

TO END ALL WARS

Reviewed by: Ken James, Staff Writer

Moral Rating: Better than Average
Moviemaking Quality: 5 stars (out of 5)
Primary Audience: Mature Teen to Adult
Genre: War Drama
Length: 2 hrs. 5 min.
MPAA Rating: "R" for language and war related violence



War movies have been in vogue for some years now. Just looking into the recent past we've seen the likes of *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *The Thin Red Line*, *Schindler's List*, *Hart's War*, *Uprising*, *Life is Beautiful*, and *Enemy at the Gates* — and these are just WWII films! Looking for a common running thread we find that 1) "war is hell" (which it is) and 2) mankind, put in extraordinary times, can either succumb to their oppressors or rise to overcome them.

To End All Wars is one such film. Rather than focusing on the plight of the Jewish people, this story centers around the true-life events of Ernest Gordon, author of *Through the Valley of the Kwai*. Gordon and his entire Scottish "Sutherland Highlanders" division were captured after the fall of Singapore and held deep within the Southeast Asian jungle. *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) tells the story now known to so many; these sickly POWs forced to build a railroad running for over 400km through some of the harshest terrain on the planet. But while *To End All Wars* covers some of the same territory, it is wholly a different film.



What makes this film unique is the redemptive and *don't choke* Biblical theme of forgiveness. Irish-born actor Ciarán McMenamin portrays young soldier Captain Gordon who finds his faith at the selflessly caring hands of British POW Dusty Miller (Mark Strong, *One Against the Wind*, *Sunshine*). But while these two men begin to study and teach other POWs what it means to "turn the other cheek", Major Ian Campbell (Robert Carlyle, *The Full Monty*, *Angela's Ashes*) works at putting together an escape plan that will make their Japanese

captors suffer. American fighter Lt. Tom Reardon (Kiefer Sutherland, *Eye for an Eye*, *Flatliners*, TV's "24") joins neither camp at first. He selfishly works at taking care of himself and only himself until a turning point comes that leads him to follow the higher road.



Like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Blackhawk Down*, *To End All Wars* is not for the squeamish. It is a solidly "R" rated film due to the war-related violence (very realistic, very bloody, straight from real-life), non-sexual male nudity, and offensive language (though the Lord's name in vain was thankfully absent). Children and anyone else who



could be deeply disturbed by the violence should avoid the film for this reason. Yet those who are willing to endure will find a film that shines brightly for its moral Christian worldview. Such ultimate questions raised in this Oscar-caliber film include "Is there any higher reason to live?" "Do I have a purpose in life?" "How can I forgive those who have wronged me?" and "What would make a man once so selfish sacrifice himself for others?" (as one character in the film does). For answers, it is our prayer that those who see *TEAW* will turn to the Bible which is so highly regarded as the ultimate guidebook to life. That means even the Christian

audience who, for far too many, hold their own grudges and issues of unforgiveness.

If you are an apprentice to Christ and already name Him as your role model to strive towards, *To End All Wars* would be an excellent film to view with those who don't yet have hope in their lives. The most impact will come from a follow-up discussion after seeing the film. Raise these tough issues and let the discussion go on from there.

Technically, *To End All Wars* is flawless. From the acting, to script, to filming, to the solid moral core. Let us pray for more of these to hit the big screen as, according to ministries working from within, Hollywood finds itself in an introspective and spiritually-seeking mode after 9/11. Kudos to Producer Jack Hafer, Director David L. Cunningham, and others who had a part in this noteworthy performance. You'd have to be a stone to not be moved by it, but Christ said that even "the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

At the film's conclusion, the real Ernest Gordon (who went on to immigrate to the U.S. and became Dean of the Chapel at Princeton University for 26 years) is filmed on location at the River Kwai in Thailand during a 2000 meeting with former adversary Takashi Nagase in a touching reconciliation reunion.

[Look for *To End All Wars* in limited release theatrically beginning August 2002 with wider distribution planned after that. In the meantime, spread the word about this marvelous film. More info at www.toendallwars.com.]

Year of Release -- 2001 (limited), 2002 (wide)

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