

Breaker Morant

The barbarities of war are seldom committed by abnormal men. The tragedy of war is that these horrors are committed by normal men in abnormal situations.

Actor	Character
Edward Woodward.....	Lt. Harry "Breaker" Morant
Jack Thompson.....	Maj. J.F. Thomas (defense attorney)
John Waters.....	Cpt. Alfred Taylor
Bryan Brown.....	Lt. Peter Handcock
Rod Mullinar.....	Maj. Charles Bolton
Lewis FitzGerald.....	Lt. George Witton

Based on a true story of an Englishman, Harry Harbord Morant (1864-1902), who falsely claimed descent from an aristocratic family and was forced to flee England to escape debts and being discharged from Royal Naval College. He left England in 1883 to start new life in Australia and made a name for himself as a "breaker" of horses and as a poet for the nationalist magazine *The Bulletin*. He volunteered to fight in South Africa and joins other skilled Australian horseman in South Australian Mounted Rifles in January 1900.

Set at the time of the Boer War (1899-1902). Boers were Dutch settlers who went to South Africa in 16th century and who refused to submit to British imperial control. They sought to establish an independent Boer Republic. British and colonial troops (including Australian volunteers) were sent to crush the rebellion. The Boers did not have a regular army but used armed farmers who fought in an "irregular" i.e. "guerrilla" manner. Like the Americans in Vietnam 65 years later, the British often could not tell the difference between combatant and non-combatant (no uniform, part-time fighters). Again like the Americans in Vietnam, the British attempted to separate the civilian Boers from the fighters by herding civilians into "concentration camps"

Questions:

1. What are the reasons that Morant, Handcock and Whitton give for them enlisting to fight?
2. The film raises the question about how one fights a guerrilla war. How do the British forces choose to fight this type of war? What happens to the practice of this strategy when the German missionary is killed?
3. What was Morant's job as a leader of the Bushveldt Carbineers? In what ways was he effective at this position?
4. What is rule 303? What was its purpose for Morant and his men?
5. The story deals with the duties and responsibilities of the lower officers and men to carry out immoral or questionable orders. How does the court martial deal with this problem?
6. What did the Australians claim was Lord Kitchener's order about the Boers wearing British khaki? Why was this order denied?
7. What is a show trial? How could this trial be labeled as a "show trial"?
8. Should atrocities that are committed by civilised men who are caught in an abnormal (uncivilised) situation be judged by normal civilian laws and moral codes?