities of a hero. He would be the only one who is injured, and the prisoner who sings *La Marseillaise* when the French army takes Douaumont back¹¹. The differences between Marechal and de Boeldieu would be, as well, a sample of Renoir's ideas: the old, decadent aristocracy against the new, vigorous proletarians. Even so, the last part of the film could be seen as an indication of the Renoir's idea of the necessity to collaboration among classes to success; de Boeldieu sacrifices himself so Marechal and Rosenthal have the chance to escape¹².

But, after a while, the ideas that Renoir has in mind when he made the film didn't exactly agree with the public's impressions after seeing the film. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, when it was released this film was received in different ways by the different political groups in France; the right-wing read it as a defence of the patriotism, the left-wing, on the other hand, received this film as a work which advocates for the national unity as the illusion it proclaims on the title. But, as we say, the WWII would completely change these views and produce a shift upon the readings of the film.

After the experience of the World War II there were some arguments describing this film as anti-Semitic and collaborationist. The first one would be a certain reading of the character of Rosenthal; he appears as a different, a Jew that wants to escape to defend his wealth, who shares food after vanity... Even so, this characterization could be seen as the determination of Renoir to

¹¹ ALEGRE, S., "Re-lectura de La Grande Illusion (1937) de Jean Renoir" in *Film Historia*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 25-34, 1991.

¹² Ibidem.

show that, even having those differences, Rosenthal is still a French¹³. On the other hand, the claim that argued that the film was a call for collaboration with Nazi Germany is created since the characterization of German soldiers is not so negative; here we shouldn't have in mind that the camp where our heroes are, is for officers, where the treatment should be better than those of regular soldiers. Together with it, they are represented as severe soldiers; we should have in mind the neck brace that von Rauffenstein has on the second part of the film as a symbol of the German rigidity¹⁴.

Regarding academic History, this film would represent in a correct way the situation of prisoners of war during WWI, at least the situation of imprisoned officers. In this sense, we must say that, above all, is impossible to analyse the situation of the totality of prisoners of war through this film, so we are going to focus on some aspects this film shows and analyse their validity according to existing historiographical literature. One of those aspects would be the German food shortage due to commercial blockades¹⁵; this appears on the film through the scene where prisoners explain that is better for Germans to allow all the packages they receive than feed them. The harsh discipline established in German camps is present in the film as well¹⁶: when Marechal and de Boeldieu first arrive to Hallbach a guard explains them the regulations of the camp: "strictly prohibited" is present during the whole speech.

Another aspect with great presence in the film is the fact that the prisoners were free to make theatre. WWI prisoners were able to access to cultural distraction in order to avoid mental issues¹⁷. This issue was usual among prisoners for evident reasons, and the scenes where Marechal is isolated are representative. Focusing on cultural aspects, we can easily imagine a function like the one prisoner of the film play in a real prisoner camp during WWI; the image of men dressed as women would be valid in order to do these performances as well as part of the answer to the gender issue. The fact of reclusion and lack of women would suppose a challenge for the soldier's sense of masculinity¹⁸, and events like the mentioned play would be a way to escape from it. The last aspect we would like to mention is the attempts to escape made by prisoners¹⁹; as de Boeldieu puts it, "a prisoner camps function is to escape". These attempts would be valid for the soldiers in order to

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ JONES, H., "Prisoners of War" in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. DANIEL, U., GATRELL, P. et al; Freie Universität Berlin, 2014, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10475>. Consulted on 2016/05/25.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

maintain their sense of duty, the idea that they are still soldiers, as well as a distraction from the day to day live in the camp.

World War II; *Stalag 17* (Billy Wilder)/ *Unbroken* (Angelina Jolie)

Stalag 17 is a Billy Wilder's movie, filmed in 1953. The plot shows a group of US sergeants, held in a German camp for prisoners of war during World War II. The script is an adaptation of a play written by Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski, both of them former prisoners during this conflict in Stalag XVII-B. The story is about a group of prisoners who think that they have a snitch in their barrack; this is a movie which uses some humour blows to narrate a, at first sight, tragic events as the seclusion of people due to a war.

The film starts with an oversight of the camp, while a narrator, a prisoner, tells us some facts about the camp and their situation. We see guards with dogs, some barracks, and barbed wires... Cookie, the narrator, introduces us to the situation they were living at that moment, when two of the prisoners were ready to escape, but he warns us about the possibility of a spy among them. When the will-be fugitives leave the 4th barrack through a hole under the stove, a quarrel starts among those who stay. One of them, Sefton (William Holden), makes a bet saying that the escapees won't arrive outside the camp. The rest of the prisoners take place against him; they are arguing when they heard several gunshots.

In the next morning the attendant of their barrack wakes the prisoners and tells them that both the prisoners who tried to escape are dead. They see the bodies when they come out to listen to the camp chief commander. This one warns them not to escape; anyone found out of the camp would be shot. The chief commander also says that the stove that covers the hole in the barrack would be removed and the tunnel closed by those prisoners in that barrack. The prisoners talk about what he has said while they are washing up; how could he know about the escape and the tunnel? When the prisoner in charge of the security of their plans, Price (Peter Graves), says that he cannot know what has failed is when they start thinking that there could be a snitch among them.

With the visualization of these scenes we can set a couple of the motifs that are present along the film; at first we have some humour blows and secondly there is the idea of showing Sefton as the informer. The funny gags are mainly interpreted by two of the prisoners: "Animal" and Saphiro (Robert Strauss and Harvey Lembeck). These two characters appear making jokes with the attendant of the barrack ("Since there are two free beds why don't you bring a couple of those Russian women prisoners?" ask one of them). The amusing personality of the attendant, sergeant

Schulz (Sig Roman), contrasts with the strict camp commander von Scherbach (Otto Preminger). This one thinks always about its own status and assumes that if some prisoner escapes it would damage it. The second motif, Sefton as the traitor, appears when the prisoners are washing themselves and he is the one character that is separated from the group's mentality. In this scene there is no direct accusation towards him as a snitch, but there is an insinuation. This makes us rethink the situation when the two prisoners were escaping at the beginning and Sefton makes a bet against their chances to do so.

The washing time we mentioned before ends when a prisoner warns the rest about the arrival of new Russian women to the camp. "Animal" and Saphiro run to see them, and because of that they arrive late to eat their lunch, a potato soup that is used by a prisoner to clean his clothes by the time they reach the bunkhouse. They see then Sefton, who is boiling an egg; he has obtained it through exchanging cigarettes. While eating, another prisoner enters into the barrack with a radio hidden in the trousers of his companion, who lacks a leg. This radio is used to try to hear some news about the war, but they have to hide it when sergeant Schulz appears to take the stove. He sent the prisoners to cover the tunnel, and when he is alone observes that the light bulbs cable has a knot. This would be the secret signal from his informant, so he takes a message hidden in a chess piece.

While they are closing the tunnel the voice of Cookie, as the narrator and assistant of Sefton, tell us some information about this one's activities in the camp; he is always making exchanges with cigarettes, which he obtains from some business he had created, as rat races or a bar where he sells a liquor he distils. Once the tunnel is covered, when the prisoners are in the bunkhouse, the mail arrives with letters for some of them. Together with it a little Christmas tree is given to them, hidden in the same way that the already mentioned radio. There is also a book for each of them as well, a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

Since there are two free beds in the 4th barrack, two new prisoners are transferred in. One of them is a lieutenant, Dunbar (Don Taylor), who, according to the sergeant who accompanies him, has blown up a German supply train. The rest of the prisoners warn them about being careful, since they think there is a traitor among them. At this moment, attendant Schulz comes again to advise that a representative of the Geneva Convention is going to visit the camp. The guards are going to give new blankets and ordering to clean the bunkhouse. Then he seizes the radio, taking it from the hiding place, and sends the prisoners to take the blankets, after seeing the knot used as a signal.

The guards founding the radio are the straw that breaks the camel's back for the prisoners, all they face Cookie and force him to open Sefton's trunk. Inside it there are all kinds of objects; photo cameras, watches, a lot of cigarettes, etc. This is, in their minds, an evidence of Sefton's treason and, when Schulz appears again to take lieutenant Dunbar in order to ask him about the train explosion, they give a beaten to their fellow prisoner.

Dunbar is questioned by the commander von Scherbach, who forces him to stay awake for a long time and warns him that, if he has blown the train, he would no longer be treated as a prisoner of war but as a saboteur in front of German justice. Meanwhile, Geneva Convention inspector arrives in the camp with some Red Cross packages, which contains several Ping-Pong balls. The prisoners make no complains to him, and, for once, there is good food in the barrack. The only thing one of them mentions is the situation of the lieutenant, arrested with no evidences. The inspector goes to where he is held and warns the commander about the war crimes judgments that would be made after the war, and that he should show some evidences about the sabotage if he wants to avoid them.

Here, once again, we can see some humorous scenes: "Animal" and Saphiro joke with attendant Schulz and the sergeant who arrives with lieutenant is an impersonator of American actors. When the prisoners receive *Mein Kampf's* copies, all they draw a Hitler moustache and act as Nazis; "we are indoctrinated", they say when Schulz appears in the bunkhouse. The other motif, which is recurrent in the film, is the presentation of Sefton as the traitor. One of the main sources to have doubts about him is the exchanges he makes with the guards; the scene where he eats an egg instead of the potato soup that the others have as a lunch shows that. Some information given by the narrator, being this one Cookie, Sefton's "assistant", about the different businesses, and the large number of objects that the rest of the prisoners find in his trunk emerge as evidences of it as well.

Christmas Eve comes to the camp; the prisoners of the 4th bunkhouse exchange Sefton's distillery for a phonograph, while this one is in his bed without much regard of the celebration after the beating. Being there, he sees the light bulb swinging with a knot, after Price, the prisoner in charge of security and the one who reveals himself now as the traitor, takes the message in the chess piece. Sefton doesn't see him, but, in the next morning, he observes that someone has undone the knot, and then is when he realizes of the method used by the snitch to pass information to the guards.

When an alarm sounds in the camp and all the prisoners are sent outside, Sefton hides himself in the shadows of the barrack, spying on Price. He has stayed inside with Schulz, explaining him the system used by Dunbar to blow up the train, which he has learned from the sergeant who arrived to the camp with the lieutenant. On the next day, Christmas day, the prisoners made a plan in order to hide lieutenant Dunbar, who is going to be delivered to the SS as a saboteur. Sefton warns them about himself, saying that, since he is the snitch, they should keep a guard on him, and he suggests Price, the real traitor, as the security man. While the rest are carrying out the plan Sefton tries to get some information from Price, questioning him.

Once Dunbar is hidden, one of them has to meet him and escape together, at night. Price offers himself to be his companion, but then Sefton starts talking and discovers Price as a traitor in from of the rest, explaining the method used to pass information and with a key question; "At what time happened the strike on Pearl Harbour?" Since Price is, in reality, a German he says that he was having dinner when it occurred, but in the east of the United States was lunchtime. When is exposed, Price tries to ask for help, but the prisoners catch him and use him to mislead the guards, pushing him out with a great noise, while Sefton meets Dunbar and achieve to escape.

To finish this chapter, we would take a look of academic literature about the POW's subject in World War II. We have to give some credit to this film, since it is based on a play written by two former prisoners; the events depicted here, even if not real, would be an output of the experiences lived by them. Some of these aspects could be used as an example of what was being a prisoner of war; beyond the literary resources, necessary to create a film, some features would be valid to understand their experiences. As an example, the different gags where Russian women prisoners appear, as well as the obsession of "Animal" with the actress Betty Grable, would be a sample of a situation where a lot of men are confined away from female contact, and how they would react to it. At the top of this we can add that the use of the different humorous gags along the film could be seen as the will of the writers to do some kind of therapy through this story. Even if their situation should have been traumatic, their approach is comical in a lot of aspects; doing so, they have the opportunity to treat such a serious issue from this perspective and, at some extent, overcome the suffered situation.

Some of the details mentioned or showed in the film are, as well, a good example of the daily conditions of these prisoners and agree with the information given by the scientific literature. The whole situation with Sefton, under suspicion of being a snitch, originated by his exchanges with the guards, partially shows the economic organization made by POW's in the camps, where

cigarettes were used as currency in order to acquire assets to survive or improve conditions²⁰. The International Committee of the Red Cross gave packages to the prisoners with different goods; in the cases they received those packages, some prisoners used them to make exchanges as well²¹. We learn something about these in the film; Sefton defends himself about the accusations arguing that he is forced to exchange with the guards because his package had been stolen.

In the film, there is a visit from an inspector of the Geneva Convention, who carries some of those packages to the camp. These inspections were usual during WWII, since it was one of the aspects agreed in the mentioned Geneva Convention of 1929. Through this, different states settled some basic conditions they were going to ensure for the POW's during their wars. When the conflict started the ICRC requested to abide to the Convention, a text most of the belligerents had signed²².

The abidance to the Geneva Convention wasn't the same on all the sides, and it changed depending on the situation of the war. One of the aspects that shifted was the answer to escapees; a Hitler's order in 1941 encouraged camp prisoners to shoot escapees instead of taking them back to the camp as established in the Convention²³. A sample of this would be the execution of the two prisoners who try to escape at the beginning of the film. Furthermore, we can think about the speech of the chief commander von Scherbach: he asks the prisoners not to escape, since it would harm his reputation on the higher ranks. At another point of the film, the commandant is questioning lieutenant Dunbar, when the inspector appears and warns him about future judgements regarding war crimes. This could be seen as the representation of the allies to the German breaking of the Geneva Convention; after some Hitler's orders, like the one mentioned before, the allies assured that after finishing the war those soldiers responsible of the breaks would be judged²⁴. Doing so, they hoped to frighten Germans and thus improve the conditions of allied prisoners.

In order to understand in a better way the treatment of prisoners during WWII, we are going now to summarize the situation of those who were imprisoned by the Japanese through the film *Unbroken*, directed by Angelina Jolie. This is based on the true story of Louie Zamperini, an American of Italian parents, who participated in the Olympics of Berlin in 1936 and then was held by the Japanese army after spending 45 days adrift in the ocean. WWII would be a transitional

²⁰ RADFORD, R. A., "The Economic Organisation of a P.O.W Camp", in *Economica*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 48, pp. 189-201, 1945; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2550133> consulted on 2016/05/25.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² MACKENZIE, S. P., "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II" in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 487-520, 1994; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124482> consulted on 2016/05/25.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

phase regarding the treatment of POW's; before this conflict a humanitarian view dominated treatment, but this war supposed a shift into opposite direction²⁵. The example we are going to develop here could be used to understand which direction took the treatment of POW's.

At the beginning of the film, we can see Louie Zamperini in a bombardier on a mission to attack an island, but after doing so they are attacked back and the plane suffered serious damage. In a flashback, we can see Louie as a kid, getting into trouble with the police, punished by his father. Then he appears in a running track, his brother is an athlete and is in a race; Louie is hiding under the bleachers, watching girls, when he is located and has to escape. His brother takes him and makes him run, forcing him to train to be an athlete as well. In the next scene we can see Louie, again as a grown up, as a very good athlete who is good enough to be in the Olympic Games.

We are on the plane again; it is damaged and with great troubles to land, but they achieve it. While he is running through the island they are in, his companions appear telling him that they have to carry out another mission, with the same plane which is in the same bad conditions as before. When they are flying, the engines start to fail and then go down to the ocean. A new flashback shows us Louie in the Olympic Games, where sets a record, completing the last lap faster than no one. But now he is in the ocean, trapped with some parts of the plane and almost giving up. He finally liberates and goes up to the surface, where he meets the only two survivors of the crew and reaches the lifeboats.

The three survivors start their ocean adventure; they think about how to dispense the food and water they have, but one of them eats too much and they fall short. A seagull lands in the boat; they catch it but, it tastes too bad, so they use it as bait to fish something. They survive eating whatever they can fish; they even catch a shark, and drinking the water they collect when it rains. A couple of planes overflight their position, but the first one doesn't see them and the second one is Japanese, so it starts to shoot them. The days go by and they are more and more tired and starving; one of them dies and they have to throw his body in the ocean.

Finally, on the 45th day, a ship finds them, but this one is, as the plane, from the Japanese army, so they are taken prisoners. They lock them in a small cell in an island; Louie and Phil, the one who has survived with him, are questioned about military questions, but they don't say anything valid. After some days they are transferred to a prisoner camp in Japan, but when they arrive in Tokyo the guards separate them and we don't see Phil in the rest of the film. Once in the camp the chief, Watanabe, introduces himself; since the first moment he focuses his attention on Louie; being in front of him the Japanese guard says "look at me, look at me" to the American, but

²⁵ Ibidem.

when he does it Watanabe starts beating him.

The treatment Louie receives from Watanabe does not change; he learns that Louie was an athlete, and forces him to race one of the Japanese guards. When he falls, because he is too weak, Watanabe says to him that he has failed and starts beating him again with a stick. One day, a couple of businessmen appears in the camp looking for Louie; they want him to go with them in order to broadcast a message to his family saying that he is alive, since the American army has declared him dead. He agrees, but once he is done, they give to him another text, and offer him to stay in a hotel in Tokyo instead of the camp if he broadcasts this message as well. The text condemns the U. S., so Louie refuses to do so and goes back to the camp. Once he is back Watanabe says that he has to learn some respect, and forces the rest of the prisoners to punch Louie in the face one by one.

Some days after that, while the prisoners are playing Cinderella, Watanabe sits next to Louie and says to him that he has been promoted and that he would leave the camp. This supposes a great relief to Louie, but the American army is getting closer to the camp, so it comes the day when all the prisoners are transferred once again, far away from the Americans. The new camp is a labour camp; the prisoners have to unload coal, in order to help Japanese people in their efforts, as the chief of the camp, once again Watanabe, puts it. Louie is mistreated by the guards; after being pushed, he twists his ankle, so he can't work as fast as the others. When Watanabe sees him limping, he forces him to hold a wooden beam up his head, telling to a guard to kill Louie if he drops it. But he doesn't drop it, and holds it for a long time. Watanabe felt defeated after this, and, telling Louie not to look at him, starts beating him once again with his stick.

The next day a message arrives in the camp; the war is in standby and the guards invite the prisoners to take a bath in the river. Thinking that they are going to die the prisoners go to the river with great fear, but once they arrive an American plane overflights them, pointing that they have been seen; the war is over now. They receive some packages from their army; food, cigarettes... Finally all of them go back home, and Louie can reunite with his family. The film ends with an overlook of the fate of the characters, summarizing what happened to them after the war; Louie, married and with two kids, gave his forgiveness to his captors, to all of them unless to Watanabe, who refused to meet him. He ported the Olympic flame in Japan in 1998. On the other hand, Watanabe, classified as war criminal, evaded the arrest until he granted the amnesty made by the United States.

The mistreatment Japanese army gave to its prisoners was highly unsatisfactory, as we can see through *Unbroken*. As history professor Preston John Hubbard recalls in *Apocalypse Undone: My survival of Japanese imprisonment during World War II*, the prisoners in Japan were dehumanized, treated with no compassion and even with cultural arrogance by the Japanese soldiers²⁶. Professor Hubbard served in the American army during WWII and was held by Japanese for four and a half years. During this time he survived to imprisonment in the Philippines and in Japan. While in the Philippines, he was one of the prisoners who suffered the Bataan Death March, where more than 7,000 prisoners died.

The Japanese Empire never ratified the Geneva Convention: according to the government, the terms of it would be applied as circumstances allowed²⁷. For them the military priorities were more important than international law. We must understand the Japanese attitude after the contemporary ideological conditions; we cannot forget that they were allied with the Nazi Germany. In previous wars, like the Russo-Japanese war at the beginning of the 20th century, the treatment of Russian prisoners by Japanese authorities was exemplary, which made them proud²⁸. But the ideological context of the country in the decade of 1930 shifted this into an increasing militarism, a new reading of the old Bushido tradition after the rise of a xenophobic nationalism.

With this new understanding, the absolute sacrifice was demanded and the surrender of a soldier was seen as dishonour, for him and for the country. As a consequence, the surrender enemies were dishonoured and they deserved bat treatment²⁹. The beatings, as the ones Watanabe gives to Louie in *Unbroken*, were usual, even for minor infractions, and the prisoners were forced to sign declarations promising not to escape³⁰. As Watanabe himself puts it: “you are enemies of Japan, and you will be treated accordingly”.

Forced labour was common as well. As we see in the film, the prisoners must put their effort into helping Japanese people in times of economic shortage. Even the officers were forced to work, what was contrary to the Geneva Convention³¹. The best example of this appears on the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, which we have left out of this analysis. The movie describes the fate of British prisoners of war held by the Japanese in Thailand and forced to build a bridge over a river.

²⁶ HUBBARD, P. J., *Apocalypse Undone: My Survival of Japanese Imprisonment during World War II*, p. 165, Vanderbilt University Press, Tennessee, 1990.

²⁷ MACKENZIE, S. P., “The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II” in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 487-520, 1994; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124482> consulted on 2016/05/25.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibidem.

All the prisoners have to work on it and the conditions they endure are very poor, with a large number of prisoners dying out of diseases because of the mistreatment. This film is based on real events; the largest Japanese project during the war was the construction of the Burma-Siam railway, where 16,000 prisoners died³².

In *Unbroken* we can see the overcrowding that the prisoners suffer in the Japanese camp, a fact that Professor Hubbard recalls in the mentioned book, *Apocalypse Undone*; he says that they had a man's body width for each to sleep, on the floor, which enlarged after members died³³. The film shows, as well, the little information the prisoners had about the war; the newspapers were prohibited³⁴, and the prisoners got the information from the guards, directly or, as in the film, from any prisoners who understood Japanese and was spying on them. The notification of Roosevelt's death, for example, was one of the news that the guards gave to the prisoners, as we can see in *Unbroken*, and it had an impact on the morale of the prisoners³⁵.

In order to finish this chapter, as a summary, we could say that, as mentioned before, we can compare *Stalag 17* and *Unbroken* to see the shift that happened in the conditions suffered by prisoners of war. Even if these two films are about the same war, and the captors are allied, the treatment that each of them gives to its prisoners is different. We should mention now that, in the case of the Germans, we have seen just an example of their treatment of officer enemies; it is by all us known the treatment they dispensed to those they thought that were less than them, as the Jews. Even so, the example of *Stalag 17* would be useful to understand the relationship among captors and prisoners before this war, closer to the one shown in *La Grande Illusion*; the respect for the prisoner and the proper treatment were the basis of this relationship, even if we shouldn't deny that, surely, abuses happened.

Unbroken, on the other hand, shows the way the relationship took during and after the WWII; the conception of the enemy as inferior, as people that don't deserve proper treatment. In 1949 a new Geneva Convention was signed, but the shift was firm, and it was confirmed in the Korean and Vietnam wars³⁶, as we would see in the next chapter through the film *Rescue Dawn*.

³² Ibidem.

³³ HUBBARD, P. J., *Apocalypse Undone: My Survival of Japanese Imprisonment during World War II*, p. 174, Vanderbilt University Press, Tennessee, 1990.

³⁴ Ibidem., p. 172

³⁵ Ibidem., p. 174

³⁶ MACKENZIE, S. P., "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II" in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 487-520, 1994; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124482> consulted on 2016/05/25.

Vietnam War: *Rescue Dawn* (Werner Herzog)

Rescue Dawn is one of the many films made in the United States about the Vietnam War, a conflict that this country held for 20 years in the context of the Cold War. Made by Werner Herzog, this movie tells us the story of a German airman who fought that war after acquiring American citizenship. The script is based on a true story: Dieter Dengler was shot down and captured while he was on a secret mission of the U. S. army. The target was to bomb some supply routes in North Vietnam, to do so they had to venture into Laos, and there our hero was shot down.

This is what we learn at the beginning of the film; a text appears telling the secret missions carried out by the U. S. in Laos while we see some images of planes bombing targets in the jungle. Then we see a group of airmen in an aircraft carrier, among whom Dieter is found, preparing one of those missions. They see some videos about how to survive in the jungle, and they choose the materials they would carry during the mission.

Finally, they go out to do their assignment, during which Dieter is shot down and has to penetrate in the jungle, escaping from those who have made him fall. After throwing his radio, as he has been told, he hides for the night, covering himself with a plastic he has previously prepared to use as mosquito net. In the next morning, when he is looking for some water, his persecutors find him and take him to a village, now as a prisoner. They move Dieter very often, from one village to another, with a rope in his neck, while they hide from the American helicopters overflying the area.

After staying in different towns, he is taken to the house of some high command, who speaks with him in English. Dieter, at the first moment, says that he is German, but finally he admits the American citizenship. This high command tries to make Dieter to sign a text where the United States are damned for the situation Vietnamese people are living and arguing that they are the responsible for the war. He refuses to do so, even if they told him that his situation would improve, because he “loves his country”. Now is when the conditions he has suffered become really harsh. He is tied from his feet to an ox and dragged, they submerge him in a pit with the water at the height of his neck, etc.

With this first part of the film, Werner Herzog presents the two sides of the conflict. On the one hand, we find the U. S. army. The airmen in the aircraft carrier behave as if there was no war; they make jokes while watching the training videos. Dieter even says that he joined the army hoping to stay in south Vietnam, as he was going on holidays instead than to war, but, as one of his companions says, that has a bad time to enrol, since the U.S participation was increasing. On the other hand, there are those who make Dieter prisoner. They are presented as crazy, barbaric people,

who torment him not to learn anything but just for fun. There is a scene where one of the captors shot him aside, even putting the gun next to his ear to shot. When they arrive to different villages all the people in there goes to see him, as if it was some kind of show. He is tied to the ground, with his arms and leg stretched; they don't let him go to the toilet; the kids, some of them smoking, play while he is tied holding a flying beetle above his head.

At this point of the movie Dieter is taken to the camp where he is going to be imprisoned. There he is locked into a bamboo hut where he meets other prisoners; all of them are workers of Air America, trapped while they were carrying supplies to the Americans. There are two prisoners from the United States and three who are locals; some of them have been there for more than two years. Gene, one of the Americans, shows him the camp and the guards, telling him to be careful with some of them since they are crazy. As the other American prisoner, Duane, says, "keep your head down and your mouth shut, then you will survive". Once he had seen the camp, Dieter tells the others that he had decided to escape; since the hut is no prison for him he would get away at night. The rest of the prisoners discourage him about doing so; "the jungle is the prison".

When the night arrives all the prisoners are locked in the same cabin and their feet are put in a wood in a way that they can't free them, and they are handcuffed as well. After this first night Dieter obtains a nail and when they are locked again, he uses it to free all them from the bracelets. Hereinafter they are free during the night, so Dieter starts thinking of a plan to escape, when the rainy season arrives. He starts holding and hiding a part of the rice the guards give to them as a meal. Finally, he devises a plan to run away; they are going to take the guns from the guards, since they leave them in a cabin when they go to eat, after that the prisoners would take up the camp and wait until the U. S. army picks them up.

Time goes by and the guards give to them less food day by day. Finally, they decide to escape on July 4th, but Gene shows some reticence to it; he thinks that they are going to be released since the army is negotiating for it. It comes the day in which there is no more rice for them, the guards serve worms as food; Gene says that he wants to eat the rice they have hidden for the escape, but Dieter refuses to do it and they have an argument. The next day one of the local prisoners hears the guards arguing and tells the rest of the prisoners what he had learned; the guards are thinking about taking them all to the jungle and executing them because there is no more food. After hearing this, they decide to change the day of the escape: they are going to flee the next day.

The different scenes in the camp show again the captors as barbaric, inexperienced people. The guards are totally archetypal; there is “Little Hitler”, the sadistic guard who torments the prisoners for no reason; “Crazy horse”, who is always doing some martial arts moves; “Jumbo”, the little guard who is nice to the prisoners and even gives them some extra food... There is a moment where “Crazy horse” is playing with a gun and it fell down, almost killing everyone. At another point some American fighter planes pass across the sky and the guards go crazy, shooting Duane in the ear since they think the prisoners have called them.

While Dieter is in the camp, otherwise, we find out where he is held. Duane tells him that they are in Laos, and that their captors are Laotian but the camp is under the command of the Vietcong. Regarding the characterization of the prisoners, the one that stands out the most would be Gene. He appears as the disturbed one after years of seclusion; he thinks that there is not going to be a war between Vietnam and the United States, and that they are going to be released soon. He threatens Dieter telling him that he would avoid him to escape, even if he has to tell the guards about the escaping plan.

Finally the day to flee arrives; they gather the rice and prepare to escape. They go out of the cabin through a hole they have done on the floor, and, after getting some guns, they have to surround the guards; Dieter and Duane from one side and Gene with the rest from the other one. Duane and Dieter confront the guards, killing two of them, but the rest escapes into the jungle without doing their part of the plan. They all meet outside the camp; Dieter is very angry with Gene because this one hasn't fulfilled his part. They exchange some ammo for Gene's gun per a machete, and they go in opposite directions. We are not going to see Gene and the others in the rest of the film.

Dieter and Duane arrive to a river, and they decide to go on a raft down the river; they hope to arrive in the Philippines. They hide with big leafs for the night, and avoid contact with the few people they meet. At one point they throw the guns away, since they can't use them. Duane is more and more tired while the days go by; he even begins to hallucinate. Dieter finds an abandoned village, and they decide to stay there, when a helicopter pass by. Dieter tries to call them, but with no results, so he sets the village on fire in order to be visible. When the helicopters return, instead of rescuing them they shot at Dieter.

After burning the village, they have to move, since it probably has called attention to someone. At this point they meet a little boy, and they kneel down asking for some help. A group of adults sees them and starts attacking them with machetes, cutting the Duane's head off. Dieter escapes, but he is all by his own now. A Viet Cong patrol is looking for him, and he starts going

crazy, hearing the voice and seeing Duane next to him. Finally, while he is eating a snake that he has hunted, an American plane passes just above where he is and sees him. A couple of helicopters appear then and rescue Dieter; after asking some questions in order to confirm his identity, they take him to a camp of the U. S. army.

When the helicopter arrives at the camp, while the doctors are taking Dieter to the hospital, a couple of CIA agents appear and tell everybody to forget everything; they have to interrogate Dieter since he has participated in a secret mission. During this questioning the pilot fellows of Dieter arrive to the hospital, and with the excuse of giving him a letter from his girlfriend, they get to stay alone with him. When the CIA agents leave the room, the pilots take Dieter out of there, and carry him to the aircraft carrier where all the workers there receive him as a hero.

Regarding the reading one could make upon this film, we should take into account here two different ways to approach. On one hand we should analyse the validity of this movie to learn about the situation of POW's during the Vietnam War, and, on the other hand, the truthfulness of the film compared to the real life, since *Rescue Dawn* is based on a true story. For this latter, we should take a look to the website that the family of Gene deBruin, the prisoner that appears as crazy, along with the family of Dieter Dengler and Pisidhi Indradat himself, one of the native prisoners, had created to critique the film³⁷.

According to this website, the director, Werner Herzog, takes some liberties to change the story that are offensive to the people familiar with those events. If some of those adjustments could be understandable, as the fact that there were 7 prisoners instead of the 6 that appear in the movie, there are other that considerably changes the real events. The main one would be the characterization of Gene deBruin; in the film Gene appears as a paranoiac prisoner that has gone crazy after a long captivity, but, as his family members and his fellow prisoner Pisidhi Indradat recalls on the website, deBruin was a kind and caring individual, who stays with an ill prisoner when they finally decide to escape³⁸.

Another change would be the characterization of Dieter Dengler. On the film he appears as the saviour of those hopeless prisoners, since he makes up the plan to escape and push the rest to follow it. In reality the plan was already set by the time Dieter arrived to the camp, and the rest of the prisoners didn't tell him it for several weeks until they could really trust him³⁹. These would be some of the principal liberties that Werner Herzog takes. The director creates a heroic figure of Dieter, and to do so he has to adjust the reality of the story and create a new one to glorify a single

³⁷ www.rescuedawnthetruth.com consulted on 2016/05/25 .

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem.

character instead of the whole group.

We should remember here the idea of Rosenstone about “true” and “false” inventions on cinema. According to this author the filmic historical vocabulary can create images that are, at the same time, invented and true, since they are originated to condensate, synthesize or symbolize larger amounts of data⁴⁰. Even so, historical films cannot indulge in capricious inventions, by ignoring facts that we already now⁴¹, as Herzog makes here with the characterization of Dengler and deBruin. These kind of inventions would be what Rosenstone calls “false”, since they change the real events that we now and those invented realities are not a synthesis or symbolization of the experience the prisoners lived.

Even so, the film shows some aspects that are valid to learn about the situation of POW’s in Vietnam. Since the beginning of the conflict the North Vietnamese army declared that American prisoners were war criminals who had held crimes against North Vietnamese people in an illegal war, so they were not entitled to the privileges and rights of POW’s set by the Geneva Convention⁴². The Viet Cong refused to provide prisoners' names to the International Red Cross and to regular inspection visits⁴³. Otherwise, prisoners would be humanely treated and the wounded enemies collected and cared for, as non-written law of war stipules⁴⁴.

The treatment given by the Viet Cong to American prisoners, according to the majority of their stories, would be of brutal abuse⁴⁵. During the 1960 decade, some of the prisoners gave interviews, ensuring that they were well treated; even some peace groups that had visited the camps declared that there was not systematic torture or brainwashing⁴⁶. On 1969 three American POW’s were released, and, at a press conference, made some statements telling the mistreatment and tortures they had endure⁴⁷. After that, a firestorm of publicity against the North Vietnamese army started, and even the Politburo of the Vietnamese Communist Party discussed the treatment of the prisoners, and released a resolution in 1969, where, if not bound by the Geneva Convention, ask for a humanitarian policy toward American prisoners⁴⁸.

⁴⁰ ROSENSTONE, R. A., *Visions of the Past: The Challenge to our Idea of History*, p. 71, Harvard University Press, London, 1995.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 72.

⁴² PRIBBENOW, M., “Treatment of American POW’s in North Vietnam” in *Cold War International History Project*, e-Dossier, No. 30, Wilson Center, 2012.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ LEWY, G., *America in Vietnam*, p. 332, Oxford University Press, 1980.

⁴⁵ Ibidem., p. 332

⁴⁶ Ibidem., p. 335

⁴⁷ PRIBBENOW, M., “Treatment of American POW’s in North Vietnam” in *Cold War International History Project*, e-Dossier, No. 30, Wilson Center, 2012.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

In the film Dieter is mistreated at some points, especially after refusing to sign a document condemning the United States for the illegal war on Vietnam. This type of texts was usual during the conflict and some of those prisoners that had ensured the well treatment declared, after some time, that their statements and condemning were signed after brutal tortures⁴⁹. *Rescue Dawn* focuses on the personal adventure of a single captive, and set aside the brutal conditions that some prisoners held in Vietnam ensure they suffered. The film shows some of those practices, but it doesn't show Dieter brutally tortured at any point. Even so, the conditions of the camp and during the journey they made to it are bad enough; and one of the reasons to characterize Gene deBruin as crazy, and the rest of the prisoners hopeless as well, would be to show the consequences that long time captivity could have.

Conclusion

In order to conclude this analysis, there are some conclusions that we would like to take into account. As we have seen, these movies have been useful to learn different aspects about the experiences of prisoners of war during some of the most significant conflicts of the 20th century. The validity of POW's stories to create a certain discourse about a war is evident. In these films there are clearly represented the "good" and the "bad" side of the conflict, the prisoners and the captors, even if in some cases, as on *La Grande Illusion*, the "bad guys" aren't that bad. They help to create and spread a certain reading of the war. For example, as we can see clearly with *Rescue Dawn*, even if the depicted events are true, the characterization of Dieter's captors as sadistic, almost savage people, nourishes the arguments in favour of the military intervention of the United States in Vietnam. This is more evident in some other films, where the enemy army carries out crimes against its own people; those films reinforces the image of the United States as the saviour of the weak and the defender of liberty.

Otherwise, one of the aspects that draw our attention about these films would be the different representation of the prisoners, depending on the epoch the films were made. On those movies filmed in the 20th century, *La Grande Illusion* and *Stalag 17*, the director focus the action on the whole group of prisoners, showing them united in the adversity of their situation; even if there are main characters, who have a major protagonism than others, the plot develops through the action of different individuals. On the movies filmed in the 21st century, on the other hand, there is a main character, who suffers an adverse adventure almost by his own. He is a classical hero, endures the situation individually; the rest of the prisoners appear as secondary characters, momentarily

⁴⁹ LEWY, G., *America in Vietnam*, p. 339, Oxford University Press, 1980.

helping the protagonist with a certain task or receiving his help.

In *Unbroken* we have an epic story, of an Olympic athlete who suffers the horrors of captivity, and the sadistic wills of a barbaric guard; he has friends among the prisoners, but he is the one who takes the main blows. On *Rescue Dawn*, Dieter Dengler is the one who has the brilliant ideas to escape, the one who encourages and pushes the rest of the prisoners, hopeless until his arrival. In this case the will of the director, Werner Herzog to characterize Dieter as a hero is evident, since, as we have seen, he changes some true events and represent Gene deBruin as a mad person who confronts Dieter in order to highlight this ones virtues.

The difference between the 20th century and the 21st century movies would be a sample of the change suffered by the western society from one to another century, mostly from the middle decades of the 20th to the present. The society of the 20th century would have a broader sense of community than the one of the 21st. The change to a major individuality is embodied in the culture that the society creates; the heroes, instead of collective, are single individuals now, who endure adversity by their own. This change was made on the last decades of the 20th century; the Cold War created a world closed to itself after the fear suffered during this conflict, and once this have finished the heroism and greatness of the United States, the winner side, prevailed over the rest of discourses.

As we have seen, films are valid instruments to learn about some historic aspects; through them we can represent a part of the history in a different language than the written one, reaching a major public than the historical publications. On the other hand, they are a clear sample of the society that creates them. As a cultural product, each and every movie captures the main streams of the epoch that produces it.

Bibliography

- ◆✂• ALEGRE, S.; “Re-lectura de La Grande Illusion (1937) de Jean Renoir”, in *Film Historia*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 25-34, 1991-
- ◆✂• FERRO, M.; *Cinema and History*; Wayne State University Press, 1988.
- ◆✂• FERRO, M.; “Film as an Agent, Product and Source of History”, in *Journal of Contemporary History*; Vol. 18, No. 3, *Historians and Movies: The State of the Art: Part 1*, pp. 357-364, 1983.
- ◆✂• HUBBARD, P. J.; *Apocalypse Undone: My Survival of Japanese Imprisonment during World War II*; Vanderbilt University Press, Tennessee, 1990.
- ◆✂• JONES, H.; “Prisoners of War” in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. DANIEL, U., GATRELL, P. et al; Freie Universität Berlin, 2014; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10475>. Consulted on 2016/05/25
- ◆✂• LEWY, G.; *America in Vietnam*, Oxford University Press, 1980.
- ◆✂• MACKENZIE, S. P.; “The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II” in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 487-520, 1994; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124482>. Consulted on 2016/05/25.
- ◆✂• PRIBBENOW, M.; “Treatment of American POW’s in North Vietnam” in *Cold War International History Project*, e-Dossier, No. 30, Wilson Center, 2012.
- ◆✂• RADFORD, R. A.; “The Economic Organisation of a P.O.W Camp” in *Economica*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 48, pp. 189-201, 1945; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2550133>. Consulted on 2016/05/25.
- ◆✂• Rescue Dawn the Truth website: URL: [Www.rescuedawnthetruth.com](http://www.rescuedawnthetruth.com). Consulted on 2016/05/25
- ◆✂• ROSENSTONE, R.A., *History on Film/Film on History*, Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh, 2006, from the Spanish version: ROSENSTONE, R. A.; *La Historia en el Cine: el Cine sobre la Historia*, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, 2014.