

Bastion Point: A Cold Hard Stare

A review by Rowley Habib of the Mita, Pohlmann, Narby Productions documentary film: "BASTION POINT. DAY 507" screened on Television One's "Contact" programme.

Once when I was up at Bastion Point, during one of those many false alarms about the place being raided by the police, someone had pointed out a group of people and said they were a German film company who'd been living on the Point for some time and were making a documentary film about the place. This is why I thought this film would be a general coverage of the long occupation there.

Instead what unfolded before me, for at least three quarters of the 30 minute film duration was a detailed documentation of that final eventful day of May 25, 1978 when the Government forces moved in and arrested 222 people on the site and razed the buildings. To say the least, it was a very disturbing spectacle.

This is a brave film in every aspect. Fast moving and no nonsense. Tight, factual, unemotional, yet sympathetic to the subject. And honest: almost brutally honest. The editing is nothing less than brilliant. To my mind, it is up there with the very best of documentary films.

The tone and pace is set from the opening shots: an aerial still of the Point taken from somewhere over the Waitemata Harbour. Merata Mita's narration, sympathetic but unemotional, briefs the viewer of the history of the place leading up to why the protesters were making their stand there.

NO NONSENSE

Her final words are: "This is a record of that final day". You know immediately it is going to be a no nonsense film. And then it takes you straight into the action. Joe Hawke is making his final statement and plea to his people and the nation.

Then the Commissioner of Crown Lands is handing Joe, and the other leaders of the Orakei Action Committee, writs warning them they are trespassing and therefore breaking the law. We see Joe Hawke and the other leaders of the protest making a final approach to the elders of Ngati Whatua in a last ditch attempt to avert a confrontation. But to no avail.



Photo by The Listener

And then we are looking at a scene that could have been taken in any one of a dozen countries where civil war has broken out and the Militia has taken over. A seemingly endless convoy of army vehicles slowly but relentlessly approaches along a public thoroughfare.

That it is the film makers' belief that these are the only film footage of this event, seems to me to indicate some kind of indictment in itself. It is not a pretty sight.

POLICE CLOSE IN

The vehicles stop and the uniformed police, in stark white helmets, climb out in their scores. And then we are witness to what I at least feel is one of the most brilliant and effective editing of any documentary film I have been fortunate enough to see as the film cuts back and forth between police and protesters.

There are long shots of the police advancing in closed rank; close-ups of the faces of the protesters, looking anxious but curious; close-ups of the

faces of the police — the set blank almost sullen looks, staring straight ahead of them.

There is a long shot of the police gradually closing in on the buildings and protesters surrounding them and a close-up of the kuia rising to her feet and tentatively reaching out and holding to the verandah post of the meeting house next to her. One is not certain whether she is holding to it for comfort or whether she is trying to protect it. Or both. There are many cut-backs to this kuia — a kaumatua of the tribe — throughout this period. It is a brilliant ploy of the film makers, for in her face an entire story, in itself unfolds.

Then begins a series of the brilliant use of stills: black and white photographs that became so familiar to millions of readers of newspapers for days to come after the incident. These are effectively inter-cut with live footage of the actual scenes; qualifying that it had actually happened, that it was no myth concocted up by sensation hungry news media.