

Paths of Glory. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Starring Kirk Douglas... and a bunch of other guys you'll recognize from that vague demi-monde of "character actor," some of whom made it later on in weird connections: Ralph Meeker played Mike Hammer; Adolph Menjou always a continental slicky boy; George McCready always the oily businessman, politician, sycophant; Richard Anderson the doctor determined to "make him better than he was" in *Million Dollar Man*. "Based" (whatever that means) on Humphrey Cobb's 1957 novel of the same name as the film as the same name as the "elegy" (whatever that is) in a "country churchyard" by the famous dead guy Thomas Gray "based" on the actual and genuine revolt of the French *poilus* (which is like a "soldier," only hairier) in 1916 like the British army didn't revolt nor the German, neither, nor the Rooshan as the butchery reached Homeric proportions only you don't read about the others on account of the Teutono-Slavo-Anglo conspiracy of silence to make the ~~Frø~~ French look like weenies though between you, me, and the *lampadaire* (like a lamppost, only, you know, classy on account of foreign) they haven't done much recently to dispel the myth.

Here's this season our nation at war with appeals to duty, sacrifice, *glory* falling (largely—though not exclusively—upon the cap-backwards britches-around-the-knees mall-addled youth of the day) among howls of execration at the futility, the immorality, the absurdity of war falling (largely—though not exclusively—from the lips of overweight greying scions of the Sixties and their latte-sodden epigones from lairs in the Fine Arts Department at a university whose name you'd recognize in an instant if I mentioned it but rhymes with "useless, no-balls academic twit") upon Mom and Dad... like young Jason ever listened to *them* about anything. Time, therefore, (since reading books about ideas and stuff is no option) to resurrect those old war movies, the black and white ones, and evoke their (rarely subtle) evangile for a subsequent (and dumbo) age: *ours*.

Goes without saying that World War II movies, many turned during the action and often with real vets in the cast or filmed immediately after the war in the flush of victory, freighting their message of communal endurance and justified response to brutal provocation, can't be trusted (*Sands of Iwo Jima, Twelve O'clock High, Battleground*). World War I films, alas, by reason of the emerging technology made 20-some years after that war, conceal poorly the misgivings of our Age of Anxiety, Aspirin Age, Jazz Age which saw cataclysm over the horizon (*What Price Glory, Sergeant York, All Quiet on the Western Front*) through the mists of Depression and despair and so can't be trusted, either. Couple of interesting nowhere war flicks (both with Gary Cooper) do surface like *They Came to Cordura* (Mexico) and *The Real Glory* (Philippines) to tackle issues of national purpose and of individual courage in such a way as to remain timeless... therefore unwatched.

Into this mess comes now Stanley Kubrick who on account of he showed us Nicole's butt and Tom's I think and HAL's and made the mostly overrated *Full Metal Jacket* which Lee Ermey, Matthew Modine, and even Vince Vaughn none of whom has much to offer far as I can see (though Ermey was at least a real Mah-reen) are still milking. If Kubrick had stopped at *Dr. Strangelove*, I'd put him with Nabokov as one of the greatest guys

with “k” in his name ever (including Dostoyevsky and Cant and Cafca). But the guy opened a whole can of Social Rectitude and between flirtations with Entertainment (*Clockwork Orange*) went mostly bye bye on us. *Paths of Glory* is not about the absurdity of war. It’s about the absurdity of generals. It’s really a melodrama and designed to anger you with the manifest venality of an ambitious officer, General Mireau (McCready), the foppish indifference of a staff poag Broulard (Menjou), the patent innocence of three French soldiers (Meeker, two others I can never remember), the unctuousness of a corporate/regimental (ptui!) toady (Anderson), the stubborn if doomed nobility of a troop leader, Colonel Dax (Douglas). *Breaker Morant* does the much better job with this trope and tells a *real* war story to boot (a *Vietnam* war story at that).

After yet another failed but costly assault on the German “Anthill,” in the course of which the frustrated Mireau orders French artillery to fire upon his own men to staunch up their resolve, the General decides to court martial a random selection of his regiment for cowardice, leaving the choice to Dax who in turn delegates it to an incompetent and genuinely cowardly lieutenant. Three men in the end stand trial, two of whom actually did go over the top only to be stopped by a hail of bullets. Despite the cleft-chinned Dax’s masterful defense (lot of people think this is the closest Kirk Douglas came to that “acting” stuff), these foredoomed men are found guilty, sentenced to be shot. We watch their despair as dawn approaches, Dax’s efforts to appeal first to his Commander (Mireau) and then to Mireau’s (Broulard), the insistency of the machine once wound up. Well, hell... let’s compromise: we’ll shoot the guys anyhow, but relieve the General. And so it goes.

Watchable movie. Just not a war movie. The principals could as well be corporate stooges (and often are), politicians (ditto), bureaucrats (ditto): ambitious and venal human beings (dunno why they’d have to be *men*, for all that... I’ve heard stories that *women* lie and aspire) in any arena where established position entitles the holder to deference at the expense of common sense and of common decency. Just about the time you’ve had enough of the “Question Authority” cretins, a tale of purloined innocence like this one makes you wonder if all those times to did what the captain said, you obeyed out of noble fealty or simple ain’tgotthesackitude.