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Topic: Analysis of how soldiers are humanised and victimised in *Hacksaw Ridge*

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Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Chapter 1. Introductory Chapter

1.1: General Background

After nearly 14 years of development, the biographical war film *Hacksaw Ridge* was released in September 2016, touching the hearts of audiences worldwide with the extraordinary backstory of the war hero Desmond Doss, the first conscientious objector to receive a medal of honor for saving more than seventy-five men in the Battle of Okinawa. The film, without sparing historical accuracy, was a riveting emotional rollercoaster, allowing viewers to witness the incredible deeds of Desmond Doss, writhe in anguish at the hyper-realistic war sequences, and ultimately gain a deeper appreciation of the unsung acts of our war heroes.

By utilising Rene Girard's theory on the scapegoating mechanism and theories on pacifism, this research seeks to analyse the portrayal of *Hacksaw Ridge*'s main body of characters, the soldiers. It will examine how the scapegoating of Desmond Doss, and moral dilemmas on the use of violence in the film add to an authentic, humanising portrayal of soldiers which resonates with us viewers.

1.2 Rationale

The evolving relationship between Desmond Doss and his fellow soldiers, seen in clashes and the building of rapport between them, provides insight on the moralistic stance the various characters bear. Furthermore, concerning the scapegoating mechanism present in the film, the character development of Desmond Doss in the film parallels that of the literary scapegoat, notably his growth from a sacrificial outcast to a revered hero through the film. The film will be analysed with reference to Desmond Doss as the film's central scapegoat. I will explore the interactions between the soldiers and Desmond Doss as to how they portray the soldiers, as Desmond Doss' actions and deviations in the role of a scapegoat help shape the lives of those around him and the "community's narrative as a whole" (Luaces, 2018). This method of analysing the portrayal of the soldiers overcomes the limited screen time and lack of sustained attention soldiers receive in typical war films, which is especially true in this film due to its nature as a biographical work.

1.3. Research Questions

How does *Hacksaw Ridge* portray the moral ambiguity between violent and non-violent actions by Desmond Doss and the soldiers, thus placing them in a humanising light?

How are the soldiers' complex motivations of scapegoating Desmond Doss portrayed, presenting the scapegoating mechanism as not just a mindless discrimination against the weak?

1.4. Thesis Statement

The soldiers in *Hacksaw Ridge* are not imbued with conventional heroic traits, and are instead humanised and victimised through their complex moral stance on violence, as well as their insecurities and fears that motivate their harsh scapegoating.

1.5. Delimitations

This research will exclusively analyse the film *Hacksaw Ridge*, therefore omitting documentaries and other literary works on Desmond Doss. In accordance with the patterns of scapegoating mechanism, primarily Rene Girard's offered interpretations in his literary works, it will analyse scenes in the film and how they humanise the film's characters. In addition, specific branches of pacifism that the characters in *Hacksaw Ridge* embody will be detailed, so as to better conceptualise the morally ambiguous conflicts between them.

1.6. Significance of Research

With the rise of many popular war films sporting hyper-realistic combat brutality and body horror scenes, many viewers have become desensitised to them, seeking mere entertainment from such graphic violence. This research hopes to discourage such shallow treatment of war films and disprove these stylised versions of soldiers' lives. Also, this research hopes to discern how factors other than realistic cinematography in popular war films are able to humanise and victimise soldiers, thus evoking viewer sympathy for them.

1.7. Limitations

Though the film *Hacksaw Ridge* had won Best Film Editing and Best Sound Mixing at the 2017 Academy Awards, its exemplary use of visuals and sound will not be analysed extensively in this research. Furthermore, it should be noted that Girard's theory on the scapegoating mechanism has been very controversial and received a large amount of critique and contrasting interpretations. These will also have to be aptly taken into account when using the scapegoating mechanism in my theoretical framework.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Scapegoating Mechanism

The scapegoating mechanism is simply defined as the act of renewing purity of a community, through the tribalistic practice of expelling a select member from it. The framework has shown much development, particularly to theorise larger aspects of human nature and desire.

First coined in *Permanence and Change*, Burke states that the scapegoating mechanism stems from our heavily stratified society, where everyone is "initiated into a system of commandments" (Carter, 1996). From this, we can discern two main factors of scapegoating. The first is the complex hierarchical structures of our society, with friction and resentment between "layers" or *hierarchical psychosis*. (Bellinger, 2009). Examples cited in his research include white supremacy and the lynching of blacks, often segregated as "higher" and "lower" races. The second is human imperfection, where feelings of guilt and failure arise from being unable to meet the numerous societal standards in life. Both cases align in the sense that the human cannot achieve the ideal of mutual forgiveness and love, something preached in years of religion and culture.

Girard instead states that the scapegoat mechanism is instead owing to mimetic desire. It is the innate tendency to imitate and similarly crave what one lacks and the other has, (Fleming, 1977) which escalates to mimetic rivalry or "conflict of doubles", as both parties vying for the same object lose individuality and end up in conflict, thus projecting their transgressions onto an arbitrary victim. I observe that both theories share similarities in relation to the "ethically superior scapegoat", who is not discriminated against for his sins, but by the perfect ideal he embodies that others envy. This aligns with Girard's concept of mimetic

desire, and his description of the scapegoat as a *pharmakon*; one who attracts others as much as he evokes their hate. Building on Girard's theory on mimetic rivalry, he also coins the term *undifferentiation*, where the community who scapegoats find themselves bearing similarities to the scapegoat; it is made apparent that they were not hating their rivals, but rather the darker side of themselves. (Girard, 1972) He cites this as the birthplace of social divide and collapse, asserting that panic and tumult would ensue as the community loses the bearings of their own individuality, an communal identity formed purely by the hate of another.

Another point to note is the inclusion of religion in the scapegoating mechanism. Bellinger (2009) notices a discordance that "when God scapegoats, it is good, but when human beings scapegoat, it is evil". Burke and Girard both agree on this; humans have taken on the role of divine figures of God's sovereignty to justify their scapegoating, such as Hitler's persecution of the Jews through rhetorical resources to paint his own godlike image. What is interesting is that the reverse is also true; humans also create divine figures to justify their own scapegoating. The immortalising of scapegoats in religious myth that they can fabricate at their own will acts as a method to disguise and downplay the immorality of scapegoating (Graham, 2002)

However, Girard famously cites Jesus as an example, one who willingly accepts the sins of people. He asserts this as the Christian revelation; it disrupts the vicious cycle of scapegoating, where the Christian message of mutual forgiveness and love critiques society and produces people's self-awareness of their unconsciously immoral scapegoating. The credibility of this statement is questionable, and could exaggerate the contrast between the innocent Christian gospels to our violent society. (Frear, 1992) However, it is notable as it marks a transition into greater representation and personal agency of the scapegoat.

Modelling after Jesus and the Christian revelation, Girard coined the term "literary scapegoat", a character "neither totally subdued by authorial delusion nor perfectly heard by virtue of an absolute presence of innocence" (Luaces, 2018). This moral ambiguity thus overcomes the limited presence of the scapegoat in typical scapegoat literature (coined 'persecution texts'), yet also probes for a more critical reading of the text to determine whether the scapegoating is truly "justifiable", as we the reader also become involved in this process of scapegoating. (Barge, 2001)

2.2.1 Pacifism

Pacifism regards peace as the highest value, and condemns war in all forms. While this phrase connotes a sense of absolutism, this is not a given across all domains of pacifism. In its ethical definition, two distinct models of pacifism appear, namely deontological pacifism and virtue pacifism. Deontological pacifism prohibits violence in self-defense, or defense of others, referring to it as the morally deficient choice (Farmer, 2011). Virtue pacifism instead is more committed towards the virtue of being “peaceable”. It finds it acceptable to employ violence in certain means, with the key focus being to act creatively so that violence can be curbed. (Farmer, 2011)

The heart of arguments against pacifism lies in the fact that it is not realistic. In regards to both forms of pacifism, the former is seen as overly restrictive and ultimately unfeasible, while the latter fails to recognise the impossibility of the complete eradication of war, as merely being grounded in “utopian illusions” (Moses, 2017). Advocates of virtue pacifism find this claim invalid. Farmer states that virtue pacifism is less concerned with the abstract justification of war in all of its political complexities, and rather focuses on achieving peace as an interpersonal value. Farmer highlights several aspects of virtue pacifism that contribute towards a realistic model of pacifism. Virtue pacifists accept the risk of their acts against government structures to promote peace being futile; they instead focus on “active engagement with all conflict participants - both the belligerents and those affected by the conflict - to discover or develop nonviolent solutions to the conflict” (Pries, 2017). Farmer also considers virtue pacifists as “moral anti-essentialists”, who find that a violent action does not define the moral goodness of a person. In particular, this resolves the shortcomings of absolutist pacifism, where to achieve non-violence, violent means may have to be employed, making pacifism oppose itself.

Similarly, advocates of deontological pacifism have suggested the rethinking of its model. Peulic (2017) coins a “reflexive realist” approach, integrating principles of “agency, prudence, and the recognition of limitations into deontological pacifism, which can be seen as incorporating some concepts from virtue pacifism, in the development of a useful and relevant model of pacifism.

2.2.2 War pacifism and the Conscientious Objector

In the context of war, pacifism is stated to be socially useful only as a decisively minority-exercised view in a law-abiding country. (Smuniewski, 2019) Modern pacifism has been described almost as a rebel movement - one which aims to shake the modern state to its very foundation (Sibley, 2016), and finds its strength in discarding the usual methods of politics and resorting to the unexpected. (Sibley, 2016) Yet, despite being closely linked to war pacifism, the conscientious objector has received much little support by critics of pacifism. Many question the patriotism of these pacifists, who by choosing not to fight, are indirectly helping the enemy. (Peulic, 2017) or “afraid of suffering” (Fiala, 2018). This, in extension, highlights a misconception linking passiveness to pacifism; Passiveness cannot be ascribed to pacifism, as inaction may also refer to “undertaking risks to the self in order to attain peace without visiting violence upon the other(s)” (Pries, 2017), and simply choosing to suffer for their ideals of peace.

Chapter 3. Methodology

With reference to Girard’s scapegoating mechanism, I will analyse how the complex motivations of scapegoating are portrayed in the film, which will help elucidate the soldiers’ vulnerabilities.

Pacifism theory will be used to discern the key moral conflicts presented in the film, which I will link to the soldiers’ nuanced conceptions on violence, and how this humanises them. Overall, this will help me understand how the film portrays soldiers in an authentic manner which audiences can sympathise with.

4.0 Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Moral ambiguity between violent and non-violent actions

In *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), both the soldiers and Desmond Doss are portrayed to share the virtue of non-violence, albeit to differing extents. As the military serves as a place where

violence is legitimised and socially approved, the soldiers' harsh and cruel actions against Desmond Doss are not fully demonised; pacifism simply does not belong in their environment, and wrestling with their inner conscience to exact violence is something they all cannot avoid. This humanises the characters, portraying their complexities of their inner self and moral decisions.

4.1.1 Portrayal of Desmond Doss

Despite the obvious moral goodness and virtue of Desmond Doss' actions, the film portrays the weaknesses of such pacifist beliefs that clash with the integrity of war, which is violence and brute force. Through his character, the film sends a message on the truly ambiguous nature of war, where ideals of violence and non-violence are flipped. This subtly advocates for the soldiers, whose actions clearly balance out both of these extremes and become more rational to us viewers.



Figure 1. Desmond Doss persisting against his father's will to join the military

In this scene, Desmond Doss rebels against his father's will to join the military, saying that "I won't be able to live with myself if I don't [serve the military]" The scene clearly shows Desmond Doss' enthusiasm to join the military, with him already planning out to be a medic and tending to the injured. Yet, this scene only instills a sense of dread in the viewer. While Desmond Doss' intentions to save lives are laudable, his standing next to the graves of previous soldiers in the scene as well as his father traumatised by war only makes his attempt seem fruitless and suicidal. This addresses a weakness of pacifism, which is the failure to

recognise the limitations of pacifism's benefit to others. Considering Desmond Doss' life of familial abuse, this scene only emphasises his desperation to defy the violence he had suffered under since childhood. By presenting Desmond Doss' pacifist motivations as ultimately futile, *Hacksaw Ridge* can be seen as sending a message on the impossibility of nonviolence existing in a harsh environment like war.



Figure 2. Desmond Doss politely asks Smitty to return him his Bible

In this scene, Desmond Doss can be seen embodying aspects of virtue pacifism, demonstrated in his interactions with his fellow soldiers. In this scene, Smitty snatches Desmond Doss' Bible in a bid to incite conflict, to which Desmond Doss is seen politely asking Smitty to return him his Bible, even though this is extremely humiliating for him. Despite being grounded in his deontological ethics that violence is morally impermissible, Desmond Doss shows a commitment in virtue pacifism to becoming "peaceable", treating Smitty just as he would a friend as seen in the word "please". He accepts his own shortcomings as a pacifist, and by taking steps to ensure violence does not ensue, he in fact encourages those around him to share the care and empathy he models after.

Yet contextually, this act fails to provide the resolution Desmond Doss hoped for. In the later scenes violence against Desmond Doss only ensues, with his passiveness being a show of cowardice to the soldiers. Had Desmond Doss' employed violence in the appropriate means and chose to show aggression towards Smitty, he would not be deemed timid and be further discriminated against. His failure to recognise the inherently violent institution they live in

only highlights the realistic weakness of pacifism, where using force and violence to achieve the ideals of pacifism would only make pacifism oppose itself (Corlett, 2003). This blurs the line between justifiable violence and non-violence, showing the morally ambiguous nature of violence in war.

4.1.2. Portrayal of the soldiers



Figure 3. Unwilling to wield a gun, Desmond Doss is bullied by Smitty for his perceived cowardice

The soldiers are portrayed to actively rebuke his pacifist beliefs that defy the very essence of combat and the military. In figure 3, we see Desmond Doss being bullied by Smitty for his refusal to fight and hold a gun. Knowing that Desmond Doss is unlikely to fight back, Smitty punches him without warning, saying “you think you’re better than us?”. Although Smitty’s actions are immediately deemed unreasonable to the audiences, his condemnation of such pacifist beliefs serves as rooting out the truth as to whether Desmond Doss is simply afraid of suffering and killing. Smitty’s use of “coercive pressure” (Sibley, 2016) may be deemed violent, but necessary to prevent any implications of Desmond Doss’ inaction in war, where their lives would be at stake, and violence occurring in a much larger magnitude. Thus, his violent act to protect him and his fellow soldiers is justified and may even be considered as a form of minimal pacifism.



Figure 4. Captain Glover explains the military's stance on pacifism to Desmond Doss

In figure 4, we see Captain Glover explaining his stance towards pacifism. Despite Desmond Doss' assertion that he is willing to suffer in war like anyone else, Captain Glover rejects this view, adopting a utilitarian mindset as he states that Desmond Doss' sacrifice is neither beneficial to himself nor to the military as a whole. The audience finds themselves siding more with Captain Glover's stance towards pacifism, given his stern attitude towards minimising the loss of any human life. In contrast, Desmond Doss' pacifism appears to be rather selfish, prioritising his beliefs over the lives of others. Captain Glover's rejection of naive idealism, and favouring of a pragmatic approach is instead deemed more effectual, showing the complexities of his character as one who is able to balance violence and non-violence in its appropriate dimensions, thus humanising him.

4.2. Complex motivations in the scapegoating mechanism

4.2.1. Scapegoating as a displacement of one's insecurities

In *Hacksaw Ridge*, the soldiers' scapegoating of Desmond Doss is depicted to arise from their own insecurities. This is made prominent through Girard's observed phenomenon of "undifferentiation" (Girard, 1972), which characterizes a dissolution of difference between the soldiers and the scapegoat. As the soldiers see a reflection of themselves in the scapegoat figure, they come to the realisation that their scapegoating was immoral, and that the traits they despised in the scapegoat figure were merely parts of themselves they wished to downplay.

At first glance, it is apparent that Desmond Doss is completely different from the soldiers, and it is justified that he is being scapegoated for it. The soldiers see his unwillingness to

wield a weapon as “cowardice”, “thinking you’re better than us”. They view his pacifist beliefs as a form of escape from the inherently violent nature of war, and by distinguishing themselves from him, they are conversely able to reject and suppress this timidity. They grow to favour a heavier use of violence, pulling further away from this perceived image of weakness linked directly with Desmond Doss’ pacifism, and thus assert their control over the scapegoating mechanism.



Figure 5. After being attacked by his fellow soldiers, Desmond Doss is coerced into leaving the military for his own safety

Yet, the morality of their scapegoating comes into question in closer interaction with Desmond Doss. In one scene, Desmond Doss is attacked by the soldiers after implicating them into having to go through additional military training. Severely bruised, his military superiors sympathise for him, giving him the option to leave the military and identify the attackers. However, he rejects this offer and says “I can’t”, leaving the soldiers dumbfounded by his decision. His rejection of authorial advocacy through his superior’s help, which is a characteristic common in other scapegoat narratives suggests a sense of independence and strength to stand up for himself. This action dispels his image of weakness and inability to handle adversities, proving himself to be just as resilient, if not more than his fellow soldiers. The soldiers realise that Desmond Doss is just like them; a soldier pushing himself to be brave and tough. Yet unlike them, he achieves his ideals without the means of violence, while the soldiers instead counted on violence and the safety of each other to collectively oppress someone. Their shocked expressions reinforce the guilt brought about by this realisation. They are not only forced to question the essentiality of violent force as a virtue in the army, but also confront their own insecurities that were previously displaced unto the scapegoat.



Figure 6. Smitty confides with Desmond Doss, sharing his traumatic experiences from his childhood

In another significant scene during the war, Desmond Doss and his biggest rival Smitty are sitting together in the battlefield, waiting out the night. The scene is framed such that Desmond Doss and Smitty are both at the center of the screen, highlighting the personal intimacy of the moment and presenting them as equals, both muddy and wounded after battle. In a heartfelt confession, both reveal their backstories are nearly identical, both laden with familial abuse and instability. Smitty's release of emotion completely contradicts his usual apathetic demeanour, allowing us to perceive this as a form of release from an artificial pretence, choosing to instead identify with the scapegoat and come to terms with his uncomfortable past. It is made clear that his scapegoating served as a method of masking his insecurities, attacking someone who simply seemed to have a more pleasant life than him. Yet even after the confession, Smitty still exhibits traits of wanting to distance himself away from the scapegoat, even trying to prove his life as the sadder "sob story", seen in the phrase "at least you knew him [your father]...mine could have been any one". This elucidates the complexities of Smitty's character, suggesting his existent desire to continue scapegoating, to conceal his past and have someone to blame for his plight. Finally, in the scenes prior to his death, Smitty can be seen crying out to Desmond Doss, "I'm scared, I'm scared". As Smitty bleeds out to death, his desperate cry reveals the human weakness all soldiers share, which is the fragility of life in war. Reducing the film's initial antagonist to such a pitiful state allows us to sympathise for him, as his scapegoating is revealed to be almost a necessity to overcome his insecurities, something that he only gives up at the verge of death.

The concept of undifferentiation can also be seen in the dynamic between Desmond Doss and his abusive father, who scapegoated Desmond Doss for injuring his brother and repeatedly tortured him since he was young. The two characters heavily mirror each other; Desmond Doss is a hopeful man eager to serve in the military, while his father is a despondent war veteran. The father can see his former self in his son, such as upon hearing that he is entering the military, in which he cries out “like the damn fools we were!”. His lust for power and violence through the abuse of his son does not just stem from his traumatic experiences, but rather shows a desire for retribution coalescing out of his fear and regret of what war has made of him. Being powerless against the military enterprise, he is forced to wrestle with his insecurities, and hence counts on the scapegoating mechanism to resolve this.



Figure 7. Desmond Doss' father hesitantly appears at court to support his son, standing up for his son's right to continue serving in the military

The source of such trouble is clear; war has harmed Desmond Doss' entire family, and it is presented as a powerful, inevitable force they cannot escape from. In another scene, Desmond Doss is being put on trial for breaching his officers' instructions to wield a weapon. The judicial system, in particular, reflects an overwhelming violence ranged against him, and of the hopelessness of resistance or outcry (Humbert, 2012). The court serves to legitimise violence despite its irrationality; contextually, the factor behind the trial was merely a military officers' mild annoyance, emphasizing the unfairness of Desmond Doss' denouncement, with him being a mere pawn of the military elites. In the scene, the father appears at the last moment to support his son in court, effectively mirroring his son; both men are donning their war uniform, their eyes constantly darting around from nervousness and fear. Albeit with much difficulty, the father succeeds in protecting his son from criminal punishment, allowing him to continue serving in the military, reflecting a form of agency by standing up against the unjust military system. However, viewers end up wondering: What is the cost of this action?

Viewers cannot help but question its ramifications, as it only brings their family further into the suffering of war. Through undifferentiation, the father only reflects the future lives of a soldier Desmond Doss wants to become; one who will be forgotten and miserable after their service. The father's final fleeting glance at Desmond Doss reinforces this idea; his dejection that nothing he can do can save his son, who is yet another victim of war and its infinitudes of persecution and violence.

4.2.2 Scapegoating as a method of unification

Scapegoating is also portrayed to serve as a way of unifying the soldiers to continue fighting in war. This is made visible through the soldiers' projection of Desmond Doss as the "mythical scapegoat", a literal embodiment of a god. This, in extension, highlights the vulnerability of the soldiers, who require such a figure to mask their guilt of scapegoating an innocent victim, and embolden them to continue risking their lives in war.



Figure 8. Colonel Stelzer firmly disagrees with Desmond Doss clinging onto his religious beliefs in war

In this scene, Desmond Doss' military superior refers to war, saying "this is Satan himself we're fighting." The mythical figure of Satan aligns with Girard's definition of religious scapegoats; Satan is the root of all evil, a figure that we automatically associate with tragedies however indirect the connection between the two may be. Satan is the arbitrary victim, an unconscious and unaware choice to displace blame unto with no fear of reprisal. (Barge, 2001) We see how the utilisation of such a scapegoat figure by the superior, and therefore also representing the rest of the military, produces a sense of certainty and commitment in the

righteousness of the soldiers' purpose, leaving no room for moral judgment or reasoning, and thus masking feelings of guilt and doubt in the process.



Figure 9. Desmond Doss confides to Smitty on his experience nearly killing his father

Desmond Doss bears similar characteristics to such a “mythical scapegoat”, represented by several aspects of the film. At first glance, the emphasis on his Christian morals places him on a higher plane of morality than the others, which Girard points out to heavily model after the mythical scapegoat Jesus. However, we see a change in Figure 9, where Desmond reveals that he once came close to shooting his father, saying that “in my heart, I did”. The sentiment of killing no longer cloaks him in an absolute presence of innocence, demonstrating that he at times resorts to violence like everyone else, portraying him in a morally ambiguous light. The significance of this scene lies in it directly opposing previous portrayals of Desmond Doss’ virtue to an exaggerated extent of holiness, showing that he is still human and prone to making mistakes. Through the incongruity demonstrated in the scenes, we can see that the construction of divinity in Desmond Doss is not fully autonomous; instead it is done by the soldiers to construct a beacon of hope to continue fighting in the war, supporting our notion on the soldiers’ reliance on a scapegoat to mask their vulnerability.



Figure 10(left). Moments after Desmond Doss saved 75 injured soldiers from certain death on Hacksaw Ridge

Figure 11(right). Soldiers waiting for Desmond Doss to pray before the final battle

This idea is further reinforced in the final few scenes of the film, after Desmond Doss' miraculous rescue mission from the raging warfield. In the scene, we see how one constant between the scenes is Desmond Doss positioned in a far-off corner, reading his Bible alone, portraying him as separate from the military unit. We sympathise with Desmond Doss in Figure 10, as he is concealed within the mounds of dirt in the scene, whereas in Figure 11, Desmond Doss has all eyes of the soldiers on him, elevating his stature compared to the homogenous mass of soldiers. The scene in Figure 11 also includes absolute silence as the men all intently focus on Desmond Doss. The static movement of Desmond Doss, appearing to be brooding over his Bible in deep thought, contrasted against the soldiers staring at him before their military assault can be compared to that of an inanimate totem, cast away when not in need and only regarded during a life-and-death scenario. The appearance of the Bible further suggests a form of "religious awe", a fervent belief that Desmond Doss is a mystical figure to help the soldiers. This is reinforced by the absolute silence of the soldiers, indicating subtle cognizance and subservience of the scapegoat, as if to not offend any higher religious powers at work. It can thus be seen how the soldiers' desperate scapegoating serves as a method of emboldening themselves to continue fighting in the war.



Figure 12. Severely injured, Desmond Doss is lowered from the battlefield by the soldiers

In the ending scene of the film, Desmond is abruptly injured by a stray grenade, and is placed on a stretcher to reach medical help. In his incapacitated state, he even mutters weakly for the soldiers to bring him his Bible, flipping the dynamics where the soldiers' "saving grace" is now the one needing assistance. Furthermore, the physical lowering of Desmond Doss superimposed against the soldiers standing in the distance connotes a lowering of his stature. The jarring effect produced by this scene thus highlights the mortality of the soldiers, reminding us of this vulnerability all of them face.

However, it is worth noting the positive reconciliation brought by this final scene. The soldiers become aware that Desmond Doss is not the godlike, immortal figure they sought out for solace, but nonetheless risk their lives to bring Desmond Doss his Bible. In this heartfelt scene as they send Desmond Doss off, one soldier even says "you're done in Hacksaw", marking a sense of redemption for both the scapegoat and the soldiers, who have risked their lives to send Desmond Doss off. As the war still rages on in the scene, a soothing melody is now played over the carnage. The soldiers have achieved a state of mutual forgiveness and understanding, overcoming the need for a scapegoat as they finally come to terms with their immoral scapegoating. They recognise that all of them are vulnerable humans, and that the solution lies in their forgiveness and understanding of one another, exactly what Girard fervently preaches as the Christian revelation, allowing the community as a whole to undermine the scapegoating mechanism that has constantly plagued them.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The narrative of *Hacksaw Ridge* effectively captures the elements of soldiers' lived experiences. By taking an unconventional approach and regarding Desmond Doss as the scapegoat, we can see how even the most primitive patterns of scapegoating (Girard, 1972) emerge. The soldiers' desperation for a scapegoat figure to displace their insecurities, as well as active deification of the scapegoat figure to provide them with a false sense of security elucidates the fears they all share in a life-or-death situation. The soldiers' subtle acceptance of their vulnerabilities in the final scenes of the film also remind us that they are humans capable of forgiveness and love. The soldiers are also humanised in their actions which overcome the ambiguous nature of war, developing complex moral stances in a context where

expectations of morality and righteousness are completely subverted. Therefore, it can be concluded that *Hacksaw Ridge* makes a statement on current trends in war film, to recognise that these elements of a soldier is not something that should be disposed of; it truly allows us to marvel at their brave feats, allowing war film to resonate with the viewer more than any visceral imagery could do.

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