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"Go Tell The Spartans" The 1978 film "Go Tell the Spartans" is a dramatic indictment of American activity in Vietnam. The story, which takes place in 1964, shows the futility of war, and how fleeting glory in such situations can be. The explicit references to the 300 Spartans who stood against the Persian Army in the ancient world lends a classical air to the film, but also an ironic one. The American soldiers who die in this film are not dying for a great cause and probably will not be remembered. Nevertheless, they are honourable and willing to die for their country. The film focuses on American and Vietnamese soldiers in a distant outpost called Muc Wa. The men are inexperienced and have no real sense of what the war will entail. They are badly outnumbered by Viet Cong troops and there are reports of fighting in the area. Their commander is named Barker, and he is the heart and soul of the film. Barker has fought in many wars and is world-weary and wise. He knows his men are foolish and outnumbered. He does everything he can to teach them to prepare themselves for battle. But the men at Muc Wa are just one cog in a larger wheel. We see how the bureaucracy of the American armed forces slows things down and prevents soldiers from showing initiative. Even after numerous complaints, Barker is still undermanned. In a sense, he is only awaiting his own death. In order to fully understand this excellent film, it is important to understand America's role in Vietnam during the period. Unlike the Second World War, where the purpose of the U. S. was clear, and its vital interests at stake, the Vietnam War had an unclear objective. Americans had trouble understanding why it was in their national interest to send hundreds of thousands of soldiers to this far-away land. Some of the actions taken by their own soldiers ashamed them, and the losses of life were enormous. Many aspects of the war in retrospect seem

surreal. When watching Barker and his men, it is important to understand the filmmakers are intent only on showing the courage of these individual men in the face of adversity and not the war overall. They are effectively throwing their lives away for nothing. Lancaster's performance as Barker is the heart of the film. He shows this man to be honest and capable, and a true individualist who is also deeply concerned with others. Without the character and the actor who plays him, the film would be much less significant. The film's ending brings all of these messages home. The men are killed in the final attack, and Barker dies too trying to cover them during their escape. Everything that was predicted, sadly, comes true. In a sense, the end of the film is like the Fall of Saigon, which saw the American losing the war with even more finality after they had withdrawn their forces. "Go Tell the Spartans" is a true classic.