



John Sommer/photo



Alison Walker/photo

The Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet that once was located at Guelph Street and Maple Avenue in Georgetown is now the site of Meldrum Orthodontics. The photo of KFC was taken in 1979.

OPINION

'THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD' - PETER JACKSON'S MASTERPIECE

FIRST WORLD WAR FOOTAGE BROUGHT TO LIFE, WRITES TED BROWN



TED BROWN Column

For Christmas, my grandchildren, Oliver and Atlee, gave The Sidekick and I tickets to attend a screening of Peter Jackson's First World War documentary, They Shall Not Grow Old.

The tickets were pre-sold with only two screening dates in Canada - Dec. 17 and 27.

I'd read how Peter Jackson had taken 100-year-old film footage and through the use of cutting edge technology, created an in-

credibly realistic documentary of The Great War, from 1914 to 1918. I was excited to see it.

Jackson is best known as the director, writer and producer of The Lord of the Rings trilogy and The Hobbit trilogy, adapted from the novels by J.R.R. Tolkien.

And he used similar cutting-edge technology employed in the Tolkien series' to produce this film.

It is simply beyond words.

The film opens with Jackson introducing the project, inviting theatregoers to stay behind after the credits run, as he had another short film explaining the technical tools used to create it.

The film opens days before the outbreak of The Great War, and the narration in the background is taken from actual veterans

of the Great War, who had been interviewed in the 1960s through a project at the BBC.

The film walks us through the declaration of war, the crowds of men lining up to enlist, and various scenes of basic training and the gruelling daily marches through the countryside.

One could see the transformation as thousands of young, undisciplined recruits evolved into a fighting machine. They were young, cocky and eager to fight.

But as the film advanced, the mood started to change. The strain of the battles showed and the faces became longer and more haggard, as the bodies piled up in the craters in No Man's Land.

The film footage of the artillery was amazing, with shells and shrapnel

flying through the air.

I was certain this couldn't be actual footage - it was simply too "good" from a technical, photographic point of view.

It was colourized - nothing new these days - but the jerky, shaky film images were gone. It rivalled modern war coverage of today.

We remained behind for Sir Peter Jackson's description of the production and the technology employed.

He told how the crew reviewed over 600 hours of interviews with over 200 soldiers and viewed countless hours of original film footage.

After selecting the actual footage they'd use, the technology was brought in to play.

Jackson utilized software that converts the speed of the film from the original 14 to 15 frames per second to the present-day

standard of 24. The software reads the frame, then creates the missing frames in between, optimizing it to run smoothly like present film. They also colourized it a frame at a time to get the colours right.

Even the occasional red poppy growing in the grass was colourized.

In his quest for perfection, Jackson spent a great deal of time in Europe, photographing various battlefields where the campaigns had been fought. Some locations had hardly changed at all.

It was at one location where Jackson's narration hit me with full impact.

Flipping between the colourized footage of the First World War soldiers waiting for the order to go over the top, to present day at the same location, Jackson made an incredibly poignant comment.

"What you're seeing here is the last 30 minutes of these men's lives. They were wiped out when they attacked that day ..."

My grandfather was a veteran of the Great War.

We never talked about the war - I was only eight years old when he died.

But after watching Jackson's They Shall Not Grow Old, I can honestly say I have an overwhelmingly greater appreciation for what he did and endured - as well as his comrades whose bodies remain buried in the battlefields of Europe.

If you ever have an opportunity to see this film - grab it.

It is that good.

Ted Brown is a freelance journalist working for the IFP. You can contact him at tedbit@hotmail.com

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