

Normandy - some favourable, some not so favourable. It is a subject that, like the bomber offensive, remains controversial. A story of complex strategy and squabbling generals, it invites differences of opinion.

The film-makers join this debate over military strategy and leadership and they express their opinions with great force. The viewer is told that the Canadian army suffered a series of "cataclysms" in the summer of 1944, military disasters that, to all appearances, overshadowed all of its accomplishments. The theme is one of untrained soldiers, incompetent and ruthless generals, and brutal acts of war. This is a bleak story from beginning to end. The only heroes, so the film tells us, are the common soldiers, thrust into the cauldron of war with only a dim hope of survival.

AN ANGRY RESPONSE

Not one of the Normandy veterans who appeared before the Sub-Committee accepted this tribute with grace. Their statements revealed a common theme. Brigadier-General (ret'd) Ernest Anderson, a company commander with the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment on 6 June 1944, told the Sub-Committee that *In Desperate Battle* was "inaccurate...and an insult to the men of the Canadian army."⁽³⁾ Captain (ret'd) George Richardson, who served with No 3 Forward Maintenance Ammunition Section in Normandy, insisted that "we were definitely not the drunken, vicious, bumbling idiots that *The Valour and the Horror* seemed to want everyone to believe we were...The whole tenor of (the film) seemed to denigrate our Allied and Canadian war efforts."⁽⁴⁾ And Brigadier-General (ret'd) Denis Whitaker, who commanded the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry regiment in Normandy before being wounded on 18 July 1944, explained to the Sub-Committee that the production "deeply offended veterans because it consistently emphasizes failure and ignores the achievements of the Canadians forces on the battlefield."⁽⁵⁾

As with *Death by Moonlight*, there was a sense among veterans and veterans organizations that a grave injustice had been done to the honour of Canada's fighting men, and that the memory of those who had fallen in battle had been sullied. The veterans who appeared before the Sub-Committee did not want their story to be an exercise in hero-worship, or a glorification of war, but they did want it to be told with accuracy and fairness. One of their greatest fears was that ordinary Canadians would be left with a distorted and inaccurate image of a critical period in their country's history. Some of Canada's finest military historians appeared before the Sub-Committee, and they showed little hesitation in echoing the sentiments of veterans. While not disputing that mistakes were made in Normandy and that the

(3) Proceedings, 8:85.

(4) Proceedings, 6:90-91.

(5) Proceedings, 5A:9.