

TELEVISION AND THE NEWS (Originally published September 1967)

It is worrisome at times to feel that one is being propagandized through that powerful medium of network television news whose policy makers never come out openly and admit prejudice. We got just such a feeling some time ago while watching a CBS rerun of the French film, *The Anderson Platoon*. It was a remarkably well- done documentary that followed a small American unit in combat and rest and was photographed with close-at-hand realism in a combat area in Vietnam.

Those who have had actual, frontline combat experience and have lived the grubby life of the foot soldier in any war are well aware that it is not a pleasurable existence. Yet the foot soldier does not think in terms of horror, disgust or emotionalism when in action. He is there as part of the realism. He lives in the stink and flies and filth. He adapts to the coarseness and vulgarity, to blood and violence, to wounded and dead. This is the way war is. It has always been this way, and had cameras been available then, almost identical film could have been obtained in the Gallic, Napoleonic and other wars of the past.

It is only when such film is edited and furnished with suggestive mood music and pointed commentary that it departs from factual documentation and becomes subject to emotional falsification and an instrument of propaganda. As such it can be slated in any way desired by those who edit and set policy.

The *Anderson Platoon* film accentuated artfully the most unpleasant aspects of guerrilla fighting in the humid, rain-drenched, parasite-infested, rice paddy land of Vietnam. The misery of the ill-fed, sorrowful, native adults and children caught in the brutality of combat was carefully portrayed to elicit sympathy. Equal care was taken to spotlight the American racial dilemma. The platoon was well integrated; Anderson was a Negro. It was spotlighted not only pictorially but also with a background of folk music of the protest variety sung in a mournful Negro baritone. The camera followed a simple, illiterate white GI on his rest and recreation tour to the bars and fleshpots of Saigon and practically into bed with a couple of Oriental harlots. This must have been consoling to a mother and father watching TV back home in Tennessee. The roughened white hand that awkwardly comforted the black wrist of Anderson, as he lay wounded on a stretcher, was given close-up scrutiny by a camera concerned more with brotherhood and equality than with combat realism.

It was the sort of presentation, in short, that seemed deliberately aimed at promoting doubt, disquiet and discouragement for home front consumption. In World War II, if the Quislings, the Axis Sallies or the Tokyo Roses could have been supplied with a cameraman and allowed to edit and present an anti-war, anti-American film they could

not have done a better job.

In presenting this low-keyed, subtle film of obvious propaganda, it would seem that the CBS network aligns itself with the vocal, liberal and anti-war peaceniks who feel that war is futile, socialism desirable and communism misunderstood. The definition of furnishing aid and encouragement to an enemy gets blurred at times.

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