

## WRITTEN REASON FOR DECISION SECTION 12

TITLE OF PUBLICATION: Saving Private Ryan

OFLC REF:9801078

### HEADNOTE

**Decision:**

The Classification Office has classified this publication as:

**Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years.**

**Display Conditions:**

Nil.

**Descriptive Note:**

Depicts graphic and realistic war scenes.

### DECISION

**Submission Procedure:**

The Labelling Body submitted this 35mm film to the Office of Film and Literature Classification (the Classification Office) under s12(1) of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (the FVPC Act) for classification.

Under s23(1) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office is required to examine and classify the film.

Under s23(2) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office must determine whether the film is to be classified as unrestricted, objectionable, or objectionable except in certain circumstances.

## **Description of the Publication:**

The film entitled *Saving Private Ryan* has a total running time of 170 min 47 sec.

The feature takes the form of an extended flashback by an old man visiting a military cemetery. The flashback begins with the US forces landing at Omaha Beach on “D-Day” in June 1944. The camera follows Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks, as he and his troops advance up the beach and into enemy battlements. The scene, which lasts for approximately 25 minutes, is very graphic and realistic in terms of its portrayal of the horrors of war, particularly the resulting injuries and fatalities.

In the aftermath of the landing Captain Miller receives orders to locate and bring back a Private Ryan. Ryan’s three brothers have all been killed in the war and military officials have decided that his mother should be spared the death of her fourth son. A group of approximately eight men, led by Captain Miller head into the French countryside in search of Ryan. After a series of incidents in which a couple of Miller’s men are killed, the unit finally locates Ryan who is protecting a strategically important bridge. Ryan refuses to leave his fellow soldiers, saying that he does not want to desert the only “brothers” he has left.

Captain Miller decides that the only way to accomplish his mission is to help Ryan’s unit protect the bridge. An extended battle scene follows as the allied soldiers attempt to stave off advancing German troops. Most of Miller’s men are killed in the process, with the Captain eventually succumbing to an enemy bullet. As the Captain is dying allied aeroplanes fly overhead and reinforcements arrive. Before he dies Miller turns to Ryan and says “earn this”, referring to the fact that men have died to save him. The feature ends with the old man at the military cemetery. It is apparent that the man is Ryan. Ryan, who is with his wife and family, says that he hopes he has “earned it” and that he has tried to be a good man.

## **The meaning of “objectionable”:**

Section 3(1) of the FVPC Act sets out the meaning of the word “objectionable”. The section states that a publication is objectionable if it:

*...describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.*

In classifying this film the main question is whether it deals with matters of violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.

### *Matters of violence*

Violence primarily takes the form of the infliction of serious physical harm and is discussed below under s3(3)(a)(i).

## **Certain publications are deemed to be objectionable:**

Pursuant to s3(2) of the FVPC Act, a publication is deemed to be objectionable if it promotes or supports, or tends to promote or support, certain activities listed in that subsection. None of the activities listed in s3(2) of the FVPC Act are promoted or supported in any way by *Saving Private Ryan*.

### **Matters to be given particular weight:**

Section 3(3) of the FVPC Act deals with the matters which the Classification Office must give particular weight to in determining whether or not a publication (other than a publication deemed to be objectionable under s3(2)) is objectionable, or should be given a classification other than objectionable.

The Classification Office has considered all the matters in s3(3). The only matters that it considers relevant to *Saving Private Ryan* are those set out in s3(3)(a)(i), namely:

*...the extent and degree to which, and the manner in which, the publication describes, depicts or otherwise deals with acts of torture, the infliction of serious physical harm, or acts of significant cruelty.*

The film presents very strong depictions of the infliction of serious physical harm. Such presentations are lengthy, frequent, and of a very graphic nature.

The infliction of serious physical harm takes the form of men being injured or killed in the course of World War II. The resulting injuries are realistic and are focused on and presented in great detail. That such harm occurs within the context of a realistic and emotive plot further strengthens the impact of the violence.

Of greatest impact is the opening scene of the US forces landing at Omaha Beach on D-Day. American troops are followed as they advance up the beach and into enemy battlements. The horrors of war are presented in a very graphic and realistic manner as the men are massacred by enemy fire. Everywhere men are depicted dead or dying. The injuries are horrific. Particularly memorable are images of a man holding onto his arm which has been blown off, a man who is still alive lying on the ground with his entrails spilling out, and a man dragging an injured man up the beach and then turning to see that the man's legs have been blown off. Images such as these are unrelenting and occur continuously throughout the 25 minute scene.

Further horrific scenes of war are repeated at regular intervals throughout the feature. These subsequent scenes are particularly impactful as they involve characters that the viewer has come to know. One character is shot as he holds a young girl he is trying to protect. Another male dies as the unit mounts an attack on a radar site. The dying man is presented lying on the ground. His face is white and he is bleeding heavily. The rest of the unit try to help him, putting their bare hands over his wound and attempting to mop away the blood. When the man asks for morphine they give him repeated shots of the drug knowing that he is dying and it will ease his pain. Scenes such as this present the emotional and heart wrenching side of war.

The feature ends with a battle scene similar in length to that of the opening scene. The action is fast paced and the injuries and fatalities are again horrific, although not on the same

immense scale as that of the opening scene. The presentations of violence are more structured, with the camera following individual characters as they engage in close combat with the enemy. Particularly graphic is a scene in which a German and American soldier engage in hand to hand combat. The scene is very tense with the German soldier eventually sinking a knife slowly into the other man's chest, killing him.

Acts of significant cruelty are also presented within the context of scenes of war. Such presentations are at times unable to be separated from the scenes of war within which they occur. Particularly impactful in this context are presentations of soldiers surrendering and subsequently being killed, usually by being shot in the head at close range.

**Additional matters to be considered:**

Under s3(4) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office must also consider the following additional matters:

*The dominant effect of the publication as a whole:*

The dominant effect of the publication is of a presentation of highly graphic and realistic war scenes set within the context of a relatively straight forward storyline. Extended sequences of violence are presented throughout the feature, with the strongest scenes at the beginning and end of the film. Although the violence is at times unrelenting, it does not present as gratuitous in nature.

*The impact of the medium in which the publication is presented:*

The publication, being a 35mm film, will be viewed on a large screen and therefore has a high visual impact. Digital sound adds to the impact of the images.

*The character of the publication, including any merit, value, or importance that the publication has in relation to literary, artistic, social, cultural, educational, scientific, or other matters:*

The film has significant social and educational merit in that it provides a frank and horrifying look into the harsh and brutal reality of war. Scenes of the scale and degree of the bloodshed, and presentations of the effects of battle on individual soldiers, are particularly strong. Such presentations are thought-provoking and are considered likely to engender discussion and debate amongst viewers. The way in which the film presents war is quite different to traditional presentations which have had a tendency to glamorise and glorify the experience.

The film also has technical and artistic merit. It is directed by Steven Spielberg, who uses various techniques to create a film that is high in its visual and aural impact. Camera work, special effects, make-up, stunts, and striking sets and locations all contribute towards the highly moving nature of the feature.

*The persons, classes of persons, or age groups of the persons to whom the publication is intended or is likely to be made available:*

Given the extent and degree of violence, the film is likely to be intended for older teenagers and adults.

*The purpose for which the publication is intended to be used:*

The film is likely to be used for the purposes of entertainment and education.

### **Conclusion:**

The film entitled *Saving Private Ryan* is classified as objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years. This classification is due to the extent and degree of graphic and realistic war scenes.

The feature is a war film set within the context of the arrival and initial slaughter of American troops at Omaha Beach on D-Day. It follows a Captain Miller as he lands and then goes on a mission to locate and return a soldier by the name of Private Ryan. Graphic and realistic war scenes feature throughout the plot, with the strongest and most extended scenes at the beginning and end of the film. The film presents very strong depictions of the infliction of serious physical harm in the form of men being injured or killed in battle. Although the resulting injuries are realistic and are focused on and presented in great detail, the violence does not present as gratuitous in nature.

The Classification Office believes that the film has significant social and educational merit and should therefore be available to older teenagers as well as adults. The film provides a frank and horrifying look into the harsh and brutal reality of war which is quite different from the glorified and sanitised manner in which war has traditionally tended to be portrayed. Such a presentation is thought-provoking and is considered likely to engender discussion and debate amongst viewers.

In view of the extent and degree of the violence, but bearing in mind the social and educational merit associated with this film, the Classification Office finds that the availability of the film is likely to be injurious to the public good unless its viewing is restricted to a mature audience.

The Classification Office classifies *Saving Private Ryan* as:

**Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years.**

### **Display Conditions:**

Where the Classification Office classifies any publication as a restricted publication, it is required under s27(1) of the FVPC Act to consider whether or not conditions in respect of the public display of the particular publication should be imposed.

In considering the issue of public display, the Classification Office must have regard to the matters set out in s27(2) of the FVPC Act, namely:

- (a) *The reasons for classifying the publication as a restricted publication;*
- (b) *The terms of the classification given to the publication; and*
- (c) *The likelihood that the public display of the publication, if not subject to conditions, or as the case may be, any particular condition, would cause offence to reasonable members of the public.*

The film has been classified as restricted to persons 16 years of age and over as a result of its violent content. The title of the publication, *Saving Private Ryan*, is innocuous in nature. It is not thought that reasonable members of the public would be offended by the title if it were to be displayed in a public place. Therefore no display conditions

***Written reason for decision is not required for section 12 submissions. It is the policy of the Classification Office to provide written reasons for section 12 submissions.***