

We Are Mansfield Park

By Wayne Northey

Western culture is committed to a mass mythology of the righteousness of war. The latest 60th Anniversary D-Day commemorations are recent evidence.

Anthropologist René Girard defines “mythology” as that which camouflages violence to benefit its perpetrators.

I have now lived through 55 Remembrance Day and D-Day commemorations. I have only heard officially about the sacrifice and bravery of our soldiers in both World Wars. No government ceremony however has recounted Allied savagery and brutality, nor commemorated the millions of Allied civilian victims. This is disingenuous mythology.

My dad fought on the Italian front in World War II. It was known that at its most savage, Allied soldiers did not take prisoners... A few years ago, my teen-age eldest burst into tears when this awareness sank in. His grandfather *never* talked about the War until his dying day. But silence like mythology only covers, does not exonerate, culpability.

Edgar L. Jones wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly* February 1946, “One War is Enough” (<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/bookauth/battle/jones.htm>): “What kind of war do civilians suppose we fought, anyway? We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers. We topped off our saturation bombing and burning of enemy civilians by dropping atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, thereby setting an all time record for instantaneous mass slaughter.” And again: “... we mutilated the bodies of enemy dead, cutting off their ears and kicking out their gold teeth for souvenirs, and buried them with their testicles in their mouths, but such flagrant violations of all moral codes reach into still-unexplored realms of battle psychology.”

Retired American Lt. Col. David Grossman has since done some of this study in a new area of research he has dubbed “killology”. He writes that modern soldiers are trained in brutalization: “This brutalization is designed to break down your existing mores and norms and to accept a new set of values that embrace destruction, violence, and death as a way of life. In the end, you are desensitized to violence and accept it as a normal and essential survival skill in your brutal new world.” See his website: www.killology.com.)

In October, 2003, *The Toledo Blade* ran a Pulitzer-Prize winning four-part series, “Buried Secrets, Brutal Truths”, on atrocities committed by an elite army unit, *Tiger Force*, in Vietnam, designated “a rogue unit”. During its reign of terror in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1967, hundreds of civilians were mercilessly tortured and murdered. The government investigation into these atrocities was intended to remain buried forever. There were no criminal charges laid. (See: <http://www.toledoblade.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20031022/SRTIGERFORCE/110190169>)

In a December 28, 2003 article, *The New York Times* quoted David Hackworth, creator of the Tiger Force unit: "Vietnam was an atrocity from the get-go. It was that kind of war, a frontless war of great frustration. There were hundreds of My Lais. You got your card punched by the numbers of bodies you counted." The article adds: "But they [those from Tiger Force interviewed] wanted to make another point: that Tiger Force had not been a 'rogue' unit. Its members had done only what they were told, and their superiors knew what they were doing." This "defence" was regularly heard at the Nuremberg Trials.

Current Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry was also quoted giving evidence before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1971. He reported that American soldiers in Vietnam had "raped, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country." The full article may be found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/28/national/28TIGE.html?ex=1073639319&ei=1&en=94ecfbb2e66368dd>. A similar reality is being revealed in the War on Terror.

In Tokyo, March 9 and 10, 1945 about 100,000 civilians died from incendiary bombing, as in Dresden a month earlier. General Curtis LeMay, highly decorated commander of the Japanese war theatre, boasted that "we scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9-10 than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined." "I suppose if I had lost the war," LeMay later commented, "I would have been tried as a war criminal. Fortunately we were on the winning side."

There were about 800,000 civilian casualties in bombings of 66 other Japanese cities, culminating in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with an instantaneous death toll in fact of over 200,000 civilians. There were also about one million civilian casualties in Germany from Allied carpet bombing of 42 cities.

In the movie adaptation of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the central character, Fanny Price at age 10 goes to live at her relatives' fairy-tale estate, Mansfield Park. Her new life is idyllic and genteel in every way. But eventually into her adulthood the awful truth emerges, adumbrated throughout the movie: the "civilized" opulence is underwritten by the putrid horror of New World slavery that her uncle, Sir Thomas, oversees business interests in, and (implied) also participates in rape with impunity of chattel black women, and worse.

Our cherished avowal of democracy and freedom, our protestations of inviolable international human rights, stand knee-deep in the blood of millions of civilian victims the world over. This unmitigated horror is the (officially) unacknowledged legacy of World War II, of all war.

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