

THE WAR FILM: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
OR SIMPLE ENTERTAINMENT

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ABSTRACT

THE WAR FILM: HISTORICAL PERSEPCTIVE OR SIMPLE ENTERTAINMENT,
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This thesis studies the depiction of military life and actions in war movies. The public's perception of the military is shaped through a variety of means, one of which is the feature film showing at the local theater. The increase in population and the decrease in the size of the military have greatly enlarged the percent of the population that are not associated with a serviceperson or a veteran of one of the services. Their only means of obtaining information on the status and professionalism of the military is through what they are fed via the media. The movies produced by filmmakers within the United States affect the recruiting and public perception of the military through their portrayal of events, missions, and personnel. It is important for the Department of Defense and those serving to understand the significance that these films can have on the audience. Films are studied for historical accuracy, the making of the film to include Department of Defense assistance and input, and the portrayal of the soldiers, both officers and enlisted. This thesis concludes that war movies follow historical accuracy as closely as possible within resource constraints as long as the historical content is a good story.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years from now, when you are sitting around your fireplace with your grandson on your knee and he asks you what you did in the great World War II, you won't have to say, "Well, I shoveled shit in Louisiana."¹

General George S. Patton

War is the ultimate test. War challenges the body and soul, both mentally and physically. War intrigues people from all walks of life. The question of why nations start wars is a lingering one with many hypotheses but no finite answers. Still, wars are fascinating and historians study wars and continue to ponder the question of why. Why Pickett's charge? Why the charge of the light brigade? What could that commander have been thinking when he ordered that attack? Armchair generals re-fight wars through board and computer games. They demonstrate their tactical acumen when they briefly change history with the outcome they desired or justified to themselves, just to answer the rhetorical question of why. The fascination of war engulfs many, intrigues some, baffles most, and disgusts plenty. It has shaped the borders of the modern world and bewitched scholars and common people alike. War brings out the best and the worst in mankind through its evocation of pure good and evil and genuine purity. It is both an art and a science, and it is studied by and taught to every generation. War has developed and uncovered great leaders. Presidents, ambassadors, heroes, and criminals alike have served in this nation's armed forces during time of peace and conflict. War tries a nation's national will and mobilizes its population. It provides a national identity and

sense of patriotism. Because of this fascination, the genre of war movies has generally been a consistent draw at the box office.

The war movie attempts to allow the audience to fight with the soldier on the front line and trudge through the mud, while never putting down its buttery popcorn. It allows the viewer to feel the butterflies of combat, the rush of the assault, and the heat of the explosion, all while sitting comfortably in his seat. War movies have been around since the motion picture was invented. It is only natural that something as fascinating as war, which captures the attention of an entire world, should have been translated onto the silver screen. It is arguable that some of the greatest movies of all time are war movies and that many of the greatest actors have starred in war movies.

The primary thesis question is: Do war movies reflect the true nature of military life and actions? War movies provide a source of entertainment for the public, but they also provide a political forum for filmmakers, as well as a possible recruiting tool for the services. Do movies skew historical accuracy during production to comply with public prowar or antiwar sentiment in order to sell tickets, or do filmmakers attempt to portray history as it was, regardless of public appeal? This thesis addresses these questions and others in an attempt to provide some insight into the filmmaking world.

In order to provide a framework for the study, this thesis answers several secondary questions: How did the filmmaker's background affect the final products? What role, if any, did the Department of Defense play in the production of the film? How historically accurate is the film regarding missions, uniforms, and equipment? How

is the soldier portrayed? A study of the secondary questions provides insight into the original question of historical accuracy.

Importance

The purpose of this thesis is to provide the reader with an understanding of how war movies are produced and what, if any, affect their popularity has on the military. Ron Kovic, the author of *Born on the Fourth of July*, joined the Marines because John Wayne assaulted Iwo Jima. *Top Gun* caused a rush on Air Force recruiting stations because many potential recruits did not differentiate between the Navy and the Air Force.² Perception is often accepted as reality.

Many Americans know the military only through television and the movies. The fact that many Americans have not served in the military, combined with the defense drawdown, has resulted a large percentage of the population not knowing a single military serviceperson, thereby requiring them to garner their opinions of the military from other sources. If the movies portray the military as evil, untrustworthy, and warmongering, then a large portion of the public likely will view the military in the same light. It is important for the military to understand what shapes public opinion and what effect that public opinion has on recruiting, retention, and even possibly public funding through defense spending. This study aims to demonstrate that the Hollywood war movie is one factor that not only assists in shaping public opinion about the military, but also can affect recruiting and retention in the services.

Scope

What is a war movie? For the purpose of this study, a war movie is defined as any film with military forces or armed conflict as its central theme. The armed conflict itself does not have to be the focal point of the movie. The theme of soldiers returning home from war and transitioning back to civilian life, as exemplified by *The Best Years Of Our Lives*, would fall under this definition of a war movie. Using this classification, there are hundreds of American movies that could be classified as war movies. In order to maintain a coherent analysis, the group of movies selected for analysis in this thesis was specifically tailored to answer the proposed thesis topic.

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. Chapter 2 is a literature review of relevant books and an overview of the movies selected. Chapter 3 is “The Making of the Movie.” This chapter examines the filmmakers and their reasons for making the movie. It also looks at Department of Defense (DOD) involvement and how its policy has changed over the past sixty years. Did the DOD accept or reject the script and did it provide any assistance to the director? Chapter 4 studies the historical accuracy of the film. Does the movie portray historically accurate missions and tactics? Or does the movie use a historical event or backdrop for a fictional movie? Chapter 5 studies the soldiers, their demeanor, and how they are portrayed. It also examines whether the uniforms and equipment in the film correspond to what was actually used at the time of the event being depicted. Chapter 6, the conclusion, shows the relevance, or lack thereof, of the findings in the preceding three chapters.

Background

The DOD has known since the first movie producer asked for technical assistance that films assist in shaping public opinion, thereby affecting recruiting. DOD understands the importance of “information warfare” and maintains a public affairs office in Los Angeles to provide acceptable assistance.³ The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) is responsible to “provide DOD assistance to non-Government, entertainment-oriented motion picture, television, and video productions consistent with DOD instructions.”⁴ The Pentagon has allowed services to provide technical advisors to studios that produced scripts that the DOD accepted at “no cost to the taxpayer.” Unacceptable scripts did not receive service-specific technical advice or the DOD stamp of approval. To gain DOD approval, a film must reflect a reasonable and accurate portrayal of military personnel. It must not demonstrate as commonplace acts that discredit the service. If individuals in the service perform discrediting acts, these acts must not be tolerated by the military in the movie, and the people performing these acts must be punished. A violation of these simplified rules will result in no DOD approval.⁵

It has been argued that the movies made during the 1940s depicting victorious Americans against the evil empire of Germany were made by warmongers and propaganda experts. Many critics claimed the movies were made by the government in an effort to mobilize the United States against the Axis powers and that the movies were not factual.⁶ Is this type of activity still prevalent today? Or does each producer or studio executive produce a movie based on his own agenda, regardless of whether the DOD supports it? Perhaps the current public sentiment towards service members and the

government determines what type of war movie the studios develop. Or perhaps the movie influences public sentiment for or against the military. The issue of influence from Hollywood is just as important as the current CNN effect, where the daily news can increase or decrease the public's perception of a person's or organization's legitimacy in a five-minute sound bite.

Most filmmakers in the 1940s supported the United States (US) Armed Forces. Many of them got their start in filmmaking while serving in the Armed Forces with the public affairs department, or they joined the public affairs branch specifically to report on the war. Very few filmmakers challenged the wholesome look and noble actions of the military until the 1960s. The American populace envisioned their country as peace-loving and the military as brave warriors fighting evil empires to uphold democracy. Even those filmmakers whose sentiments were antiwar did not rail against the military in the movies, but rather attempted to dissuade military action by demonstrating the brutality of war. There were a few exceptions, but the majority of the films were proservice and held the serviceman in high esteem. The public also supported those in uniform and demonstrated publicly their support for the military.⁷

This all changed in the 1960s during the Vietnam War, when antiwar sentiment grew more pronounced across the nation. Most Americans viewed the Korean War as a war lost by politicians and not by the American fighting soldier. Vietnam, however, brought the horrors of war into the public's living rooms every night on television news casts. Once Vietnam became a media war, the euphoria of World War II faded and war movies were more likely to demonstrate military problems and the dehumanizing aspect

of war than tactics and missions. Hollywood did not mobilize public opinion as in World War II; television took over this role. World War II movies were scarce, although *Patton* (1970) was enormously successful. During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, there were very few movies made about World War II.⁸ Conversely, there were well over 100 hundred war movies made from 1939-1944⁹ and another twenty-four were made from 1945-1949, as infatuation with the war declined. The next decade brought forty-seven movies while during the 60s, only about thirty-nine films were produced.¹⁰

Vietnam became the prime target for filmmakers, as it provided them the opportunity to delve into the soldier psyche and pursue previously untouched or uncovered issues in war. It provided a freedom of expression that some filmmakers felt they had not been authorized previously. It was also fresh in the minds of the filmmakers and the audience. In addition, war movies provided the filmmaker with a conduit to show violence on the silver screen. Excessive violence and mayhem was under increasing attack by the public, but violence and bloodshed always seemed to sell well in war movies that disguised this mayhem in the form of patriotism and historic reality.¹¹

Movie Selection and Study Criteria

Movie selection criteria were based on a number of issues. First, due to time constraints, not all war movies ever made could possibly be reviewed for historical accuracy in the given time period. Second, not all movies are made for the same reasons. Some are based on historical facts while others are fiction and made purely for entertainment. For this reason, comedies were eliminated, as most clearly were not made to demonstrate any type of historical accuracy. Third, the scope was designed to study

filmmaking over time to gain a better understanding of the changes in Department of Defense involvement, filmmaker's military experience, and special effects over the course of several decades.

To accomplish these aims, the thesis was limited to World War II. Since there are still numerous films dealing with this war, the selection was further limited to the European Theater and to American movies focusing on American troops depicting soldier life and interaction in military operations. The movies would pivot around the invasion of Normandy, the largest amphibious operation ever, historically known by most Americans as D-Day or its military code name, Operation Overlord, which took place on 6 June 1944. It is this event around which the focus of this film selection centers. Then the field was narrowed again by selecting no more than two movies produced per decade. Collectively, these decisions provided the final movie selection and study parameters.

Based on the above mentioned criteria, the movies selected were: *The Story of G.I. Joe; Battleground; Attack!; D-Day, the Sixth of June; The Longest Day; Patton; A Bridge Too Far; The Big Red One; and Saving Private Ryan*. This selection provides two films each from the decades of the 40s, 50s, and 70s and one selection each from the 60s, 80s, and 90s, that is, at least one World War II movie produced in every decade. This selection covers the time the military returned as conquering heroes in the 40s to the protest era of the 60s and 70s, when soldiers were cursed and outcast in the media, to the 1990s, when World War II appeared to enjoy a renaissance in interest.

Chapter 3 investigates the background of the directors and influences on their direction and production of the film. The two sections of this chapter study filmmakers

and DOD involvement. First, did the filmmaker¹² have a military background and how did that contribute to his selection of the prowar or antiwar message that he is providing to the audience? Does his background influence his portrayal of the US soldier and the mission? Other questions answered in this portion attempt to ascertain the impact of outside influences on the filmmakers. What role, if any, did the Department of Defense play in the making of the film? Did DOD provide technical assistance and, if so, what kind? How do certain war movies reflect the attitude of society at the time of their production? Are movies influenced by the public perception of the military at the time of production, or does the movie affect the public's perception?

Each of the movies selected provides the European Theater of War as common ground to initiate an understanding of the conflict during that time period. This study determines the continuity of similarly situated war movies over the span of six decades and the changes associated with time. Continuity refers to the depiction of similar historic events in different movies and the variations of each portrayal. It also looks at changes in DOD policies and attitudes towards certain filmmakers or movie themes over the same time period. The thesis will also show how DOD policies toward filmmakers and assistance provided have changed since the 1940s.

Chapter 4 studies the film's historical accuracy. Missions and tactics are sometimes difficult to portray in movies. Given the vast number of movies available covering the various conflicts, this portion of the study focuses on movies that provide some portrayal of planning and execution from the strategic to the tactical level. Each movie selected bases its story on some semblance of a historical event, whether it is a

reproduction of the landings at Normandy or reference to the actions of specific units. This selection of movies is relevant to this chapter for the following reasons: their production covers the past six decades; they demonstrate some relevance to the strategy and tactics used; and they each touch on the invasion of Normandy, the continuing operations in Europe, or a specific unit in the war. This analysis will compare the actions replicated in the movie with details from the actual operation. Did the movie portray events as they happened? Or did the filmmaker use “poetic license” and add fictional details to the movie story, perhaps to sell more tickets or move the action along?

Chapter 5 looks at the portrayal of the United States Army soldier. The soldier is the backbone of the Army and the focal point of many movies. He is either the star character or he is cannon fodder for the enemy. He is either from a small town in Kentucky or a large city like New York. The filmmaker has a particular image for that soldier that he wants to present to the audience. The films selected are analyzed for their portrayal of the soldier with respect to his appearance, uniform, equipment, bearing and attitude. How does the portrayal of the US soldier change as a factor of “historical distancing,” that is, as the production date moves farther way from the actual conflict date? Did the filmmaker make every soldier a Hollywood superstar model or is there a mix of character types, both ragged and intelligent? What message is the filmmaker trying to send with the soldiers portrayed in the movie and their demeanor? Are the movies farther away from the conflict date more sentimental to the plight of the soldier or do they surface the dark side of war, to include murder and treason?

Limitations

There are some limitations that may restrict the success of this study. First, the availability of films was a determining factor in the final selection of movies to be analyzed. Second, the amount of movie background material available on the filmmakers was in some cases small. While more recent films have websites containing detailed information about all aspects of the film, there is not as much information available on the older films. The Office of Public Affairs for each service, based in Los Angeles, also provides information on DOD involvement in each movie. Third, limited time accounts for a limited set of movies. With the limited number of movies reviewed, the study is not as thorough as including more films would allow it to be.

¹*Patton*, 1970. 20th Century Fox, directed by Franklin Schaffner.

²Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 100. Thirty years after the release of *Sands of Iwo Jima*, Marine Corps recruiters still claimed to have an increase of volunteers every time the movie was shown on television. Although anecdotal information, there appears to be repeating evidence that movies do, in fact, assist in the image of the military.

³Philip M. Strub, Special Assistant for Audiovisual, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, interview by author, Pentagon, Washington D.C., 25 January 2001.

⁴Department of Defense Instruction, *DoD Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Motion Picture, Television, and Video Productions*, Number 5410.16, dated 26 January 1988.

⁵Philip M. Strub, Special Assistant for Audiovisual, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, interview by author, Pentagon, Washington D.C., 25 January 2001.

⁶Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997).

⁷Suid, 1-13.

⁸Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). The 1970s brought very few World War II based movies: (1970) *Patton*; *Catch-22*; *Kelly's Heroes*; *Tora! Tora! Tora!*; *Too Late the Hero*; and *Hornet's Nest*. (1971) *Raid on Rommel*. (1976) *Midway*. (1977) *A Bridge Too Far*; *MacArthur*. (1978) *Force Ten from Navarone*; *Brass Target*; and (1980) *The Big Red One*; *The Sea Wolves*; *The Final Countdown*.

⁹Fyne, 236.

¹⁰Basinger, 245-254. This is an estimate on those films labeled as war movies by Basinger. It omits comedies, documentaries, and foreign films.

¹¹Suid, 1-13.

¹²For the purpose of this study, filmmaker includes writers, directors, producers, studio heads, and actors. Any of which may have had a profound influence on the film production. Some films demonstrate that a single person had a great influence while in other films several people will be responsible for the eventual end product.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The real war will never get in the books.

Walt Whitman

Introduction

This chapter is designed to provide a review of the films selected, an overview of the soldier and his equipment during World War II, and reviews of relevant books pertinent to this study. It is not meant to be all-inclusive but general in nature; detailed criteria of specific events captured in the selected films are discussed in the appropriate chapters. The purpose of this overview is to provide a framework for analysis of uniforms, equipment and weaponry used in the selected movies.

The literature review has been divided into five sections that are pertinent to this study: a review of the films selected, which are the primary literature; a look at relevant books that study the making of combat or war films; the general characteristics and demographics of the soldier; identification and a brief description of historical uniforms and equipment worn by the United States Army in the European Theater during World War II; and identification and description of the primary weapons used. The soldier had greater flexibility in the wear of his uniform and gear during combat than what the military is accustomed to today.

The Films

*The Story of G.I. Joe*¹ is a film based on the writings of Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent Ernie Pyle. The film follows a group of men from Company C of the

18th Infantry Regiment as they fight across the desert of North Africa to the beaches of Sicily, and then through the hills of Southern Italy. These are average soldiers of World War II brought together by a war and held together by a common goal; to survive and return home. Pyle acts as a common thread holding together the continuity of the group of men. The story is a compilation of his newspaper columns during the war; it has no real plot and no real ending. The characters are fictitious but the events are actual experiences as documented by Pyle, who plays a small role in the movie as the heart of the film is on the common soldier and his habits and actions during battle and between battles. It focuses on the day-to-day lives of infantrymen in a combat zone. Combat scenes are seldom shown, as the focal point stays on the interaction among the men, their environment, and the daily happenings of a military unit: mail call, chow, patrols, drinking coffee, and smoking cigarettes. The film was not designed to be an action movie depicting great battle scenes, heroics, and dramatic firefights, but rather a tribute to the infantry soldier of World War II who was trying to survive. The story followed the guy that trudged through the mud, slept where and when he could, and looked forward to a smoke and a cup of coffee.² It is “cruel, factual, unaffected, genuine, and with a heart as big as Ernie’s. This was the story of G.I. Joe.”³ The film was nominated for four Oscars in 1945: Best Score, Best Song, Best Supporting Actor (Robert Mitchum), and Best Screenplay.

Manny Farber, film critic for *The New Republic* during this time, praised *G.I. Joe* for “showing more firmness about its feeling and concept than any Hollywood movie has

about anything in years.”⁴ James Agee, film critic for the Nation, agreed with Farber by praising its artistic integrity and adding that it took “an act of heroism to make this film.”⁵

*Battleground*⁶ begins in a camp “somewhere in France.” Members of second squad, third platoon, I Company, 101st Airborne Division are relaxing around camp and preparing for a pass to Paris the next day. The German offensive into the Ardennes changes the plans of the division and the men are thrust straight back into battle.

The scene shifts to the crossroads near Bastogne where the men are dug in. It is snowing; they eat cold k-rations; they have no information on where they are or what is happening around them; all they know is that they are supposed to defend their little area of the war. They are surrounded, bombarded daily with artillery and leaflets, and supplies are becoming dangerously low. The movie is about interaction between soldiers, their higher headquarters, and the elements more than about combat and fighting. It splices vintage newsreel footage from World War II into the combat scenes to provide real action that could not be recreated. The snow continues to fall for most of the movie; the men are suffering from sickness, wounds, and frostbite. The film displays cowardice, respect, and valor from members of the squad and attempts to demonstrate to the audience the life of a G.I. and his struggle during a desperate period.

Battleground chooses a replacement soldier who has just arrived as the conduit for molding a man into a fighting machine. He has no identity; the veterans do not want to learn his name; and he is shaken by the death of a replacement friend in a sister company where the chain of command did not even know his name. He fights, learns,

and becomes a wily veteran by the end. But this movie is more than a story of him; it is a story of the mud-slogging grunts that brought victory to the United States.

Although not popularly supported by the chiefs at MGM, *Battleground* became the big box-office champ in 1949 and is credited with bringing war films back to the theater after a four-year hiatus. The film was also nominated four six Academy Awards including Best Picture. It won two Oscars; Best Screenplay and Best Cinematography.⁷

*Attack!*⁸ is based on the stage play *Fragile Fox* by Norman Brooks. It was designed to show the conflict between members of the officer's corps in an otherwise nonconfrontational internal war as depicted by Hollywood. The members of Fox Company lack respect for their company commander, Captain Cooney, played by Eddie Albert, and the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Parker played by Lee Marvin, will not intercede because of ulterior motives. These two officers are members of the same National Guard unit from the small town of Riverview, which is the same as saying "anytown USA." Cooney's father is a powerful local judge who Parker needs on his side for his postwar political ambitions. In order to fulfill his desires, he must facilitate Cooney's acceptance as an infantry officer to appease the dreams of the judge and gain his support.

The film opens at the battle of Aachen when Cooney freezes and fails to provide support to a squad pinned down by German fire; the company loses a good lieutenant and a good squad leader, among others. Lieutenant Costa, played by Jack Palance, can barely control his temper at the thought of the incompetent commander leading them into battle again. Parker intervenes by indicating the unit is done fighting, leaving Cooney in

command, but the Germans counterattack and the Battle of the Bulge is underway. Morale in the company is dangerously low and there is no time for internal conflict.

Jeanine Basinger in her book, *The World War II Combat Film, Anatomy of a Genre*, argues that the new cynicism that takes place in this film is due to plot expansion. The same old style war movie cannot sell, so the director looks elsewhere to expand the plot.⁹ In the case of *Attack!* it is the father-son relationship and the commander-subordinate role of officers from the same National Guard unit. Cooney's father never loved him, so he joined the National Guard to make his father proud. He never wanted to go to combat and never desired to lead men. Due to his good fortune, Parker, a hometown buddy and prior assistant to his father, is his commander. Parker provides continuous protection and patronage to Cooney's command, until the situation unravels out of even his control.

*D-Day, The Sixth of June*¹⁰ is a romance story set during World War II and based on the novel *The Sixth of June* by Lionel Shapiro. The film illustrates how a combat setting in a familiar historical context can be used as a backdrop for a romantic film. It is relevant to this study because of the historical backdrop, the interaction and portrayal of officers, and the title as a ticket seller. It involves a married American officer named Captain Brad Parker (Robert Taylor) and his love affair with a British member of the American Red Cross, Valerie Russell (Dana Wynter). Although he is married and she is engaged to a British officer, John Wynter (Richard Todd), they fall in love while he is stationed in London. Wynter returns to London seriously wounded after fighting against Rommel in North Africa. Russell returns to her fiancée to care for him, although her

heart stays with Parker. Parker is shipped to North Africa and volunteers for an elite combined Allied force to land on Normandy prior to the main forces, just so he can return to England and see Miss Russell. As the story turns, the commanding officer of the elite force is relieved two days prior to the operation and the replacement commander is Wynter.

The film climaxes with a fictionalized assault of a Normandy Beach on D-day. The assault is a combined operation of British, American, and Canadian troops as members of a special unit, named Special Force Six, organized specifically for this mission. The objective of the mission is to destroy large guns that overlook the Atlantic and could prove catastrophic to the pending invasion force. The mission is quickly accomplished. Parker is wounded and on his way back to England while Wynter, also wounded, stays behind to wait for a later medical evacuation ship. While waiting, he tragically steps on a land mine.

D-Day the Sixth of June is clearly a film that falls into Doherty's category of films that used a name to conjure up images of battles or glory that would entice audiences to view the film, regardless of the subject matter.¹¹ *D-Day* is a romantic film culminating with a small beach assault in Los Angeles, not a spectacular event involving 100,000 men storming the beaches of Normandy as the name might lead one to believe.

*The Longest Day*¹² depicts the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944, which is the biggest amphibious assault in history. The film recreates this epic event--well known in history as simply "the longest day"--from four different perspectives: German, British, United States, and French. An international conglomerate of producers

brought together an international cast of actors to provide a vivid account of the actions and random events that led up to this historical invasion.

Beginning on the day prior to the invasion, events transpire in the German war rooms that take many of the key leaders away from Normandy at a critical time. Bad weather and an underestimation of Eisenhower's resolve to attack in less than ideal conditions provide many German leaders with a false sense of comfort on the night of the fifth of June. For example, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, German commander of the coastal defense force, takes leave for home to attend his wife's birthday while other German leaders attend war games in preparation for future operations.

Across the channel in England, 3,000,000 men, 11,000 planes, and 4,000 ships were preparing and waiting for the order to attack. The waiting was tense and each group engaged the agonizing time differently. The latest weather report by the Allies was interpreted, and Eisenhower gave the solemn attack order. The wheels are set in motion on both sides of the channel and "the longest day" has begun.¹³

*Patton*¹⁴ is a biography of General George S. Patton and his exploits during the Second World War. The film follows Patton (George C. Scott) from Operation Torch in North Africa through Sicily, France, and into Germany. It displays his flamboyance and sometimes tumultuous personality that endangered his command with some, but anchored his name in history as one of America's greatest generals. *Patton* displays the character, thoughts, and emotions of Patton and delves into his beliefs of reincarnation and love of military history and war. The interaction with General Omar Bradley as his

subordinate turned superior provides additional drama in displaying the differing styles of the two uniquely successful generals.

The film also exhibits the legend of Patton from the German point of view. German leaders built a dossier on Patton and believe that his ardent study of history made some of his actions predictable, such as invading Sicily after North Africa following the example of the Athenians. This perspective provides a separate plot to display the military genius of Patton while attempting to not present too much of a propaganda film by glorifying the heroic deeds of a World War II general. But the filmmakers also bestow too much credit on Patton from the German perspective as the leader who made the strategic decisions for the Allies' next attacks, negating the role of Eisenhower and the civilian leadership of Britain and the US.

Although released in 1970 during the height of the Vietnam War, when America was not infatuated with the military, *Patton* succeeded greatly. Not only was it the greatest box office grossing military movie ever produced up to that time,¹⁵ but it also was nominated for ten Academy Awards and won seven, including Best Picture and Best Actor (Scott), cementing the movie's place in history. It demonstrated that the American people's fascination with World War II and its battles, characters, and courage was far from over. The only question remaining after the film's great success; where did Patton stop and Scott begin?

*A Bridge Too Far*¹⁶ is an attempt to replicate the largest airborne operation in history, Operation Market Garden, from five different perspectives: the United States, British, Polish, German and Dutch underground. The filmmakers brought together an

international cast to portray key historical leaders and provide a vivid account of what happened. The vivid recreations of combat scenes do not utilize any archive newsreel footage.

The film begins with the briefing of British General Bernard Montgomery's plan to seize key bridges in Holland to facilitate the Allied advance into Germany, or in this case, Montgomery's race against Patton to advance into Germany. The Allied airborne units have seven days to prepare. During these seven days, several key events transpire that establish the conditions for the eventual failure of the plan. Allied leaders do not believe, or choose to ignore, Dutch underground intelligence reports on the composition of German defenses in the area and do not even believe their own reconnaissance photographs.

The similarities between *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Longest Day* are numerous. After witnessing the success of *The Longest Day*, it appears the filmmakers approached *A Bridge Too Far* by following the mold established by Darryl Zanuck, producer of the former film. They wanted to recreate an epic in the same style and sell their product with mega-stars, cameo appearances, and heroic deeds. The film adds little embellishment to the historical facts. For example, instead of the French underground, they have the Dutch underground. *The Longest Day* provided the views of five different units attacking five separate objectives. *A Bridge Too Far* involved the missions of the US Army's 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions; the British 1st Airborne Division with the Polish Airborne Brigade; the British XXX Corps and British higher headquarters. Both movies sought the input of the German defense commander and Germans at the point of attack. This film

includes the German defense from the eyes of Field Marshals Runstedt and Model. The major difference is that most filmgoers in the 1960s knew about the invasion of Normandy, or D-day, and the liberation of France, as this was a great victory and signaled the beginning of the liberation of Europe and the destruction of the Nazi war machine. Operation Market Garden, however, was not a success; therefore it was not nearly as well known as the invasion of Normandy. The filmmakers had to cope with a lesser-known historical event farther away from the actual time of occurrence.

*The Big Red One*¹⁷ is a movie about soldiers in combat and their struggle for survival. Written and directed by Samuel Fuller, who served in the 1st Infantry Division during World War II, the film uses a rifle squad as the conduit for the experiences of four soldiers and their squad leader. It follows their exploits from their first combat in North Africa and the Kasserine Pass to Sicily; then to the beaches of Normandy, and across France, Belgium, and Germany; and lastly into Czechoslovakia. The five main cast members never perish, but scores of replacements fall along the way.

The horrors of combat are demonstrated through various combat scenes involving soldiers and noncombatants. The squad leader, known as the sergeant (Lee Marvin), is a combat-hardened 1st Infantry Division veteran of World War I. His charge is to keep his young soldiers alive. One troop is a pig farmer with hemorrhoids; one is the squad sharpshooter who finds out that he has difficulty coping with combat; another is an Italian street kid that plays hot jazz on the saxophone; and the last soldier, who is also the narrator, is an aspiring writer from the Bronx.

Marvin's squad is the 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, I Company of the 3rd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment. They conduct an amphibious assault into Algiers in North Africa, fight through the Kasserine Pass, and storm Sicily. They rest for eight months in England before struggling ashore on Omaha Beach at Normandy. They push across France, into Belgium, then cross the Rhine into Germany before liberating a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia.

Fuller uses the narrator not only to tell their story, but also to emphasize the thoughts and emotions of the war environment. The narrator keeps the audience informed on decisions from the operational and strategic command levels. This provides a better understanding of the missions the soldiers and the division are executing.

*Saving Private Ryan*¹⁸ is set in World War II and the event is D-day, the Allied invasion of Normandy to begin the liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation. The invasion is seen through the eyes of men in the first assault wave at Omaha Beach in the largest casualty-producing section of the beach. His company devastated during the assault, Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks) handpicks a squad of soldiers to accompany him on a dangerous special mission. They must find Private James Ryan, whose three brothers were killed in combat, to provide him with a ticket home. The men question their orders and struggle with the question of why eight men are risking their lives to save one. The struggle is one of internal conflict, soldier interaction, and a morality play about what is right in war. Spielberg demonstrates the brutal realities of war in devastating, realistic combat scenes. *Saving Private Ryan* is an immediate war movie classic and destined to be one of the greatest films of all time. Tom Hanks probably said it best

when he indicated that this movie is a “current definitive document about a day of decision unlike any other, certainly in the history of the world.”¹⁹ Nominated for eleven Academy Awards, *Saving Private Ryan* won five including Best Director. *Saving Private Ryan* was also the top grossing motion picture of 1998.

The Books

Film critics have been around since the advent of the motion picture. Film reviews have been around since the advent of the critics. The two are not mutually exclusive and are intertwined by their desire to plant notions or interpretations in the minds of the moviegoer. These books are not film reviews, but they delve into the development and nature of the filmmaking. Each of these books is relevant to this study by providing a unique perspective of why films were made the way they were.

Hollywood is less about providing a window to the past and more about making money and reflecting the preoccupations of the beholder, according to Thomas Doherty in *Projections of War*. Doherty argues that, regardless of the intentions of the filmmaker, each individual moviegoer can provide his own interpretation of any message and make any film mean what he wants it to mean. Therefore, critics are mere vessels to provide their interpretations to sway moviegoers into accepting the message the critic has provided. Continuing, he asserts that cinema is a “system of codes to be broken, not a vision to be interpreted or art to be experienced.” His rally cry is from Ron Kovic in the movie *Born on the Fourth of July* when he bellows, “They lied to us!” Doherty claims that antecedent was yelled at Hollywood just as much as it was yelled at Washington policy because many previous films glorified the military in past conflicts. He implies

that films depicting the true horror of war would have prepared the populace for the visions of war that would eventually stream across the television set during Vietnam. He asserts that the War Department, the Office of War Information, and Hollywood colluded to keep the awful devastation of combat from the big screen usually by omission but sometimes by outright fabrication.

“Hollywood’s wartime work is portrayed as a stiffly staged show of parading toy soldiers and tightly wound dolls.”²⁰ This statement by Doherty indicates his contempt for the pictures produced during World War II. He believes that films were made larger to comply with government censors and to instill the spirit of war effort in the populace, and less for historical accuracy as to the brutal realities of war. He indicates that the United States book-bound mentality was replaced during the 1940s by the World War II movie. Even though the first moving images were made in 1895, Americans did not flock to the theaters until the 1940s to witness the most thoroughly documented event in human history, World War II. In 1944, The Department of Commerce estimated 80 cents of every dollar spent on “spectator amusement” went to the motion picture industry. Spectator amusement included theater, sports, and concerts.²¹ Although Doherty’s analysis is very close minded, he is accurate in his portrayal of government sensors. His advocacy of that every viewer interprets a war movie the way they want to interpret it is extremely relevant for several of the films selected. He may change the opening quote of this paragraph after he viewed *Saving Private Ryan*.

Steven Jay Rubin provided a study of a group of filmmakers and how they presented war movies in his book, *Combat Films 1945-1970*. His book is neither about

war nor a study of war films, but rather about the story of warfare without manufactured heroics or glory. He discusses eight films produced between 1945 and 1970, stating that “each have [*sic*] a unique story to tell.” He chose these eight films not only because of their greatness but because of their “creative frustrations, artistic perseverance, and . . . final victory.” The book does not provide any overarching conclusions based on the eight films nor does it provide insight into the war movie genre as a whole; it is story of eight filmmakers and their passion and struggles to see these eight films make it to the silver screen.²² This book provides valuable insight for inclusion in Chapter 3 to include background information on filmmakers.

Jeanine Basinger traces the evolution of the World War II combat film and the development of the combat film genre in her book, *The World War II Combat Film*. Although there were combat films prior to World War II, Basinger argues that the combat film genre was not developed until the World War II films began to hit the screen. In her study and analysis of films, she not only studied the films themselves but also the system that produced them; the filmmakers; various other individuals that contributed to the films themselves; change in technology; the audiences that watched the films; changes and developments in social, political, and economic history; the combat experience in books; and anything else relative to the critical theory of either genre or cinema or both.

Basinger provides a few basic assumptions on which to base her book, starting with the assumption that there is a war film genre. To define war, she starts by indicating war is a setting and it is also an issue. If there is fighting, it is a combat film. If people are at home and worry about it, then it is a domestic film. And if people are in war rooms

and plan it, then it is a historical biography or political movie. So, to define her genre, she aims to determine if combat films are a genre or perhaps a subgenre of war films.

Basinger's basic premise is that the genre's first films based their story on the real events taking place in the newsreels. Later films then based their story on versions of the earlier movies, perhaps even rewriting history. To define her thesis, Basinger started by eliminating newsreels, foreign films, and those with misleading titles, that is, movies with titles such as *Remember Pearl Harbor* or *Aerial Gunner* that have nothing to do with combat. She divided the combat films into five waves. The first wave, from the beginning of the war until 1943, defined the World War II combat film. In the second wave, from 1944 to just past the end of the war, audiences and filmmakers had accepted the definition from the first wave and translated it into cinematic terms. The third wave, from the end of the 1940s to the end of the 1950s, puts reality into the combat film genre to unit audiences from those that have only known war through cinema and those that served. The fourth wave, the early 1960s, brought epic recreations by replacing reality with filmed reality. The fifth wave was a period of inversion, probably spurred on by the Vietnam War, in which films strayed from the definitions characterized during the first wave.

She then loosely grouped the "problem area" films into four categories: wartime films; military background films; training camp films; and military biographies. Films in these groups are classified as a variation of the combat genre, as each is either based on the military, wartime events or provides some semblance of combat, although combat may not be the primary central focus. Each of the movies selected for this thesis fall

within Basinger's definition of combat film.²³ Basinger's study placed films in generic categories over the course of six decades, which is difficult. To indicate that films are in this category based on when they were made versus their content establishes a pattern of identical type films. In reality, *The Big Red One* and *Saving Private Ryan* are basically squad-level interaction movies set in a historical setting, very much like *The Story of G.I. Joe* and *Battleground*, clearly crossing several of her waves. She does, however, identify problems of genre classing in her book and provides valuable information on the movie industry.

Dr. Lawrence H. Suid spent two and one-half years conducting research for his book, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies*. During his research, he personally interviewed over 300 people in the film industry, the media, and the military. The end result is a comprehensive study and insight into the workings of a war film from inside the film industry, the Department of Defense, and the technical assistance that accompanied many films from start to finish.

Dr. Suid investigated the origins of certain films, public perception of the military, and other world events that may have altered a film's interpretation. He asserts that until the 1960s, most Americans perceived the US military as an "all-conquering and infallible force for the good in the world."²⁴ After Korea failed to be a smashing conquest, most Americans blamed the government, not the military. The military maintained a positive image throughout the 1950s.

During the 1960s, however, Dr. Suid indicates that as the victories of the Second World War faded from the memory of the younger generation, the Cuban missile crisis

threatened worldwide nuclear holocaust; and the Vietnam War continued to escalate, the antiwar movement began to take center stage. Tet and the My Lai massacre cemented in the minds of the American public that the US had in fact lost the Vietnam War. Criticism of the military in print and visual media left the military image in disrepair.

He pointed out the massive public campaign the Pentagon launched in an effort to repair the image in an attempt to facilitate the establishment of the all-volunteer military. A positive perception of the military in the eyes of the public was deemed vital to the success of the all-volunteer force. As his book was published in 1978, the effect of the image repair campaign was not evident.²⁵ Dr. Suid is an extremely helpful source of DOD assistance and filmmaker information through his book and through personal interviews with the author.

The Soldiers

Over eight million men served in the US Army during World War II. The majority served overseas while only approximately 25 percent actually engaged in combat. The Army was still segregated, so only white men were represented in World War II films that were produced during the war itself. Comparison data from 1943 indicate that soldiers were drawn from geographic locales at about the same percentage as the general white population in the 1940 census. There was a large discrepancy, however, between locales within the geographic regions. Draft exemptions were much higher for men from farm, ranch, and small towns. Albert A. Blum concluded in his book, *The Farmer, the Army and the Draft*, that farmers came close to receiving a group deferment during World War II. Only 31 percent of enlistees claimed rural origins versus

a census indicating 44 percent of the white population lived in rural areas. By statistics, the Northeast provided 29 percent of the enlistees; the Midwest provided 33 percent; the South provided 27 percent; and the West provided 11 percent. Over two-thirds of soldiers in training in 1943 were from urban areas, compared to only about one-half during World War I. Almost one-half of the farm-bred men were from the South, which also provided a proportionately larger urban contingent.

The education level of the enlistee in World War II was significantly better than the doughboy of World War I and higher than the general population of the US. The median education level of the doughboy was seventh grade while the G.I.s' level stood at the eleventh grade. The 1940 census reported that white males had a median education level of 8.3 years and only 13 percent had completed high school. Thirty-two percent of the enlisted population in 1943 had graduated from high school, and almost 15 percent had some college. In World War I, only 18 percent had some high school while 37 percent had less than six years of education. Fosdick also points out that since rural soldiers were more likely to be lacking in education, their promotion rates trailed those of the urban soldier.

Approximately 70 percent of the soldiers were single and of the married troops, only a one-third had children. The War Department also pushed for younger recruits and eventually achieved lowering the draft age to eighteen in 1942. Over 60 percent of the trainees were under twenty-five while less than a one-fifth were over thirty. The War Department also pushed for discharging men over the age of thirty-eight who met certain

criteria. This policy was implemented in 1943 and resulted in 275,000 men getting discharged and excluded an additional 6.4 million from the draft pool.

Most enlistees preferred the air corps to ground combat jobs, over 50 percent asked for the air corps. Urban G.I.s preferred the air corps more than the Southerners while Northeasterners preferred the supply corps. Southerners were also more likely to be amiable to combat jobs.²⁶

Soldiers' Uniforms

The uniform worn at the beginning of World War II was a modification of the uniform introduced in 1926. The uniform looked very similar to that worn by the American Expeditionary Corps during World War I. The open collar replaced the stand-up collar and leggings replaced the puttees. Soldiers even still wore the British-style helmet. The Mk 1 helmet, modeled after a German design, replaced the British-style helmet, entered mass production, and became the standard issue to all soldiers from 9 June 1941.²⁷

The standard soldier's uniform introduced in 1941 was an olive-drab, single-breasted tunic with open collar, matching soldier straps, four gild that later were bronzed metal, buttoned in front, breast and side pockets with flap and button, and matching cloth belt. They had russet ankle boots and canvas leggings. In 1941, a short sand-colored weatherproofed field jacket with zip fastener and six or seven buttons in front and diagonal slash side pockets was introduced.²⁸

The M1941 field jacket was made of cotton cloth, olive drab in color, wind resistant, and water repellant with a shirting flannel lining. It had shoulder loops and was

issued to everyone in uniform. It was designed after a civilian style windbreaker with pockets on each side, waist length, and button up front. It was unpopular with the troops as they felt it did not provide adequate protection from the elements, especially in the winter. It was replaced by the M1943 field jacket.²⁹

The M1943 field jacket and trousers were also introduced in 1943. The new combat jacket employed the layer principle. The jacket was made of olive-drab sateen lined with poplin. Matching soldier straps, breast patch pockets with flaps and diagonal slash side pockets, and the sleeves were gathered at the wrist and fastened with a tab and a button. The waist could be adjusted by means of a drawstring.³⁰ The new field jacket was hip length with a four-pocket tunic and trousers of matching olive drab. The outfit was water repellent and made of a wind-proof cotton material. The field jacket was suitable for mild weather and had a pile fabric liner to provide adequate protection against colder weather. A specially designed hood, the M1944 hood developed in 1944, would fit over the helmet. It had buttons that connected the hood to the field jacket.³¹ There were matching trousers, field cap, and russet leather lace-up boots with integral leather anklets. Some infantry units wore camouflage uniforms at Normandy, but the uniforms were immediately withdrawn when some troops were being mistaken for Waffen-SS, who also wore a camouflage pattern uniform.³²

Paratroopers wore a special combat dress consisting of steel helmet with forked chin strap with a rubber chin cup, combat jacket with fly front and large diagonal patch breast (jungle fatigues) and side pockets, and trousers with a large patch pocket on the

outside of the thigh. They also wore high lace-up brown leather ankle boots with rubber soles, which later became standard Army issue. Many had painted camouflage helmets.

Officer rank was worn on the shoulder straps or right side of shirt collar. Rank was also painted in white on the front and sometimes the back of the helmet. Most officers had a white vertical stripe painted on the back of their helmet to identify them as officers from behind. Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) rank was worn as olive-drab chevrons on a blue background on both shirtsleeves.

The field equipment used was the same as the first fully integrated infantry equipment issued in 1910, with a few modifications. With additional minor modifications, it remained in use until the mid-1950s. The entrenching tool was worn upside down in the middle of the back of the back, or web gear if the pack was not carried. The soldier carried six ammunition pouches, a canteen, a gas mask later discarded by many troops, bayonet on the left side, and the Mk 1 helmet.³³

There were two types of overcoats: the long overcoat for wear by all ranks and the short overcoat issued to officers. The long overcoat was designed for warmth during the winter months. However, it became too cumbersome for effective fighting and quickly got wet and caked with mud during inclement weather. Because of these factors and the introduction of a winter uniform, the long overcoat reverted to the dress uniform only.

The Modified Mackinaw was introduced in 1942. It was a modification of the 1941 Mackinaw and was designed for field wear in place of the overcoat. The modified Mackinaw was made from a heavy canvas duck and lined with a thick woolen material. It was a shorter coat than the overcoat but still covered the hips. It had large pockets on

the skirt of the coat and had an attached cloth belt around the waist. The new coat used a blanket material around the collar instead of the previous used fur pile.

The raincoat issued was from a 1938 design and had only minor modifications during the war. Every soldier was issued a raincoat.

The officer's trench coat was not an authorized garment although many officers wore them, including Eisenhower. The coat was sold at many post exchanges, thereby giving it some form of official recognition. Officers enjoyed it because it had a liner to provide comfort from the cold and the rain.

The wool knit high neck sweater was introduced in 1943 and became a general issue field item. It could be worn over the flannel shirt or in conjunction with the pile liner inside the field jacket. It was machine knitted from olive drab wool and could be worn buttoned up at the neck or open.

The wool knit cap was produced in 1941 and was a general issue item. The standard design had a curtain and a visor. It could be worn by itself or underneath the steel helmet. The army also produced a wool knitted toque that is similar to a balaclava. It is knitted in olive drab wool and fits over the head underneath the helmet.

The adopted shade for all leather products, to include boots, was Army russet. The 1941 standard issue uniform consisted of ankle boots and olive drab canvas leggings. The leggings were worn by all soldiers except for those of animal mounted, animal drawn or pack organizations. The field issue uniform of 1943 replaced the legging with a form of built in gaiter. Later, the newly designed high-lace leather combat boot previously

issued for wear by the US paratroopers replaced them. Rubber boots and overshoes were issued and available for wear as needed.³⁴

Weapons

Over 11 million soldiers wore the uniform of the United States Army, which includes the Army Air Corps, during World War II. At the outbreak of the war, the infantry soldier was issued one of only two models of rifle: either the Springfield 1903 or 1917, or the US Enfield, also known as the American Enfield. These were both veterans of the First World War and soon were replaced by the Garand 30 M1 semiautomatic rifle.

The Garand entered mass production in 1939 and was first used in the Pacific. It fired a 7.62-millimeter round and could effectively hit targets at 450 meters. It had a maximum range of over 3,000 meters, and it could fire tracer, armor-piercing and incendiary ammunition as well. General Patton called it the best weapon ever invented.

The M1 carbine, introduced by Winchester in 1941, was a semi-automatic 30 caliber designed to replace the Colt automatic. It weighed only five pounds, had a fifteen-round magazine and became very popular with the soldiers. There were two variants of this weapon. The M1A1 had a folding stock for use by paratroopers. And the M2 had a thirty-round magazine and could be used in semiautomatic or automatic mode. There were only 550,000 M2s produced versus 5,000,000 M1s.

The Thompson 45-submachine gun was designed to provide the soldier with the power of a machine gun and the weight of a rifle. The most famous and most efficient were the 1921 and 1928 models. The 1928 differed from the 1921 by adding a muzzle brake to counteract the kick when firing short bursts. The high rate of fire of the

Thompson, 600 to 700 rounds per minute, made it hard to keep steady while firing bursts. A modified and simpler 1942 version eliminated the front pistol grip and had a rougher finish, and was not as popular as the earlier versions.³⁵

Paratroopers and armored forces favored the M3 submachine gun, commonly referred to as the “greasegun” because of its resemblance to that tool. It was cheaper than the Thompson machine gun, weighed only 8.9 pounds fully loaded and could fire over 400 rounds per minute, even though the magazine could hold only thirty rounds. The M3 fired 45-caliber ammunition³⁶ and gained quick popularity over the Thompson, reducing the per unit cost from 55 to 18 dollars per weapon.³⁷

The Browning automatic rifle, commonly referred to as the “BAR”, was a 30-caliber gas-operated weapon with a twenty-round magazine that could fire at a rate of 500 to 600 rounds per minutes. The 1918 model was really the only automatic rifle of the time period. It had a magazine of twenty rounds and could fire conventional, armor-piercing, tracer, or incendiary ammunition. It was accurate to 550 meters and had a maximum range of 3,200 meters.

The most popular machine gun was the Browning 50-caliber M2. It was the infantryman’s main defensive weapon and was also used as a light antiaircraft gun. It had a rate of fire of 450 rounds per minute and could reach ranges beyond 6,000 meters. The M2 replaced the 1917 model A1, which had a water-cooled sleeve that allowed it to fire for long bursts. It fired 400 to 520 rounds per minute, but had a maximum effective range of only about 3,650 meters.³⁸

The M4 Sherman tank was the most widely used US tank of the Second World War. Almost 50,000 Shermans were produced and over 22,000 were provided to the Allies in the lend lease program. Various configurations were instituted to provide additional functionality as needed for diverse missions. The United States also produced over 10,000 M10 and M36 Tank Destroyers.

The United States produced almost 30,000 light tanks, over 57,000 medium tanks, and almost 2,500 heavy tanks. The United States Army armored force grew to sixteen armored divisions and sixty-five non-divisional tank battalions, not to mention the additional tank destroyer battalions and Marine tank units.³⁹

¹*The Story of G.I. Joe* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1945), movie.

²Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 62-69.

³William Wellman, *A Short Time for Insanity* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1974), 83-89.

⁴Manny Farber, "The Story of G.I. Joe," *The New Republic*, 13 August 1945, 199.

⁵James Agee, "The Story of G.I. Joe," *Nation*, 15 September 1945, 264.

⁶*Battleground* (Hollywood: MGM, 1949), movie.

⁷Steven Jay Rubin, *Combat Films: 1945-1970* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1981), 37-38.

⁸*Attack!* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1956), movie.

⁹Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁰*D-Day, the Sixth of June* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox, 1956), movie.

¹¹Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 281.

¹²*The Longest Day* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox, 1962), movie.

¹³The film was nominated for six Academy Awards to include Best Picture. It won for Best Special Effects and Best Cinematography as *Lawrence of Arabia* swept the Oscars that year.

¹⁴*Patton* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox, 1970), movie.

¹⁵Suid, 265. That also depends on how *M.A.S.H.* is classified, which overtook *Patton* at the box office in the same year.

¹⁶*A Bridge Too Far* (London: Joseph E. Levine Productions, 1977), movie.

¹⁷*The Big Red One* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1980), movie.

¹⁸*Saving Private Ryan* (Hollywood: DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures, 1998), movie.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Thomas Doherty, "Hollywood's War" in *Projections of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Chapter One.

²¹"US Survey Shows Films Get 80% to 85% of Amusement Coin," *Variety*, 19 July 1944, 1 and 38.

²²Steven Jay Rubin, *War Films: 1945-1970* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, inc., 1981).

²³Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

²⁴Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 7.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Roger Barry Fosdick, *A Call To Arms: The American Enlisted Soldier in World War II* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1985), 86-104.

²⁷Liliane and Fred Funchen, *Arms and Uniforms: The Second World War Part 3* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), 74-96.

²⁸Andre Mollo, *Army Uniforms of World War II* (Billericay, Essex, Great Britain: Blandford Press Ltd., 1973; reprinted with corrections 1974, reprinted with corrections 1977), 58.

²⁹Howard P. Davies, *United States Infantry Europe, 1942-45: Key Uniform Guides 1* (New York: Arco Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 22.

³⁰Mollo, 59.

³¹Davies, 22.

³²Ibid, 20.

³³Mollo, 59.

³⁴Davies, 19-26.

³⁵Funchen, 83-84.

³⁶John P. Langellier, *The War in Europe From the Kasserine Pass to Berlin: The Illustrated History of The American Soldier, His Uniform and His Equipment* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1995), 40-41.

³⁷Funchen, 84.

³⁸Idid, 84.

³⁹ Steven J. Zaloga, *The M4 Sherman at War: The European Theater, 1942-1945* (Hong Kong: Concord Publication Company, 1994), 3-8.

CHAPTER 3

THE MAKING OF THE FILM

My picture will hate the institution of war, but be fair about it.¹

Darryl Zanuck, *The Longest Day*

Introduction

Every film, just like every major project ever undertaken, requires a champion to further the cause. The vision of the filmmaker, director, writer, studio head, or even a rare actor greatly influences the outcome of, or at least contributes to the final product. This chapter contains a study of the nine films selected and a determination of who had the deciding effect on the film. The chapter also examines the Department of Defense (DOD) involvement, what support was provided, and the effects of that support.

Of special interest are the major influences on each film and in particular DOD's involvement. Did the filmmaker² have a military background, and how did that contribute to his selection of the promilitary or antiwar message that he is providing to the audience, if, indeed, he is even sending a message? Does the filmmaker's background influence his portrayal of the US soldier and the mission? What role, if any, did the DOD contribute to the making of the film? Did DOD provide technical assistance, and, if so, what kind? Are movies influenced by the public perception of the military at the time of production?

Department of Defense interaction with and assistance to the film industry has a long and sometimes tumultuous history. During World War II, many filmmakers served in the military to provide recruiting films, documentaries, or combat footage as part of the

military's signal corps. These assignments fulfilled their service obligations, provided assistance to the United States government in its effort to mobilize the population in support of the war effort, and provided many of the filmmakers with jobs and ideas for films after the war was over. Although censorship and DOD involvement in script writing was prevalent during the war and for several years after, by the 1960s that interaction was quickly fading. The mid-1960s saw a shift in the Army's support of the film industry. Until that time the Defense Department was the only organization that could provide filmmakers with much-needed military equipment and resources to complete their movies. But by the mid-1960s, almost all of the World War II era equipment was gone from the Army's inventory.³ Filmmakers shifted their requests overseas to locations with equipment, such as Israel and Spain.

The Films

The Story of G.I. Joe was a concept originated by an independent producer, Lester Cowan. Cowan based his script on Ernie Pyle's work in *Here is Your War*. He reached an agreement with United Artists for financial backing and distribution, and he had a scriptwriter talk directly with Ernie Pyle. Cowan then sent an outline of the story to the War Department indicating his desire to develop a movie featuring the infantry, their training, and their actions at the front. The Army Ground Force Headquarters approved the outline but noted that several modifications would occur before the picture was released for production.⁴

Ernie Pyle was swept up in patriotism after high school graduation and joined the Navy reserves, but the First World War armistice was declared prior to his completion of

preliminary training. Pyle wrote articles for several newspapers before he became a roving columnist for the Scripps-Howard Newspaper chain. Over the next six years, Ernie crossed the continent some thirty-five times compiling stories about the average American. Excerpts from his travel were compiled into a book titled *Home Country*.⁵ It was during this trying time in America, the Great Depression, that Ernie made a name for himself. He wrote stories of unknown people doing amazing things. He was a sensitive, self-assuring, and compassionate friend of Americans who provided a figure of warmth and reassurance. He shared his sadness and exhilarations during the depression, and the people loved him.⁶

Ernie began covering the war in England. While witnessing a German firebomb raid on London, he wrote that it was “the most hateful, most beautiful single scene I have ever known.” He published a book in 1941 on his experiences in England entitled *Ernie Pyle in England*.⁷ A year later, Ernie started covering US forces and the landings in Algeria as part of the North Africa campaign. His daily column on the life of the soldiers, written in the plain English Americans had adored during the depression, gained him critical acclaim as perhaps the greatest war correspondent ever. He wrote about all kinds of soldiers in his daily column, but he saved his greatest affection for the common foot soldier. “I love the infantry because they are the underdogs,” he wrote. “They are the mud-rain-frost-and-wind boys. They have no comforts, and they even learn to live without the necessities. And in the end they are the guys that wars can't be won without.”⁸

Ernie's daily columns appeared in over 400 daily newspapers and 300 weekly newspapers worldwide.⁹ It is estimated that his column in Scripps-Howard newspapers had an audience of over 40 million readers.¹⁰ His work during World War II was consolidated and compiled into two books, *Here is Your War* and *Brave Men*. He was so popular and acknowledged as a spokesman for the common foot soldier that he is credited with getting combat pay instituted in 1944. Pyle proposed in a column that soldiers be given "fight pay" which was very similar to the aviators receiving flight pay. In May of 1944, Congress decided it was a good idea and they passed the "Ernie Pyle Bill" that provided soldiers 50 percent more pay for combat service.¹¹

While Cowan was working on finding a director for the film, he turned to another unanswered question, whom to cast as Ernie Pyle. The producer learned that Pyle gave clear instructions for the actor chosen to play him if United Artists wanted to make a movie about his exploits. "He must weigh in the neighborhood of 112 pounds and look anemic. He must not be glamorized or have any love interest in the picture," Pyle ordered. "He must write on a typewriter and absolutely never be shown with a pencil or notebook."¹²

Pyle wanted Burgess Meredith, who was an Army lieutenant at the time, to play him in the film. Cowan requested this of the Pictorial Branch of the War Department and they gave him a choice: turn over all proceeds from the film to the Army Emergency Relief Fund as had been done in previous films, or Meredith would have to resign his commission.¹³ This is where the Executive Branch decided to step in and assist in the Hollywood war effort. Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's confidential, personally

decommissioned Meredith so he could play Ernie Pyle. Burgess was officially discharged from the Army for sinus trouble.¹⁴

Having solved the question of who would play Pyle, Cowan again tackled the issue of who would be the director.¹⁵ Cowan decided to approach William Wellman. When Cowan arrived at his home uninvited, Wellman politely declined the invitation. But Cowan was persistent and Wellman, who was a World War I flier, explained to Cowan that he “was not interested in working his ass off for the infantry.” He explained why he “hated the infantry with such a fury” and slammed the door in Cowan’s face.¹⁶ Apparently during World War I, Allied infantry soldiers, to include US infantry, had mistakenly fired at Wellman while he was providing close air support.¹⁷

William Wellman, often referred to as Wild Bill, was an adventurous youth who joined the French Foreign Legion at the outbreak of World War I. After the US entered the war, he joined the distinguished Lafayette Escadrille and flew until he was seriously wounded. He returned to the US and became a stunt flyer and barnstormer. He broke into movies after he had a forced landing on actor Douglas Fairbanks’ property. Fairbanks cast Wellman in the movie *Knickerbocker Buckaroo*, but Wellman decided he wanted to be on the other side of the camera. He quickly worked his way from propman to assistant producer and then to producer. Wellman’s love of flying certainly contributed to the realism of *Wings*, a breathtaking drama of World War I aviation that was the first film to win a Best Picture Academy Award (1927). His no-nonsense attitude on the set resulted in his trading blows with actors several times, thus the nickname Wild Bill.¹⁸

Wellman knew of Pyle but did not read his columns because they focused on the infantry. After Cowan had the door slammed in his face, Pyle called Wellman and invited him to Albuquerque for a visit and to hear the story first hand. Pyle was such a sincere and genuine person that he almost had Wellman crying on the phone.¹⁹ Wellman went to New Mexico and Ernie talked him into directing the film. The two of them became close friends and learned a great deal about each other. Ernie's complete love and respect for the infantry soldier was conveyed to Wellman. Ernie was at Wellman's house the night before he shipped out to the Pacific, a trip from which he would not return. Although Wellman had a great distaste for the infantry, he produced this film with great care for his friend Ernie. He was determined to portray the sensitive side of the infantry as seen through the eyes of Pyle.²⁰

The Army promised full cooperation to Wellman in the making of the film. He required only a limited amount of military hardware, but what he really wanted was some experienced combat troops. The Army sent him 150 combat-experienced troops who had fought in the Italian campaign and were now on their way to the Pacific. The Army stressed that because "it is the plan of everyone concerned to have the troops make the best possible appearance in the film, both in physical condition and in military techniques, the training program will be rigorously pursued." Understanding that these men had already been through some terrible fighting and were on their way to the Pacific, the film company tried to make their stay in Hollywood enjoyable by providing entertainment and spending money.²¹

Wellman had his own plans for the veterans and wanted to “straighten them out.” He explained that he was a broken down old flier and that they were going to do exactly what he said they were going to do. He would not double-cross them or ask them to do anything that they did not want to do, but he was making a movie that they and Pyle would be proud of. He pointed out that this was not going to be just another war movie but that he wanted to make this “the goddamnest most honest picture that has ever been made about the doughfoot.”²² He made the actors live with the soldiers and go through the training with them. When the soldiers were not filming, they were training for the Pacific War. Many of the soldiers got speaking lines because Wellman wanted real talk from real soldiers: “When a G.I. has something to say, I want a G.I. to say it. . . . You know the story is good, and it’s real, and it’s beautifully written by a man whose very life is you.”²³

Wellman took this attitude into his direction, and the end result was nothing short of spectacular. He did not focus on combat, but rather on the soldiers. The enemy was rarely seen, and when one of the men died, he just was not there anymore.²⁴ After the movie was complete, the soldiers shipped off to the Pacific, and not a single one came back, including Pyle. Wellman never watched the movie again after the war, but General Eisenhower called *The Story of G.I. Joe* “The greatest war picture I have ever seen.”²⁵

Pyle became a household name and the unelected representative of the common soldier, but he was not always popular with the Army senior leadership. He angered some of them by quoting the soldier’s profanity in his column and indicating once that soldiers were shell-shocked. Some of his earlier columns were censored and that

infuriated Pyle, as he believed the American people needed to know the real story from the front lines. Pyle had become quite popular, and the censorship stopped when he threatened to stop covering the war. Before long, Eisenhower and Bradley were both reading Pyle's column to keep tabs on troop morale.²⁶

The last stipulation that Pyle demanded for the film was that the movie must premiere wherever Ernie was at the time of release. Even though Ernie was dead for the premiere, United Artists felt compelled to maintain some semblance of the agreement and opened the movie in Okinawa, where Pyle had died, on 9 June 1945 as a posthumous tribute.²⁷

Dore Schary was the head of production at RKO when he first conceived the film *Battleground* in 1947. He was opposed to those who thought America was not ready for another war movie and he feared that Americans might experience the same sort of disillusionment that swept through the US after the First World War. Therefore, to him, "it was imperative to do a film about World War II that would say the war was worth fighting despite the terrible losses. . . . The men who fought this war were not suckers. They had not been used. There was something at stake. It was the first time, in a long, long time, hundreds of years, that there had been a real danger of takeover by a very evil and strong force."²⁸

To demonstrate his theory that the American way of life was in jeopardy from the evil force in question, he sought out a specific situation during World War II when the Allied cause was in jeopardy. He thought there were only a couple of good pictures on the war and virtually none dealing with the war after the invasion of Normandy. He

decided that the German counterattack during the Ardennes offensive, or the Battle of the Bulge, and the subsequent defense of Bastogne would be the perfect setting to illustrate his theme that the United States was faced with a threat of annihilation that could have resulted in an Allied defeat, subsequently changing the face of the world.

Schary called in Bob Pirosh, a writer who had been in the war. When asked if he knew anything about Bastogne, he responded, “Know anything? I was there!”²⁹ Pirosh was a veteran screenwriter before the war and, instead of taking an easy job splicing film for the Army like many of his counterparts, he opted for the infantry. Pirosh was a Master Sergeant with the 320th Regiment of the 35th Infantry Division. He came north as part of Patton’s 3rd Army to relieve the beleaguered forces at Bastogne. He wrote the script from notes he kept in his diary, with the thought of someday making a movie on what he witnessed during the war.³⁰ Pirosh wanted to portray the activities of one squad of riflemen, “without heroics, without fancy speeches, without phony romance.” He felt that his story of this one squad “was, in a sense, the story of all squads. I happened to be in Europe, you happened to be in the Pacific, somebody else sweated it out in the Aleutians. The important thing is; what did it do to us? How did we feel?”³¹

Schary was the driving force behind the movie. He resigned from RKO and moved to MGM because RKO shelved his script. He then purchased the script from RKO and hired Pirosh to finish the writing.³² Conventional wisdom at the time indicated that war movies would not be successful. There were very few combat films made from 1945 to 1949, because it was deemed that the public had distanced itself from combat films.³³ After polling audiences around the United States and determining that a war

movie would be successful, Schary released the new movie name, *Battleground*, and began formal production against the reservations of the MGM studio heads.³⁴

Schary approached General Anthony McAuliffe, who had commanded the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne and gave the infamous reply “nuts” to the German request for surrender, to provide technical and military assistance to the film. McAuliffe, who was still on active duty, liked the project from its inception, so he served as technical advisor for the writing of the script. He also recommended Lieutenant Colonel Harry W. O. Kinnard, who served under him at Bastogne as the Division G3, to serve as technical advisor during the shooting. McAuliffe also arranged to have twenty veteran members of the 101st to serve as extras and provided a few tanks, trucks, and other needed equipment.

Finding a director was an obvious choice for Schary. Given the great success of *The Story of G.I. Joe*, Schary felt that William Wellman had a great understanding of how to portray the infantrymen. Although Wellman did not like Schary and his history of putting messages in film, he liked the script and could not turn down the large sum of money the studio offered him. He told Schary, “I can’t make a *G.I. Joe* out of this thing. I’ll make a film about a very tired group of guys.”³⁵

Wellman used many of the same techniques he had used during the making of *G.I. Joe*. The actors lived with the soldiers and trained with them, although it was peacetime and the soldiers were not preparing for service in the Pacific. He would later indicate that he thought *Battleground* was “very movie picture like” in contrast to *G.I. Joe*, which was “real.” Because *G.I. Joe* was made during the war, the film was made

with the understanding that many of the audience had friends and family serving overseas who might not come home, and that the war was still not over. In contrast, *Battleground* was filmed four years after the conclusion of the war; therefore, closure was more important. Given this situation, Wellman included a little more humor in *Battleground* to fulfill the entertainment desires of the audience.³⁶

The issue of putting messages in the film was evident during the chaplain scene. Schary used the chaplain as a mouthpiece to put in plain words the reason he made the film, that is, so all viewers would understand that “millions have died for no other reason except that the Nazis wanted them dead. . . . We must never again let any kind of force dedicated to a super race or a super idea or a super anything get strong enough to impose itself on a free world. We have to be smart enough and tough enough in the beginning to put out the fire before it starts spreading.”³⁷

Attack!, based on the stage play *Fragile Fox*, did not receive Department of Defense cooperation, as it was not deemed as appropriate subject matter for a military film. Aside from this film and one other, *On the Beach*, the Department of Defense cooperated with virtually every major military film made during the 1950s and into the 1960s.³⁸ Not only did the Defense Department refuse to cooperate with Robert Aldrich, the film’s director and producer, they would not even discuss script revisions that would make it an acceptable movie for them. Don Barusch, Chief of the Audio/Visual Division of the Department of Defense’s Public Affairs Office, insisted that they could not support a film that portrayed one service member killing another one. If Aldrich wanted assistance, he would have to remove that subject from the film. This was unacceptable to

Aldrich, as the ending is the culmination of the entire story. *Attack!* was one of the first movies that dared to show America's military performing in a less than exemplary manner.³⁹

Aldrich wanted to “show the terribly corrupting influence that war can have on the most normal, average human beings and what terrible things it makes them capable of-things they wouldn't be capable of otherwise.”⁴⁰ But he also attempted to ensure that this was a story about the failings of individuals, not the Army.

You've got every man in this outfit thinking the US Army is a mockery, well it's not. . . . The Army is not a mockery! The war is not a mockery! It's just this small part!⁴¹

Regardless of these lines, the Department of Defense refused assistance to Aldrich and he made the movie without any DOD cooperation. Without military assistance in the 1950s, cooperation from libraries, defense contractors, and those with access to military equipment was difficult. Even private sources were reluctant to provide assistance. As noted by filmmaker Max Youngstein when he was trying to gather information for the making of *Fail Safe*, if the Defense Department did not approve the script, garnering support was extremely difficult. When he inquired as to who gave a certain librarian orders to not assist him, the reply was, “I'm not at liberty to tell you. But they are orders from people I cannot afford to disregard.”⁴²

Prominent members of the cast had some military experience. Lee Marvin joined the Marines at the age of 17 as soon as World War II started. He was a member of I Company, 24th Marine Regiment, 4th Division and took part in 21 beach assaults from Kwajelein to Saipan. He was wounded in action, received the Purple Heart, returned to

the States, and drew a military disability pension. Meanwhile, his father had served in the European Theater during the war, so Marvin understood realistic soldier experiences and actual World War II events.⁴³

Eddie Albert had also served in the Pacific during World War II and was present at the Tarawa beach invasion. According to a 1995 interview, Albert believed his portrayal of Captain Cooney was one of his better acting experiences. Jack Palance had facial reconstructive surgery after his B-17 bomber crashed while returning to Britain in 1943. His face was badly burned and required plastic surgery, providing him with that wiry, mean look.⁴⁴

Henry Koster, the director of *D-Day*, *The Sixth of June*, was born in Germany and had to flee after punching a Nazi officer in a bank prior to World War II. He made films in France before emigrating to the United States in the late 1930s. Although he was persecuted in Germany in the anti-Semitic rancor sweeping the country at that time, this film does not overtly demonstrate any animosity towards Germany or the German soldiers depicted in the film.

Lead actors Robert Taylor and Richard Todd both served in the military during World War II. Taylor joined the Navy and trained flyers, to include making seventeen instructional videos, while Todd, the son of a British officer, joined the glider corps and participated in the Normandy invasion. Since Todd was a commando during the war, his experience assisted in the filming of the invasion sequence.

Interestingly, *D-Day* received Department of Defense approval⁴⁵, although it depicted the officer corps as adulterous and, in some cases, egotistical. Although the

invasion was recreated in Southern California near Los Angeles, Koster brought in Colonel Dan Gilmer, United States Army, as a technical advisor to ensure all military facets of the film were authentic.⁴⁶

The Longest Day was the first epic recreation of the invasion of Normandy attempted on a grandiose scale, incorporating four separate countries and their stories while filming the combat scenes simultaneously. It has been said that World War II was a black and white war.⁴⁷ Although the Navy and Marines in the Pacific used color film to capture their history, the Army used black and white in Europe. Color was not used until after the Normandy invasion, and then only sparingly, mostly among Air Corps planes. Producer Darryl Zanuck thought that color would distract from the gritty, documentary style of film he intended to shoot.⁴⁸

Cornelius Ryan, a young *London Daily Telegraph* war correspondent assigned to cover the invasion, went ashore on the Normandy coast on the morning of the sixth of June.⁴⁹ Five years later at a reunion on the beach, he watched a fisherman pull a helmet from the ocean with the skull still in it, and he was appalled that nobody anywhere knew who that was. It was then that he decided to write a book on the activities of that fateful day in 1944. Ten years later Ryan published *The Longest Day*, a landmark work of nonfiction that established him as one of the country's top military historians.⁵⁰ To Ryan, the book was "not about war, but about the courage of man."⁵¹

Darryl F. Zanuck, one of 20th Century Fox's best producers and studio executives, purchased the film rights for *The Longest Day* from a French producer who could not acquire the significant financial backing that this film would require. Zanuck

would spare no expense and he felt, from a patriotic standpoint, he could get the biggest stars to fill the major roles.⁵²

Zanuck had served in World War I when he was fifteen years old and had been a colonel during World War II, serving in both France and North Africa.⁵³ He was a supervisor for Signal Corps training films and the photographic record of the North Africa invasion.⁵⁴ He was fascinated by the invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe, which he deemed the most hazardous undertaking in military history. It was a story he felt had to be told. He wanted to ensure this was not only a historical film, but also a film that would “tell audiences what they do not know about what happened that day.” He also wanted to show the events on the enemy side to avoid “a rosy, star-spangled drawing of D-Day.”⁵⁵ Zanuck thought he was creating an antiwar film, “If people could see the brutality and inhumanity of war. . . . They would be filled with such revulsion that they would never permit their leaders to send them back to the battlefield.”⁵⁶

Several actors had ties to World War II, but a couple have interesting stories. Richard Todd, who played the role of Major John Howard, was a paratrooper during the invasion and portrayed the mission in which he actually participated. The real Howard was Todd’s superior during the war, and he was brought back as a technical advisor for the film. Robert Wagner read Ryan’s book on his own and did not wait for an invitation to the filming; he applied for a part. After visiting the American cemetery at Omaha Beach, he felt it was his personal responsibility to take part in this epic recreation.⁵⁷

The Department of Defense pledged support for the making of the film, as did the governments of Britain, France, and Germany. In order to obtain the services of the

European countries in the film, Zanuck promised to use directors and stars from each of their respective countries to film their portion of history.⁵⁸ The commander of NATO⁵⁹ forces in Europe provided 700 special forces troops that were stationed far away from the border with East Germany, so that if “there should be any trouble with the Russians in Berlin, they could be sent to the capital from Normandy just as readily as they could from their bases in Southern Germany.”⁶⁰ Britain pledged a fleet of 66 World War II vintage ships and 150 men. France, despite problems in Algeria, provided over two thousand men. West Germany provided valuable technical assistance and all the World War II material it could find, although they could muster no soldiers.⁶¹

Congressman Robert Wilson from California fired the first salvo in what many consider to be the demise of military support to filmmakers, when he questioned the advisability of filmmakers’ use of military manpower and equipment. Up until this time, the United States Congress generally maintained a hands-off approach to the relationship between the filmmakers and DOD. Wilson queried Assistant Defense Secretary for Public Affairs Arthur Sylvester on the extent of cooperation being offered to Zanuck’s crew at Normandy. Sylvester replied, “It is our considered opinion that, basically, such a story has historical importance and that the film will give the public a better understanding of a most crucial combat operation. The film would show the U.S. Armed Forces in gallant action and, although it deals with war in its roughest form, it should prove beneficial for recruiting and in creating general interest in the Armed Forces.” Sylvester further emphasized that no regulations were “apparently” violated and that the troops were also receiving valuable training while deployed.⁶²

One week before they began shooting pivotal beach landings on the island of Il de Rey, Zanuck received a memo indicating Defense Secretary Robert McNamara personally ordered the troops available cut from the 700 currently working to only 250. The memo indicated that *The Longest Day* had already received more troops than normal in military cooperation and that this curtailment was in the national interest. The French came to the rescue and ordered over 2,000 more soldiers to the island.⁶³ They even allowed their soldiers to wear United States Army uniforms.⁶⁴

Zanuck sent the movie to Washington for final approval in September 1962. The Department of Defense found one scene that they specifically objected to in the original screenplay and asked Zanuck to remove it. The scene involves a G.I. who shoots several German soldiers who were yelling “bitte! bitte!” then the U.S. soldiers wondered aloud what the Germans were saying. By the time Zanuck responded to the objection, more than one hundred copies of the film were in print and the premier had already occurred in Paris. Zanuck responded by indicating the scene was historically accurate and that he had the film screened by many high-ranking officers, including Lieutenant General James Gavin, Commander of the 82nd Airborne Division at Normandy and the current Ambassador to France, and none of them objected to the scene. The scene stayed in the film and the Defense Department considered it a breach of contract. This disagreement was another chink that would add to increased scrutiny over Defense approval for future films.⁶⁵

According to Basinger, this film lacks something that all great films have: the dramatic sense of a great story where audiences become involved with the characters and

anticipate the outcome of events. The careful recreation of historical events dwarfs the human interaction needed to breathe life into history.⁶⁶ Although she makes a valid point, the film connects to those interested in history, as well as entertainment. The film does contain soldier stories, leader interaction, enemy perspective, strategy, cowardice and heroics, all the ingredients for a good war movie.

Some have called it a documentary; others have called it a story-telling newsreel. Whichever classification it falls under, it could be called “savior,” as it pulled 20th Century Fox out of the financial doldrums. It was the most expensive black and white film ever made, but also the most successful war film at the box office up to that time.⁶⁷

The undertaking for *Patton* was the result of several people’s interest, but an actor significantly shaped the eventual end result. Frank McCarthy had served as a secretary for General George C. Marshall during the war and eventually rose to the rank of Brigadier General in the United States Army Reserve Signal Corps. He knew Patton from his overseas trips with Marshall. Of all the generals McCarthy had known, he thought that Patton was “the guy you ought to do a movie about.” McCarthy thought it was possible to mathematically prove that Patton was the most successful field commander of the war.⁶⁸

The original idea for a film about the exploits of Patton started in 1951 with a memo from McCarthy to Darryl Zanuck. Both men knew Patton and both were fascinated with the potential for the project.⁶⁹ Former studio executive and producer David Brown said Zanuck “was a military man if there ever was one” and that Zanuck wanted to create a dramatic film about Patton.⁷⁰

The Department of Defense was not supportive of Fox's first efforts at a movie because they immediately thought it would be derogatory. Given the general's rebellious reputation as a leader who slapped soldiers, wanted to fight the Russians immediately after Germany culminated, refused to de-Nazify Bavaria, and had been a difficult subordinate throughout the war, the Army was afraid at what the movie might portray.⁷¹

Patton's widow was vehemently opposed to any film about her husband, claiming it was an invasion of privacy and that any biography would portray him inaccurately. Without her support, they were denied Pentagon assistance. She died in 1960 and McCarthy renewed his interest in the movie.⁷² The rest of the family dug in their heels against the movie not only because of their mother's wishes, but also because they were approached about the film on the day of their mother's funeral.⁷³ At the time, the Army continued to refuse support because two of Patton's children were still affiliated with the Army: his son was an Army officer and one of his daughters was married to a soldier.⁷⁴

McCarthy was still in the Army Reserve as the Deputy Chief of Information in Washington. He used his two weeks of annual training in 1961 to convince his boss to allow the movie to move forward. He argued that the Army was on shaky ground to deny the movie support based on a favor to Patton's family. The Defense Department capitulated and informed the Patton family that the Army would cooperate if Fox submitted a suitable script. McCarthy again sought the blessing of the Patton family, but again they balked. The family lawyer issued a statement indicating the family was concerned the film "could not portray the character of General Patton as it was" and "that such a motion picture would be most repugnant to them."⁷⁵

About the same time, controversy over the use of troops to support the making of *The Longest Day* had erupted in Washington. The Defense Department told the Army that if a large number of troops would be needed to support the film, now was not the time to make the film. Given the lack of assistance from the Patton family and the Army's new reluctance to assist, the project was shelved. A year after the success of *The Longest Day*, Zanuck was looking for another military movie and dusted off *Patton*. McCarthy was brought in and went back to work with his research and screenplay development.⁷⁶

Frank McCarthy decided he had a screenplay that could prevail over the enormous wave of anti-militarism and unite the audience with a fascinating character experience. He abandoned the traditional combat film format and instead demonstrated the unusual motivation and fate of America's most controversial general.

He wanted to show that not only was Patton a fighting general with a mastery of maneuver warfare, but a competent poet, a vivid writer, a student of history, and a deeply religious man.⁷⁷

Zanuck was a fan of Patton and pushed for the film just as he had pushed for *The Longest Day*. In a letter to his son in 1966, Zanuck said,

Personally, I look upon him as a great man. I think he was correct in kicking his soldiers in the ass. I think he was right in wanting to use ex-Nazis as German administrators in Bavaria. I am not sure if he was entirely wrong about taking on the Russians at the River Elbe. I admire him and I believe in most instances that he was absolutely right.⁷⁸

Zanuck's son Richard, who was the executive vice-president in charge of production, indicated the studio wanted to make the film because "it will make a good

action drama about World War II.” He further indicated that there was little emotion left in America for the World War II film, since the war had been fought over twenty years ago. He said about Patton, “It’s not like the many propaganda films made by all the studios throughout the early 1940s, which played on the emotions.” When asked why they were not making a film on the Vietnam War, he answered that he thought the public was getting its fill through the newspaper and live television coverage. Maybe Fox would look at making a film about Vietnam in five or ten years.⁷⁹

Fox executives were not excited about the film. They were nervous about making this kind of movie because of the swelling antiwar feeling and wanted to know why Fox should honor someone who was the epitome of war. After much consternation, they decided to support the movie and even contemplated calling the movie, *Patton, A Salute to a Rebel*, in hopes of attracting a bigger antiwar audience.⁸⁰

Fox acquired the rights to two biographies that would provide the vital essence and backbone of the story. The first, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph*, by Ladislas Farago, was the most comprehensive Patton biography ever written. The second, *A Soldier’s Story*, by Omar Bradley, was used because Bradley was Patton’s closest cohort during the War. Bradley provided insight into Patton’s persona both from a subordinate and a superior point of view. McCarthy later brought Bradley in as a consultant during the production.⁸¹

McCarthy conducted extensive research of Army historical documents and newsreels, many produced by Fox journalists during the war, to paint a vivid and historically accurate picture of Patton.⁸² He even interviewed former President and

General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower even asked McCarthy why they were making a movie about Patton instead of Bradley, who Eisenhower thought was a commander of the highest order. McCarthy informed Eisenhower that he answered that question in his own book, *At Ease*, in which he had written, "Patton was a master of fast and overwhelming pursuit. Headstrong by nature and fearlessly aggressive, Patton was the more colorful of the two, compelling attention to his mannerisms as much as his deeds. Bradley, however, was a master of every military maneuver, lacking only in the capacity--possibly the willingness--to dramatize himself."⁸³ Patton's spectacular military success, combined with his flamboyance, made him perfect theatrical material, according to McCarthy.

Francis Ford Coppola had been only nine years old when Patton's Third Army crossed France and raced for the German border.⁸⁴ That did not bother McCarthy in his search for a screenwriter. McCarthy was looking for a young, disciplined writer who would not bring any preconceived notions to the project and Coppola was the answer. Once given the project, Coppola was issued twelve biographies of Patton and a packet of research materials from Robert S. Allen, a syndicated columnist who had served with the intelligence division of Patton's Third Army. That first night, Coppola conceived the opening scene of the long illuminatory prologue with Patton addressing his troops in full dress in front of a huge American flag. Coppola was striving for sheer shock value in the opening scene, something he thought the film needed to grab the audience.⁸⁵

McCarthy had a difficult time finding a director and an actor to play Patton. After Coppola's script hit the street, George C. Scott was hired to play the role of Patton. Scott

was not very fond of Patton but accepted the position because it was a good script and a reach for him as an actor.⁸⁶ Fox hired William Wyler of *Ben Hur* fame to direct the movie. He did not like Coppola's script so they hired Jim Webb, who had served with Patton in North Africa. Webb was one of Hollywood's most respected writers at the time and had won an Academy Award for *How the West Was Won*. He wrote a detailed and more professional script dictating military strategy and even included flashbacks to a younger Patton chasing Poncho Villa. Wyler loved it; Scott did not.⁸⁷ Coppola's script used Patton's religious beliefs and his profound study of history, while Webb delved into the general's background. Many actors thought Webb's script glorified the character too much, given the current state of the antimilitarism in the United States over the Vietnam War.⁸⁸ Fox offered the role to Burt Lancaster, Lee Marvin, Robert Mitchum and John Wayne among others. Wayne turned it down because he would not portray a military man who went around slapping soldiers.⁸⁹ Fox could not find a lead actor and Wyler decided his health was not good enough to film outdoors in Spain, so the film went on the shelf again. Once Scott heard Wyler was gone, he told McCarthy he was interested but only if they used Coppola's script.⁹⁰

Patton was the only film studied that demonstrated the power of the actor. George C. Scott, cast as Patton, would accept only Coppola's script portraying all of Patton's interesting character traits, both positive and negative. Given the current climate in the United States, the filmmakers could not find another actor to portray Patton, so they acquiesced to Scott's demands. During the filming, Scott indicated he wanted to become Patton and conduct himself as he thought Patton would. He said his only goal

was to produce “a fair and respectful portrait” of Patton.⁹¹ Scott believed that the scene where Patton threatens to relieve Truscott if he cannot conduct a breakthrough attack was slanderous and completely wrong, not how Patton would do it. He objected all the way to the Zanucks who told him to conduct the scene as written. With the director’s consent, Scott conducted the scene lying down in protest, clearly not a method of command Patton would ever use.⁹²

Franklin Schaffner directed *Patton*, although in reality he was just a figurehead who could not make script changes or decisions without approval from the Zanucks. Every time Scott questioned the validity or accuracy of a scene, Schaffner was not authorized to make changes. All recommendations went to the Zanucks for their approval and they were very reluctant to change scenes for Scott. He is the least influential of the directors studied.⁹³

McCarthy hired retired General Paul Harkin to serve as technical advisor. Harkin had been Patton’s chief of staff from *Casablanca* until Patton’s death in 1945. Harkin brought the project great attention to accuracy and read five different scripts before he agreed to work on the film. With Harkin and Bradley on board, the completed script was submitted to the Defense Department for approval. It was approved in fewer than five weeks.⁹⁴

In 1970, at the height of the Vietnam War, the military was not a very esteemed profession in the eyes of the American people. The United States government, the military, and the Pentagon were targets for the ever-growing ground swell of organized, outspoken, and frequently violent protests from all levels of society. The motion picture

industry shunned practically all World War II combat films, indicating they were unmarketable. Twentieth Century Fox took a gamble, not unlike the one they took with *The Longest Day*, putting up \$12 million for a mammoth screen dramatization of one of World War II's most controversial American field commanders.⁹⁵

A Bridge Too Far was filmed on location in the Netherlands and in a London studio. Directed by Richard Attenborough and produced by Joseph Levine, the film is based on Cornelius Ryan's book of the same name. After his success with *The Longest Day*, Ryan wrote *A Bridge Too Far* about Operation Market Garden and the tragic airborne assault into Nazi-occupied Holland in 1944. An American citizen since 1951, Ryan conducted extensive interviews and developed the largest repository of World War II paraphernalia and information outside of governmental collections. He published his book in 1974 and the movie rights were immediately purchased.⁹⁶

Attenborough had served three years in the Royal Air Force during World War II before returning to acting. He does not attempt to conceal the fact that he includes messages in his films. From *Oh! What A Lovely War* to *Gandhi*, he portrays individuals or events in troubling times who show astonishing courage. He said, "There was a great impresario called Louis B. Mayer of the MGM studio, who said that messages are for Western Union. He thought that movies were for entertainment, but that doesn't mean that every movie has to be vapid, that it has to have no content. It's terribly important that once in a while a movie comes along that entertains, that creates suspension of disbelief, but when you've left the cinema that day or that night or later that week you think 'wow, that was a fascinating piece of information'".⁹⁷ After *A Bridge Too Far* was complete

and about to hit the theaters, Attenborough gave an interview in which he conveyed his thoughts that it was a “moving film” and would “prove to be one of the greatest antiwar films ever made.” He envisioned his film as an antiwar movie under the war-is-hell theme, and that vivid recreations of combat would underline the futility of war. He included enormous explosions, bloody wounds, and death to not only military personnel but also Dutch civilians to show that the war touches all involved.⁹⁸

Historical in nature, Attenborough provides a story that centers on how ordinary men become extraordinary through their struggles. Military confrontation requires moral and physical courage in the face of the enemy’s violent opposition. Attenborough wanted to display the heroic image of soldiers to the audience. He brought in several military advisors and technical consultants during the screenwriting and filming, to include Major General J.D. Frost, commander of the battalion at Arnhem, wounded and taken prisoner during the battle, only to escape later with the assistance of the Dutch underground; General James Gavin,⁹⁹ commander of the 82nd Airborne Division during Market Garden; Lieutenant General Horrocks, commander of the XXX Corps; and Major General R E Urguhart, commander of the British 1st Airborne Division. This group of military advisors was almost a reunion of sorts of those who fought in Holland. With these men on the consultant list, it would be difficult to not follow the historical context of the battle.¹⁰⁰

DOD cooperation for *A Bridge Too Far* was limited. The Center of Military History read the script and declared the events historically accurate with a few minor suggestions.¹⁰¹ The filmmakers asked for equipment and personnel support for a period

of several months. The DOD response was not overwhelmingly supportive. Although the filmmakers asked for 500 to 800 troops, DOD offered no troops due to operational requirements but would allow troops on leave to participate as extras on an individual, off-duty basis. The Army also offered a public affairs field grade officer to serve as a technical advisor.¹⁰² Given the very capable group of technical advisors the filmmakers had already assembled, his services were not needed.

The production of *The Big Red One* was the result of the efforts of one man. Samuel Fuller fought with the 1st Infantry Division, known as the Big Red One, during World War II. He was an infantryman and saw combat in North Africa, Sicily, and Czechoslovakia. He landed on Omaha Beach at Normandy on D-day and fought through France. He wrote and directed his own films, the central theme of which was his experiences in life and war.¹⁰³

He produced *The Big Red One* because his life-long ambition was to create a movie about his war experiences with the unit he served. He wanted to create a classic war film about the men with whom he had served, his war stories, and the experiences of young men in combat. He chose Lee Marvin as the veteran sergeant to represent the history and stability of the 1st Division. A grizzled and proven veteran of the First World War, the 1st Division was the first American combat unit to engage in combat in World War I and the first to see combat against the Germans in the Second World War.

Fuller was a maverick filmmaker who never felt obligated to follow the crowd. There are no records at the DOD that indicate he ever submitted a script for approval or assistance. The movie was filmed on location in Israel without DOD assistance and

Fuller acted as his own technical advisor. Given his experiences in the war, he was very qualified to determine what was historically accurate at the soldier level.

Fuller had several messages he wanted to send with this film. First, he wanted to demonstrate the heroic actions of the 1st Infantry Division, a division of which he was very proud. This film was borderline propaganda for the Army and for the 1st Infantry Division.

Second, he wanted to demonstrate to the United States audience that war is not only for the military; civilians are sometimes caught up in war. He illustrates the tragedy war brings to civilian personnel with the death of the Sicilian boy's mother. He demonstrates the hatred and rage the Sicilian women have for the German soldiers by showing them mutilate a dead German soldier's body with their scythes and rakes. The joy and celebration parties provided to the soldiers in Sicily and Belgium indicate the elation and respite that the populace enjoys once they are liberated from German oppression. He continues his message by exhibiting the horror of the death camp near the film's conclusion. The boy rescued from the concentration camp who dies while riding on the sergeant's shoulders is an indicator that perhaps the Allies waited too long to act against the holocaust.

Last, Fuller demonstrated the innate goodness of the American soldier. These are the clean-cut, all-American soldiers in Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*. Although American soldiers came from different cultures and backgrounds and their performance on the battlefield differed, each provided something to the squad in time of need. Even the squad coward played a role. When pushed and threatened, he performed

as a hero by opening the breach in the wire with the bangalore torpedo for the assault forces to storm through. Fuller clearly articulated that shooting the enemy in combat is not murder; it is merely killing. He provided this message from the point of view of both the German and the American soldiers. He maintained the wholesomeness of the American soldier by keeping his language¹⁰⁴ and actions clean.¹⁰⁵

Fuller summarized his message through the narrator (Robert Carradine) through the dedication for his book.

I'm going to dedicate my book to those who shot but didn't get shot... it's about surviving; surviving is the only glory in war. [Do] you know what I mean?¹⁰⁶

Saving Private Ryan was the work of several people, all guided by the expert tutelage of Steven Spielberg, the director. Spielberg never served in the military and he is the first director in this study who is too young to have any personal experiences in World War II. Born in 1946, he relived World War II vicariously through the stories his father and other service members told during periodic reunions. Spielberg was exposed to both the positive side of the war--the camaraderie the men still felt long after the war was over--and the negative side--the post traumatic stress that still plagued some of the veterans. His father was an aviator who fought in India, Guam and Burma. The stories at these reunions were vastly different from the war movies Hollywood produced, but Spielberg chose to believe Hollywood because his father's stories were too harsh. Many years later, he realized that his father's stories were true.¹⁰⁷

Spielberg became obsessed with war movies and viewed all that were made. The second movie he ever made, when he was fourteen, was a war movie entitled *Escape to*

Nowhere, starring his friends. Inspired by his father, they borrowed his uniforms, and even had him play a cameo role as the jeep driver. By then, he already knew it was just a matter of time before he found the World War II story he wanted to tell.¹⁰⁸

If Spielberg had to select a previous release that was realistic, he would select Wellman's *Battleground* as one of the more pragmatic war films ever produced, although his favorite war film is *All Quiet on the Western Front*.¹⁰⁹ Never having served in combat, Spielberg tried to interpret what combat must have been like through combat footage, historical documentation, and interviews. He tried to use the angles of the combat cameraman on the beach instead of typical Hollywood sweeping panoramas from crane cameras. He likened making *Saving Private Ryan* to serving in the Signal Corps, as had John Huston when he made his World War II documentaries, and filming a documentary from the point of view of the soldiers. He filmed in sequence, beginning with the invasion at Omaha so that every moment in the film developed the next.¹¹⁰ Several of the actors indicated that filming the Omaha scene first allowed them to better portray their character because it changed the way they looked at every other scene. According to Edward Burns, "Nobody was prepared for how horrific it really was, and you really got a sense of what those guys went through." Tom Hanks admitted that some of the fear in their eyes during the landing scene was because the actors were scared. . . . And they knew the explosions and gunfire were fake.¹¹¹

To provide a more realistic image of World War II, Spielberg waited for an overcast and dismal day to film the invasion, since most European documentaries were black and white. Spielberg and cinematographer Janusz Kaminski drained 60 percent of

the color from the completed film to give it more of a sepia tone. Spielberg felt that more color glamorizes the war.¹¹²

Spielberg openly confessed that he was making an antiwar film.

Going in, I think there is very little honor to any war. There is very little nobility in any war with the exception of World War II because we had no choice. We either lost our freedom or we maintained it. That was it. My dad told me stories like that when I was growing up, until I got old enough to rebel and say, "That's what a father is supposed to tell a kid. He's supposed to wave the flag and be patriotic and say that without his efforts, I wouldn't have the freedoms I have today, I wouldn't have the bicycle I'm riding." I thought that was a bunch of bunk that my father would tell me that, that it was his job to say things like that. Then I grew up and realized, "My God! World War II really was a crossroads that determined where any of us were going to live and how we were going to live."¹¹³

Spielberg had a message to send and he sent it. War is horrible and it is vastly different from the way Hollywood has portrayed it in the past. He wanted to make a tribute to his father and those like his father that provided the true vision of war. He also wanted to thank them for their service. Spielberg provided the reason behind his decision to embark on *Private Ryan* in a *Newsweek* interview:

Of course every war movie, good or bad, is an antiwar movie. *Saving Private Ryan* will always be that, but I took a very personal approach in telling this particular war story. The film is based on a number of true stories from the Second World War and even from the Civil War about brothers who have died in combat. . . . What first attracted me to the story was its obvious human interest. This was a mission of mercy, not the charge up San Juan Hill. At its core, it is also a morality play. I was intrigued with what makes any of these working-class guys heroes. I think when we fight, war is no longer about a greater good but becomes intensely personal. Kids in combat are simply fighting to survive, fighting to save the guys next to them. . . . When they became heroes it wasn't because they wanted to be like John Wayne, it was because they were not thinking at all. They were acting instinctively, from the gut. These dogfaces who freed the world were a bunch of decent guys. It's their story that now should be told.¹¹⁴

Spielberg used Captain Dale Dye, retired Marine Corps, as his technical advisor. Dye put the cast through a ten-day boot camp to indoctrinate them into basic military order and drill. During this boot camp, they learned weapons drills, close combat, individual maneuver and tactics, and the World War II-era military idiom and hand signals. The last five days of the boot camp were spent in the field living in tents, eating rations, and hiking with full packs. Each of the actors thought it was greatly beneficial to their accurate portrayal of tired, miserable soldiers who wanted to go home.¹¹⁵

Stephen Ambrose, military historian and author of several books, provided technical advice and examples from stories of veterans through his book, *Band of Brothers*, and acted as a consultant.

DOD was provided a script for review but the filmmaker did not ask assistance. The Pentagon did vet the script and cited numerous errors but Spielberg never sent back a corrected copy. The Army had no ability to support the film as they had no World War II era equipment and no personnel on active duty that participated in the conflict that could serve as a technical advisor. Its cooperation could best be classified as “courtesy.”

Conclusion

The greatest influence on each film varied greatly among the films studied. Whether it was the writer, the visionary, the director, the studio head, or even in one case, the actor, many of the greatest film influences were driven by the desire to tell a story or provide a message to the public. Even DOD support was influenced by a film’s message. The further the film from the war years, the less support garnered from DOD and the less the support was actually needed.

The filmmakers provided the vision or image of the film and their ulterior motives and predetermined ideas of warfare played an integral part in the final outcome of the film. Of the nine films, the directors of six of them had served in the military. Neither Spielberg nor Koster served, but that alone did not influence their depiction of the military. Coppola and Scott did not serve either and their depiction of Patton received rave reviews. Several embarked on their mission with preconceived notions or ideas of what war was like and what they wanted to portray. Each had a message they were sending and used the World War II combat film to send that message.

Clearly, the military background of the filmmakers was not an issue regarding the reality of the films, as *Saving Private Ryan* arguably provides the most realistic combat footage of any picture ever produced. Although Spielberg never served, he used people who had served as technical advisors and military historians. He even interviewed veterans to better understand war from a soldier's perspective. He studied war footage and war correspondents' documentaries to better articulate his vision of war. Spielberg created his war fifty-three years after the fact. History has had time to digest the war, determine what was factual and fiction, and provide a mass of anecdotal stories on soldiers' experiences.

Five of the filmmakers indicated they were making an antiwar film. Virtually all of the filmmakers attempted to demonstrate an antiwar message through the "war is hell" theme. The common thought process is to provide combat scenes so powerful and moving that the audience will understand the brutal realities of war and not embark on or

support any more wars, to create a film that would show the horrors of war in the hopes that man would not repeat the awful events of history.

It is difficult to express the antiwar theme for World War II genre films, as a great many Americans understand the necessity of that war. Aldrich and Zanuck thought they could demonstrate to the audience the horrible impact of war on the fighting man. In *A Bridge Too Far*, Attenborough thought vivid recreations of combat scenes would make his movie “one of the greatest antiwar films ever made.”¹¹⁶ Even Franklin Schaffner, director of *Patton*, thought he was making an antiwar film. Spielberg indicated he made an antiwar film with *Saving Private Ryan*. “I realize today that it [World War II] is absolutely the single deciding event of the 20th century. But I wanted to make an antiwar film and I wanted to do anything but make a movie about glory.”¹¹⁷

This quotation from Spielberg poses the question: What is the difference between an antiwar film and a non-antiwar film? In the case of *Private Ryan*, Spielberg indicates that World War II was a “just” war and one that had to be fought, but he is still making an antiwar film. There is a conflict. The connotation of antiwar or not antiwar is up to the discovery of the viewer. Although Spielberg makes an “antiwar” film, one could argue that the heroism and camaraderie that is only found in combat could provide a non-antiwar or at least pro-military image. After all, no one from the American side argues against the statement that the war “had to be fought.”

The definition of an antiwar theme is difficult to ascertain, even among the filmmakers. Virtually everyone in the industry indicates that he is against war; but how does each filmmaker portray those feelings? Zanuck changed the original ending to *The*

Longest Day because he thought it was too downbeat. The original ending of a soldier sitting on an ammo crate on Omaha beach with two rows of dead bodies in the background is a more powerful antiwar message than the ending with Robert Mitchum moving up the hill.¹¹⁸ Likewise, Spielberg indicated he was making an antiwar movie but the film leaves the audience with a great feeling of admiration, respect, and appreciation for the sacrifices endured by the soldiers. The ending scene, when Private Ryan is paying his respect to Captain Miller, who died on the mission to send Ryan home, indicates that Ryan was a respectful and humble man who understood the sacrifices made by those who came to save him. Spielberg certainly could have chosen a different ending if he wanted to emphasize the antiwar nature of the film. He could have stressed the futility of war by killing Private Ryan in the final combat scene, thus nullifying the success of the mission and the attempts of the eight men who risked their lives to save him. Or, he could have turned Ryan into a villain or criminal in his postwar life, thus emphasizing the irony of the eight men sacrificing their lives for him.

Not all of the movies publicly advocated the antiwar theme. Wellman made *G.I. Joe* as a tribute to Ernie Pyle's fighting man. Dore Schary, the man behind the vision for *Battleground*, designed the movie so people would not forget or turn away from the sacrifices of war as he thought they did after the First World War. *Patton*, although respected and admired by many involved in the production, was chosen as a film during a tense period in civil-military relations more for dramatic reasons. From a motion picture standpoint, McCarthy indicated that Patton was "very theatrical and very flamboyant and had several Achilles heels. All these things put together made for fine drama."¹¹⁹

Three of the nine films did not receive direct DOD support and assistance, while only three received substantial assistance in terms of manpower and equipment. By the time *Saving Private Ryan* was produced, Pentagon assistance was no longer required. DOD cannot provide World War II equipment, veterans, or even technical advisors on a more experienced basis than what is provided in the civilian arena. The exploding budgets available to filmmakers renders military assistance obsolete unless they want use of a military owned location, for example, historic buildings at Schofield Barracks near Pearl Harbor, or a critical piece of modern equipment like aircraft carriers. The last two movies studied did not require DOD assistance.

DOD assistance was not an indicator of a film's box office success. *Attack!* was not hugely successful without DOD assistance, but neither was *A Bridge Too Far*, which did receive some assistance. The most significant impact of DOD assistance was the ability of DOD to alter scripts prior to their release. DOD, along with the governments of three other countries, pledged enormous support to *The Longest Day*. In return, DOD received an advance copy of the script with the power to delete or alter scenes that did not pass the approval process. One of the scenes opposed by the Pentagon was a scene of American soldiers shooting surrendering Germans during the invasion at Normandy. Although DOD objected, Zanuck did not delete the scene but added dialogue to the scene indicating that the soldiers did not know the Germans were surrendering. This type of "support" appears to be a form of censorship that prevented the public from obtaining a true and realistic military movie depicting all facets of the war.

In regard to the films studied in this thesis, not until *Saving Private Ryan* was the public immersed in the destruction, profanity, and chaos of war. The true horrors of war were first introduced during Vietnam movies of the 70s and 80s, but the inhumane aspects of war were not included in any World War II movies. The Second World War movies maintained a certain sanitation that precluded excessive blood and violence, which was an outgrowth of general Hollywood censorship until the mid-1960s. But even later films like *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Big Red One*, still adhered to the clean war image.

The movies selected were not tailored for the public's perception of the military at the time of production, with the exception of *Patton*. *Patton* was the only movie examined that took into account the general antiwar feeling of the public during the script selection. It was greatly influenced by the Vietnam War and the public outcry against the military at the time. Zanuck gave indications that he accounted for the public's perception of the military at the time of production. He said, "I wonder, however, if American audiences will understand, especially in these times, or appreciate him [Patton] as much as I do. Perhaps this will provide the controversy we want in the picture."¹²⁰ There were two competing scripts for the movie and the more rebellious, anti-glorious depiction of the military was the one selected. The antiwar atmosphere and Scott's agenda were prevalent in bringing Coppola's script to the forefront.

During the opening scene at *Patton's* 1970 premiere, there were hisses and boos when the giant American flag spread across the screen, indicating the public's negative impression of the American military. The attitude was slowly altered as the audience

listened to the candor and texture of the opening address to the troops. The audience exploded with laughter when it heard the “shoveling shit in Louisiana” line. The intended effect was evident and it gave the film an immediate antiwar feeling.¹²¹ *Patton* won the Academy Award for Best Picture, among six others, an indication that critics and audiences appreciated the film and its contents, regardless of the public perception of the military at the time. When Edmund North accepted the Academy Award for the screenplay of *Patton*, he said, “I hope those who see the picture will agree with me that it is not only a war picture, but a peace picture as well.”¹²²

The filmmakers studied had ulterior motives when they produced these movies. Although making money is the common goal of the filmmakers and the studios, it is not always the deciding factor as to whether or not to produce a certain movie. The filmmaker’s vision and size of budget are key factors in determining film production. *The Longest Day* was not a popular film among studio heads, and most pundits expected it to fail miserably at the box office. But Zanuck’s influence won and it was very successful, saving 20th Century Fox from financial ruin.

¹Rubin, 50

²For the purpose of this study, filmmaker includes writers, directors, producers, studio heads, and actors. Any of which may have had a profound influence on the film production. In some films we will find out that a single person had a great influence while in other films several people will be responsible for the eventual end product.

³Suid, 256-257.

⁴Ibid, 63.

⁵Access Indiana Teaching and Learning Center, available from <http://tlc.ai.org/pyle.htm>; internet; accessed on 17 January 2001.

⁶James Tobin, *Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to World War II* (New York: The Free Press, Simon and Schuster, 1997), review by Roger Miller.

⁷Access Indiana Teaching and Learning Center, available from <http://tlc.ai.org/pyle.htm>; internet; accessed on 17 January 2001.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Tobin.

¹¹Access Indiana Teaching and Learning Center, available from <http://tlc.ai.org/pyle.htm>; internet; accessed on 17 January 2001.

¹²“Ernie Pyle Sets Rules for Own Role in Pic,” *Variety*, 29 March 1944, 3.

¹³Suid, 64.

¹⁴Doherty, 7 and 198.

¹⁵Cowan presented the picture as a love story, figuratively speaking, between Pyle and the infantry soldier and asked the Pictorial Branch of the War Department if he could use John Huston as his director. Huston had enlisted in the Army and was making a film titled *The Battle of San Pietro* at the time. Huston read the script and made some constructive comments and recommendations, but Cowan was unable to secure his services.

¹⁶Suid, 64-65.

¹⁷Steven Ray Rubin, *War Films 1945-1970* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, inc., 1981), 32.

¹⁸Internet Movie Database, available from <http://www.imdb.com>; internet; accessed on 22 February 2001.

¹⁹Suid, 64-65.

²⁰Rubin, 32-33.

²¹Suid, 66-67.

²²Ibid, 67.

²³Ibid, 67.

²⁴Kathryn Kane, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1982), 92-100.

²⁵Suid, 67.

²⁶“Honoring Ernie Pyle,” *Soldier Magazine*, June 1995, 50.

²⁷Doherty, 7. After writing extensively in the European Theater of War, Pyle returned to the United States for a short while before moving to the Pacific Theater. Ernie did not return from the Pacific as a sniper bullet struck him in the temple after a machine gun ambush on Ie Shima, an island near Okinawa on 18 April 1945, at the age of 44.

The GIs with Pyle when he died found a column in his pocket that he intended to publish when the war was over. In it he wrote,

The unnatural sight of cold dead men scattered over the hillsides and in the ditches along the high rows of hedge throughout the world. Dead men by mass production--in one country after another--month after month and year after year. Dead men in winter and dead men in summer. Dead men in such familiar promiscuity that they become monotonous. Dead men in such monstrous infinity that you come almost to hate them.

The war was hard on Ernie as it was on most folks, but he was dearly loved and dearly missed.

The soldiers erected a monument at the location that read: AT THIS SPOT THE 77TH INFANTRY DIVISION LOST A BUDDY ERNIE PYLE 18 APRIL 1945. The soldiers later replaced the wooden monument with a granite monument that bears the same inscription.

²⁸Suid, 75.

²⁹Ibid, 76.

³⁰Rubin, 24-42.

³¹Suid, 75.

³²Rubin, 31.

³³Doherty, 272.

³⁴Suid, 76.

³⁵Ibid, 77.

³⁶Ibid, 74-81.

³⁷*Battleground*, 1949. MGM, directed by William Wellman.

³⁸Suid, 137-139.

³⁹Ibid, 175.

⁴⁰Ibid, 175.

⁴¹*Attack!*, 1956. United Artists, directed by Robert Aldrich.

⁴²Suid, 198.

⁴³Basinger, 343.

⁴⁴Internet Movie Database, available from <http://www.imdb.com>; internet; accessed on 25 February 2001

⁴⁵DOD was significantly recognized for its support in the closing credits, unlike other movies in which it received cursory recognition in the credits. The full screen notice read, "The Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation thanks the United States Army for its generous cooperation in the production of this motion picture."

⁴⁶Suid, 142-143.

⁴⁷Basinger, 198.

⁴⁸Suid, 142-145.

⁴⁹Ibid, 145.

⁵⁰Rubin, 47-48.

⁵¹Suid, 149.

⁵²Rubin, 50-51.

⁵³Ibid, 45.

⁵⁴Internet Movie Database, available from <http://www.imdb.com>; internet; accessed on 27 February 2001.

⁵⁵Suid, 148-149.

⁵⁶Rubin, 46-47.

⁵⁷Suid, 66-67.

⁵⁸Suid, 143-148.

⁵⁹The commander of NATO at the time was Air Force General Lauris Norstad. Norstad recommended that Zanuck apply to each of the countries for their troops instead of asking for a NATO order. He also sent a telegram to the Pentagon encouraging support for the film. "I feel that this excellent book, brought to the screen with Zanuck's skill, could be very useful to the military services and to the United States. I think the German aspect could be handled in reasonable perspective and, on balance, the film would benefit the alliance."

⁶⁰The Berlin Wall was erected during filming so a direct phone line was installed from the Point Du Hoc filming location to the rangers' headquarters in Wiesbaden, Germany, in case they were needed.

⁶¹Rubin, 51-54.

⁶²Ibid, 69. This is where many film studies indicate an era was coming to an end. Previously, military equipment and manpower from the services was easily obtained and used throughout the majority of major motion pictures. A major policy shift would soon occur. Interesting that a representative from California, home of the majority of the filmmakers, would initiate this request that would ultimately change the way studios could gather military support.

⁶³Rubin, 76. The actual memo read: "Participation in the film, 'The Longest Day' has been lowered from 700 to 250 at the direction of the Secretary of Defense. This decision was based on the fact that the number originally planned was much larger than is normal in military cooperation. The curtailed participation is being authorized on the basis that it is in the national interest to do so."

⁶⁴Suid, 147.

⁶⁵Ibid, 158-162.

⁶⁶Basinger, 198-199.

⁶⁷Suid, 162.

⁶⁸Ibid, 244-245.

⁶⁹Steven Jay Rubin, *Combat Films 1945-1970* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, inc., 1981), 202.

⁷⁰“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*, interview with Richard Patton, Grandson of George Patton.

⁷¹Suid, 244-245.

⁷²Ibid, 245.

⁷³“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*, interview with Richard Patton, Grandson of George Patton.

⁷⁴Rubin, 202-203.

⁷⁵Suid, 245-246. The family lawyer stated that they objected “not only on the ground of possible invasion of privacy but, equally important, on the ground that it is their considered opinion that such picture could not portray the character of General Patton as it actually was.” They regarded “the making of such picture with great distress and assure your company that such motion picture will be most repugnant to them, and further assure your company that they have opposed strenuously and continue to oppose strenuously the production of such a picture so distasteful to each of them.”

⁷⁶Ibid, 246.

⁷⁷Ibid, 201.

⁷⁸Rubin, 203.

⁷⁹Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 284-285.

⁸⁰“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*, interview with Richard Patton, Grandson of George Patton.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Suid, 246-247.

⁸⁴This is the first film I have observed where the screenwriter is not only not involved in World War II, but really has no recollection of World War II or Patton for that matter. Coppola took all of his material from biographies and official World War II records to write his screenplay and based it on what he read. He had no preconceived notions or agendas in writing the screenplay and tried to accurately portray the character of the person he studied.

⁸⁵Rubin, 205.

⁸⁶“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*, interview with Richard Patton, Grandson of George Patton. Scott would later admit that he developed an “enormous affection” for Patton and “a feeling of amazement and respect for him.” Suid, 252.

⁸⁷Rubin, 212-213. McCarthy mentioned he was afraid of actors turning down the part due to the perceived character glorification at a time that the military was not deemed in high regard across America, but he also thought that Wyler could turn that script into something great.

⁸⁸Ibid, 213. As McCarthy put it, Coppola’s script was “like having a handful of pearls and no string.” Over two years later when McCarthy finally received Webb’s script, he said, “It was a beautifully structured script but the pearls had disappeared and now I had the string.”

⁸⁹Suid, 108. John Wayne indicated his brand of violence could only be directed against villains. He felt that he had always tried “to portray an officer. . . . or a non-commissioned officer or a man in the service in a manner that benefits the service and also gives a proper break for the man to react in a human manner.”

⁹⁰Ibid, 249-251.

⁹¹Suid, 252.

⁹²Ibid, 254.

⁹³Ibid, 252.

⁹⁴Ibid, 251.

⁹⁵Rubin, 202-203.

⁹⁶Dublin Writers Museum, Ohio University.

⁹⁷Interview with Richard Whitaker of the Cambridge Film Institute.

⁹⁸Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 304-307.

⁹⁹It is interesting to note that many critics assessed that Ryan O'Neal was miscast as Gavin because of his country club looks. He lacked a certain 'military look' about him. Gavin himself said that O'Neal "tried very hard, could not have been more serious in trying to carry out the role in which he was cast, and I admired his effort. . . . [but he was] perceived as a matinee idol, and it may have been very difficult for him to carry out the role that I had." Another problem perceived by Gavin and others was that the actors received no basic instruction in drill that we have seen in other movies (*G.I. Joe*, *Battleground*, etc.).

¹⁰⁰An added problem though is finding enough space in the movie to insert each of their respective memorable events. Although not discussed, a group of egos that large would need some management to keep all of them as consultants.

¹⁰¹James J Steinbach, Acting Chief, Histories Division, Memo to Department of the Army from the Center of Military History dated 31 March 1976. Some of the suggestions were to change Gavin's rank to Brigadier General; show more anxiety for the jump among the actors; include more 'sirs' in the dialogue; change radio procedures to include call signs instead of unit names; delete 'lance sergeants'; and paratroopers cannot fire their weapons while descending.

¹⁰²Message from the Office of the Secretary of Defense dated 8 June 1976, Joint Chiefs of Staff Message Center, Department of Defense.

¹⁰³Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film, Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 180-181.

¹⁰⁴Vulgarity was kept to a minimum and the profanity was limited to a few of the 'cleaner' curse words. Profanity was not non-existent at the time. In a book by a 1st Infantry Division enlisted man, John Hurkala, *The Fighting First Division*, he articulates the debauchery of many of the officers and soldiers with alcohol and women of ill repute. He also uses the word "fugg" in various forms, i.e. fugging, fugger, etc. The assumption is that 'fugg' is a substitution required by censors for an expletive commonly heard among soldiers. A great many of these activities that were normal and accepted then, would not be tolerated today.

¹⁰⁵This movie was released about the same time as the Vietnam movies *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*, which did not always depict the American soldier as a wholesome member of society who necessarily would do the right thing.

¹⁰⁶*The Big Red One*, (Hollywood: United Artists, 1980), movie.

¹⁰⁷Mr. Showbiz, available from <http://www.mrshowbiz.com>; internet; Stephen Schaefer interview with Steven Spielberg; accessed on 12 March 2001.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Official *Saving Private Ryan* website, available from <http://www.rzm.com/pvt.ryan/index.html>; internet; accessed on 28 February 2001.

¹¹²Schaefer. This is a very good point and possibly a contributing factor to why *The Big Red One* and *A Bridge Too Far* were not more successful. It could also be a contributing factor as to why the Vietnam conflict was not very popular on daily National TV in addition to the critical views of the newscasters.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴“Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*: Small Truths at the Expense of Big Ones,” David Walsh, *Newsweek*, 31 July 1998. This is a key point. Many leaders died early in the assault leaving a great many units leaderless. Others picked up the slack and groups of men were “grabbed” by a leader and set out to assault positions to make room for others. Individual acts of heroism saved the day on Omaha; something that cannot be trained.

¹¹⁵Official *Saving Private Ryan* website, available from <http://www.rzm.com/pvt.ryan/index.html>; internet; accessed on 28 February 2001.

¹¹⁶Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 304-307.

¹¹⁷Schaefer.

¹¹⁸Suid, 176.

¹¹⁹Ibid, 244-245.

¹²⁰Rubin, 203.

¹²¹Rubin, 209. According to George Seaton, a twentieth Century Fox producer, who was present at the premier.

¹²²Suid, 251.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to study whether or not the filmmakers maintained historical accuracy in each selected film. Did the movie portray events as they happened or did the producer add fiction to the movie story to sell more tickets or simply move the action along, that is, poetic license? Does the movie portray historically accurate missions and tactics or does the movie use a historical event or backdrop for a fictional movie? Finally, what effect does the accuracy have on the film?

The Films

The Story of G.I. Joe uses C Company, 18th Infantry Regiment as a conduit to tell Ernie Pyle's story of the infantrymen in World War II. It is not designed to be a historical replication of the exploits of the 18th Regiment, but rather a compilation of Pyle's writings. Therefore, historical accuracy follows Pyle's writings and not necessarily the actual engagements of C Company. In particular scenes that the 18th Regiment did not historically participate, the film uses C Company to represent units that were actually there.

The film begins with the troops of C Company, 18th Infantry Regiment, loading onto trucks in North Africa. Ernie Pyle, a soon-to-be-famous war correspondent, is looking for the front lines and joins them on the back of the truck. World War II has just begun for American soldiers in the European Theater. The men of Company C and the

audience have just been introduced to Pyle, who will track the soldiers' exploits through North Africa, Sicily, and into Italy.

During the course of the movie, Pyle interacts with members of C Company. Although he does not stay with them the entire time, he starts with them in North Africa, and then finds them on the battlefield in Sicily and Italy. Although the movie displays little in the arena of historical missions and battles, we can surmise several factual events from the inferences made throughout the movie by Pyle and the troops. Pyle traveled extensively throughout the Southern European theater and spent time with a great many soldiers. In the film, he always made it a point to find his way back to the boys with whom he started the war, the boys in C Company.

The 18th Infantry Regiment, part of 1st Infantry Division, saw a great deal of action during World War II. They landed as a part of Operation Torch in North Africa and fought at Kasserine Pass.¹ They were originally part of the Center Task Force then became part of II Corps under MG Fredendall. They came ashore near Oran and met little resistance. The troops moved forward by truck convoys that were subsequently attacked by German fighters and dive-bombers. These attacks disrupted the already poor organization of the United States Army and hampered their ability to put any type of coherent attack together towards Tunisia.²

Although *G.I Joe* remains generic in nature in terms of their mission, the scene described above is most likely the movement across North Africa after an uneventful landing near Oran. The troops are green, fresh, full of energy and life, and ready to

conquer the world. Lt Walker (Robert Mitchum), their leader, understands the status of training versus the reality of war already.

Ernie Pyle: Pretty good-looking outfit you have here.

Lt. Walker: We're not an outfit yet, maybe by this time tomorrow we will be.³

As the convoy moves forward, the troops exchange a few stories before they are mesmerized by the distant sound of artillery. You can see the first signs of fear in their eyes as they strain to look over the top of the truck towards the sound of the guns. The trucks screech to a halt and they are suddenly under an air attack from a plane the audience never sees. The soldiers scramble for cover and the air attack fades into the distance.

The troops continue movement and Ernie begins writing about their first encounters. Although he never mentions the battles by name, one can assume that the initial defeat alluded to in the film is of the group of engagements referred to as the Battle of Kasserine Pass, since during this battle US troops were initially defeated by German forces and forced to withdraw.⁴

G.I. Joe hit on this early defeat in North Africa as Pyle narrated the events. Lt Walker appears shaken as he reports to higher headquarters of tanks descending on their position. Walker is looking for instructions and guidance when the command radio reports a general withdrawal. His competent and tough NCO, Sgt Warnicki, storms in and reports he did the best he could in trying to get men out before being overrun by German tanks, then he weeps. Not many men show emotion in the films of the 1940s, and this could be a precursor for the final scene in which Warnicki exhibits symptoms of

battle fatigue. The emotion and the early defeat in battle were not big attractions in early war movies, but they were historically accurate.

Pyle leaves for a while and rejoins C Company after they have been through Tunisia, Sicily, and Salerno. He meets a now Captain Walker and comments on the outfit. This time Walker remarks that “they’re tough, killers. . . they better be.” The 18th Infantry Regiment received campaign credit for Algeria-French Morocco with Arrowhead, indicating an amphibious assault. They also received campaign credit for Tunisia and Sicily with Arrowhead. The 1st Infantry Division then left for England in preparation for the Normandy invasion. Although the 18th Infantry Regiment was not present for the battles near Monte Cassino, Ernie Pyle was there. The filmmaker used the artistic device of using the same group to represent all the units depicted in Pyle’s writings. The German defensive line at Gustav-Cassino was formidable, and it took the Allies over four months to clear the line and almost another four months to reach Northern Italy. The weather was horrible and the German fortifications were well prepared in the mountainous terrain. Hill 516 was 1,100 feet high and had a Benedictine monastery on its summit that the Allies were reluctant to bomb.⁵

It was during this time that Ernie Pyle wrote the column about Captain Henry T. Waskow from Belton, Texas, that would win him the Pulitzer Prize. His column described a well-respected and admired company commander and the night they brought his body down from the battlefield on hill 1205 on a mule. Although these events were real, Waskow was from the 36th Infantry Division, a Division that landed at Salerno and Anzio, then fought through Italy.⁶ The 36th Division attacked the Gustav-Cassino line

and suffered numerous casualties. After a 2,000-gun bombardment, followed by an attack of four corps abreast, Cassino finally fell to units of the Second Polish Corps.⁷

The scene of the Allied bombing of the sixth-century Monte Cassino Abbey that the Germans were using for defensive positions could be labeled as propaganda. The scene is used to demonstrate to the public that some historical buildings had to be destroyed because Germans were using them as fortifications and Americans were dying trying to assault them.⁸ It is also important to the movie because this series of combat actions establishes the existence of combat fatigue among the soldiers and establishes the conditions for the eventual mental breakdown of the sergeant and the death of the commander.

Allied leaders decided that if the Germans were going to use the monastery for defensive positions and US soldiers were losing their lives, then it was a viable target. General Dwight D Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, provided the reason for the bombing. The bombing was, however, unsuccessful, as the Germans used the rubble to assist in fortifying the hill.

If we must choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men's lives, then our own men's lives count infinitely more.⁹

Ernie Pyle narrating Eisenhower's statement

The movie is a compilation of stories Ernie wrote during the war; it is never claimed that all occurred during his stay with the 18th Infantry Regiment. This is just a method used to keep some semblance of continuity to a film that would otherwise wander incoherently and be difficult for audiences to understand.

Battleground begins in late 1944. The 101st Infantry Division was on rest and reorganization at Camp Mourmelon, a training area near Reims, France, and about 100 miles from Bastogne. The Division Commander, Major General Maxwell Taylor, was in the United States and would not make it back to Bastogne until the 27th of December, after the siege had been broken. The assistant division commander and many senior members of the subordinate commands and staff were in England. The senior representative in command was the artillery commander, Brigadier General McAuliffe. The division was also short many soldiers, who were on leave to Paris when the order to move was sent down at 2100 on December 17th.¹⁰

The film depicts soldiers in a training camp “somewhere in France”, reorganizing and relaxing from previous battles. Troops are playing football, drilling, shining boots or just dreaming of what they will do in Paris on their pass. New recruits are indoctrinated into veteran units and the scene is very tranquil. Although the 101st had many troops in Paris when the call came to move forward, not all units were authorized passes at the same time. As with any other military operation, troops were at different levels of readiness. Therefore the possibility of these men not yet having the opportunity to access Paris on pass is justified.

The men depicted in *Battleground* were members of I Company. In the 101st Division during Bastogne, there were three I companies: one in 3-501st, one in 3-502nd, one in 3-506th. The 327th Glider Infantry Regiment did not have an I company because their 3rd Battalion, although called 3-327th, was actually 1-401st Glider and had A, B, and C companies in accordance with the Army naming convention in use during the

war.¹¹ Although from a historical perspective I Company did not receive the German surrender party, the portrayal of the events are virtually identical to the recorded events provided through interviews in January 1945 by several members of the 101st command.

At 1130 on 22 December 1944, four Germans--a major, a captain, and two enlisted men--approached men from Company F, 327th Glider Infantry on a road leading into Bastogne. Three Americans, one of whom could speak German, met them. It appeared the Germans wanted to negotiate terms for surrender.¹²

The word went up the chain of command and the rumor spread throughout the soldiers across the front. The German enlisted were left at the weapons platoon command post and the two officers were blindfolded and taken to the division command post. Meanwhile, some of the defenders of Bastogne, encouraged by the Germans' desire to surrender, climbed from their foxholes and spent the noon hour shaving, washing and going to the saddle trenches. The Germans delivered their message to Colonel Harper, Commander of the 327th Infantry, who in turn delivered it to Brigadier General McAuliffe. McAuliffe laughed at the request and said, "Aw, nuts!" He couldn't believe the Germans were asking for his surrender because he thought reinforcements were on the way, and he was giving the Germans "one hell of a beating." When asking his staff how to reply, Colonel Kinnard, his G3 and later technical advisor for this film, replied, "that first remark of yours would be hard to beat." The staff cheered and the reply was sent. Colonel Harper escorted the German officers back to the command post where the enlisted men were waiting.¹³

The Germans fired artillery rounds carrying propaganda leaflets into the Bastogne defense, both in real life and the film. The film version leaflet read by Holly was almost identical to a propaganda sheet fired into the American lines on Christmas Eve.¹⁴

On Christmas morning around 0245, the Germans attacked in full force. It turned into hand-to-hand and house-to-house fighting. In a desperate attempt to salvage the defensive positions, the 101st mobilized the cooks, clergy, radiomen, clerks, and staff officers from the 502nd to stem the tide. Major Douglas T. Davidson, the 502nd surgeon, led out the walking wounded from the field hospital to fight the oncoming tanks.¹⁵ The desperate situation was portrayed well in *Battleground*, as the troops in the rear on the linear battlefield became the hope on which the defense of Bastogne relied. Regardless of their individual predicaments, soldiers performed heroically for the cause, both in the movie and in historical accounts of the action that winter.

Determining historical accuracy in *Attack!*, a film that maintains unit anonymity, is difficult. They were simply referred to as Fox Company, White Battalion, 2nd Regiment. No shoulder patches were ever worn and United States divisions were never identified. One can surmise several factors based on the characters' conversions and the actions presented in the film. First, the original headline displays Europe, 1944. Since there is no date given, the location is either in Italy, or Western Europe after the Normandy invasion. The opening scene in the movie, divulged at a later time, occurs in the vicinity of Aachen. Aachen is near the Belgian border and was the first German city to fall to Allied attacks. Bitter fighting occurred throughout the Huertgen Forest prior to the city's capitulating on 21 October 1944. Soon after this is announced and the troops

believe their fight is over, division announces there has been a major German breakthrough and the unit is moving back to the front. They are informed that the airborne units are already heading that way. This is the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge.

Second, both Lieutenant Colonel Parker and Captain Cooney indicate they joined the National Guard. They are both from the small town of Riverview. Because of their hometown connection, and Parker's desire to be a politician after the war with the help of Cooney's father, the local judge; one can surmise that they are members of a National Guard division activated for duty during World War II, and not Reserve Officers assimilated into an active duty unit.

Third, the area was not cold enough to be the Ardennes forest or in the vicinity of Bastogne, that is, the area encompassing the Battle of the Bulge, but the filmmaker was not looking for historical accuracy in regard to the location: he simply wanted the audience to understand that the action was taking place in the European theater after the Normandy invasion. The aim of the film was to show conflict between officers in a combat environment, not necessarily a specific battle in time or space.

The uniforms worn throughout *Attack!* appeared to be vintage 1943 issue combat uniforms and equipment. Costa carried the Thompson 45-submachine gun while Woodruff carried the M1 carbine. All the other soldiers carried the M1 Garand. The absence of a BAR within the platoon was inauspicious. The uniforms appeared many times to be new and relatively clean, given the circumstances. Parker's uniform appeared to be almost pressed during the final combat scene.

It is interesting to note that both the German and American tanks used in the film appeared to be of the same model, albeit with changes to the outer structure. When the German tanks attacked the town, they were referred to as Panzers. Although there is a plethora of variations to the German tanks during their research and development phases, virtually all of the Panzer tanks had a box or flat faced front. During close-ups of the German tanks in this film, there is an obvious slanted front with a metal handrail on the left side of the front glacis. The side front fenders are sloping, as opposed to angular as on the German tanks, and the front machine gun from the driver's compartment resembles that of a United States issue Sherman tank. The square rear deck on the initial tank attack in the village of Linelle more resembles the 1942 M5 Stuart light tank, while the tanks shown later indicate a 1942 M4A4 Sherman tank. Captured American equipment and weapons, to include tanks, were often used against the Americans, indicating this scene is not impossible, although improbable.¹⁶

The Panzer IV was the most widely made and used German tank during World War II, but every model incorporated the flat front chassis and angular track protector. The Panther has the closest resemblance to the front glacis, but the road wheels offset and have no upper wheel guides, and the track rests on the top of the road wheels, indicating those used for the film were neither Panzer IVs nor Panthers.¹⁷

The historical context in *D-Day, The Sixth of June* is a backdrop for a romance, the prime subject of the film. The film begins aboard a ship with Special Team Six about to assault Normandy in 1944, and then flashes back to the summer of 1942, when both Parker (Robert Taylor) and Wynter (Richard Todd) are in England. Parker is assigned to

United States Army European Theater of Operations. His office is a component of a plans division assigned the task of developing plans as needed for the European Theater. The chief of the plans division is Lieutenant Colonel Alex Timor, who detests officers from West Point, which is where Parker was commissioned.

Parker arrives at headquarters wearing the officer's service dress or walking-out uniform with the officer's peaked cap.¹⁸ On his left sleeve, he wears the present day FORSCOM patch with three horizontal stripes, one each of red, white and blue, with the blue on top. This patch was introduced in 1942, although during World War I, General Pershing personally selected a similar patch for all Americans assigned to Army Ground Forces or General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces to wear.¹⁹ Although Parker does not specifically mention these units, his office and work in London presumably supply the Army Ground Forces with operational plans.

The first order of business for Timor's staff is planning for Operation Sledgehammer. Sledgehammer is a plan for the invasion of Europe in 1942, provided either the Soviet Union collapsed or the Allies found a German weakness. It was briefed to Allied leaders in April 1942 along with Operation Roundup, which was a plan for the invasion of Europe in 1943. Sledgehammer was officially quashed in July 1942, Roundup was postponed, and the Allies agreed on Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. Although Sledgehammer is notionally what the staff was planning, the actual planning and subsequent brief to the Allied leaders was complete before Parker arrived in London. They could, however, have been working on revisions, branches, or sequels to the plan.

Soon after Sledgehammer is officially quashed, an action not acknowledged in the film, Timor decides to accompany a special raid mission by combined Canadian and British commandos into German-held France, as an observer. The plan is secret and code-named Operation Jubilee. Soon after the raid, which does not occur according to plan, Timor informs a reporter that he was involved in the raid on Dieppe. The raid on Dieppe, or Operation Jubilee, occurred on 19 August 1942 keeping the film within the proper historical context.

Timor's staff is now set to work on Operation Torch, the allied invasion of North Africa. Although the operation's name is never acknowledged in the film, once the invasion commences, the folder containing the plans titled "Operation Torch" is stamped "Operation Completed." Since Operation Torch commenced in November 1942, the film's setting should reflect the approaching Christmas season. However, there is no hint of Christmas or even a notion of a change of seasons.

Timor's staff is disbanded and the officers receive orders to different units within the European theater. Parker receives orders to report to the Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers on the first available aircraft. Once he arrives in Algiers, he is again wearing the same style service dress uniform with a different patch on his sleeve. It is a circular patch with the letters "AF" embroidered in a curved pattern to match the circle, and the colors are red, white and blue. This is the patch of the Allied Force Headquarters. It was authorized for wear by members of Allied Force Headquarters, both American and British, and by personnel of separate units assigned to Headquarters Command. The

patch was approved for wear on 10 May 1943,²⁰ which quickly moves the film forward six months.

While reporting to Algiers Allied Headquarters, a convoy of tanks and other military vehicles move through a city street. The primary United States battle tank in North Africa was the M4 Sherman and variants of the Stuart light tank. In the film, the tanks moving through the city street are variants of the M47, which were not introduced, in mass quantity until almost 1953.²¹

Parker's only means of returning to England is to volunteer for a secret mission commanded by his former boss, newly promoted Colonel Timor. The command has been dubbed Special Team Six²² and is destined for the coast of France forty minutes before the main body at Angel Point, which is allegedly located on the five-mile stretch of beach between the American and British sectors. Parker leaves North Africa and returns to England. The film is vague regarding the time period from late 1942 to the invasion of Normandy in June of 1944, and the filmmaker would have the audience believe the depicted events occur sequentially over a short period of time.

The uniform used for Special Team Six is the U.S. standard combat uniform as discussed earlier, with one notable exception; the patch on the left sleeve is that of the British 9th Parachute Battalion. Although the original commanding officer of Special Team Six was an American prior to his last second removal and replacement by a British officer, the force is wearing a British patch.²³

With *The Longest Day*, Darryl Zanuck created what many dubbed the “most ambitious undertaking [in filmmaking].” He was recreating the actual events and

portraying the leaders who executed those events. He was recreating the invasion of Normandy by conducting amphibious assaults on Omaha, Sword and Utah Beaches. He was recreating British commando raids to hold bridges over the Orne River. He was recreating the 82nd Airborne drop into Sainte-Mere-Eglise²⁴ and the ranger assault at Pointe du Hoc. Combine these actions with the French resistance and the German defense, and there are many moving parts. Zanuck ensured he had experts at each of these locations, that is, people who had the knowledge and expertise to provide insight into the real execution of the mission. His list of military consultants and technical advisors is extremely long and includes names such as Lieutenant General James Gavin, Major John Howard, commander of the British commando unit ordered to hold the bridge over the Orne River, and Frau Rommel, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's wife.

Zanuck went to great lengths to ensure historical accuracy on the part of the soldiers and equipment. Understanding the significance of the movie and the veteran audience that would view it, he wanted to ensure every aspect of the filmed invasion was accurate. His staff conducted a huge scavenger hunt across Europe to find suitable World War II era equipment. They found an abundance of German equipment in Spain; reconstructed the British gliders from the same company that made them for the actual attack; received guns from all over Europe; and used a British tank they found buried in the sands on Normandy.²⁵ They found three British Spitfires in Belgium and two German Messerschmitts in Spain. They had to recreate the German uniforms because all Nazi era uniforms had been destroyed following the war.²⁶

The only item that did not need much tinkering with was the United States Army uniform. Since it had not changed much since World War II, the soldiers wore their standard issue uniform for the film with a few additions, such as leggings. Although Zanuck made accuracy a critical point, he failed to put correct unit patches on the beach assault reenactors. None of the soldiers on the beach assault are wearing division patches on their sleeves, which is noticeable in the film. The only units wearing shoulder patches are the 82nd and 101st Airborne. Eisenhower was wearing the patch of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, although this patch was not approved for wear until 13 December 1944, several months after the invasion of Normandy.

Other than the patches, the uniforms used throughout the picture were fairly accurate. The airborne troops were wearing the special diagonal pocket combat dress made especially for the paratroopers. The most notable display of uniforms, an exhibit that is a microcosm of the World War II American soldier, is the line of soldiers standing in the airborne chalk preparing to jump. Each soldier is wearing a different piece of uniform, similar to the uniform standards at the time. Few were actually wearing the paratrooper combat dress. Most had on either the M1943 combat outfit, M1941 field jacket, or M1943 field jacket, which was not designed for paratroopers.

Zanuck understood there were some inaccuracies, but he said they were very close to the event that occurred. The invasion of Normandy is an immense event to accurately and historically recreate. He said, "We did land. We did take the beach. We took dramatic license to make it effective. Anything changed was an asset to the film. There is nothing duller on the screen than being accurate but not dramatic. There's no

violation if you use basic fact, if you dramatize basic fact.”²⁷ The realism of *The Longest Day* is sometimes erroneously attributed to the inclusion of real combat footage, but, in reality, no combat footage is used in this film. Every scene is recreated.²⁸ *The Longest Day* is very historically accurate. Although there were some discrepancies, all involved gave careful consideration to ensure the historical accuracy of the film.

Although Ryan’s book was critically acclaimed, it did have a few errors. Written fifteen years after the battle, some factual errors were likely to occur. One of these errors was included in the film, but by the time the error was pointed out to the production staff, the set had already been built and it was too costly to remove. The free French commando skirmish at the Ouistreham Casino was inaccurate, as the casino had been destroyed two years before D-Day by an RAF bombing raid.²⁹

Zanuck included several small items of historical accuracy in the film to add to the film’s verisimilitude. The introduction of Rupert, the dummy paratrooper that was used behind the German lines as part of the deception plan, appeared to work as planned. The clackers used for friendly identification in the dark were introduced just before the invasion. The paratroopers were scattered across the landscape due to poor navigation and winds, and units from the 101st and 82nd were intermingled in some locations. The rangers who scaled Pointe du Hoc found the guns were not in the bunkers at the summit as expected.

There were a few items of interest that were not entirely correct during the landing. During the beach landings, the soldiers have no waterproof protection for their weapons; most are not wearing additional ammunition bandoliers strapped across their

shoulders; and none have life preservers or life belts that were common among those coming ashore. At Sword, the British had not just American style tanks, but an American tank with the star painted on the side.

Patton is strife, its accuracy intertwined with some dramatic additions to provide great entertainment for the audience. McCarthy, Zanuck, Coppola, and veteran screenwriter Edmund North, who was brought in later to provide the string to the pearls of Coppola's script, all sought basic historical accuracy in the picture. Patton was flamboyant and enjoyed the pomp and circumstance that went with the rank of general; he was outspoken and controversial in many of his views; and he was deeply religious. All of these facets of Patton's character would make for a dynamic film if they could be synchronized into a rousing and entertaining story. Patton had already provided the material, now the filmmakers had to relay his complex character to the audience.

There was considerable consternation by the filmmakers about maintaining a high level of excitement in their story while wrestling with the argument of whether or not a certain event was fact or fiction. Having Bradley and Harkin as advisors provided yet more input into the historical accuracy of the film. Neither had any interest in delving much outside the realm of actual history, nor did Scott. Scott said his only goal was to produce "a fair and respectful portrait" of Patton.³⁰

Although historical accuracy was deemed necessary for the filmmakers, so was profitability and the presentation of an entertaining and intriguing film during a time of social unrest. To balance the competing demands, the filmmakers wanted to tell a great story where truth might have to be compromised for the sake of good storytelling. They

adhered to the facts unless the facts destroyed the drama. They were forced to embellish some events and forget others to create a dramatic story. They depicted aspects of the general's behavior that were both controversial and disturbing to some.³¹

The film begins with a Patton prologue to the troops of the 3rd Army. He is wearing his full dress uniform with medals in front of a huge American flag. The speech is authentic in that Patton spoke each part of that speech at some time or another, but not necessarily when he took command of the 3rd Army and not necessarily as a single speech at any one particular venue.³² The filmmakers merged several snippets of Patton speeches into dialogue to provide dramatic effect and a grabbing opening scene. Patton spoke to every command of the 3rd Army prior to moving into France³³ and audiences probably remember him the most because of that speech. Patton also never wore his full medal dress while in theater. Although the uniform is historically correct, it was dramatic license on the part of the filmmakers. The uniform Scott wears is identical to the uniform in a picture of Patton during his last trip home to see his wife Beatrice in 1945.³⁴

In a scene at Patton's headquarters in the North African town of Gafsa, the Royal Air Force commander informs Patton that he will see no more German planes because the Allies had complete air supremacy. About that time, two German planes drop bombs near Patton's headquarters. In the movie, Patton jumps out of his now destroyed window into the middle of the street and starts firing his ivory handled pistol at the German planes that are making a second run. Although this made for great cinema and demonstrated Patton's personality, it is historically inaccurate. The discussion with the RAF commander and the subsequent bombing run by the German planes were accurate, but the

event occurred so fast that Patton did not have time to move to the street and fire at the enemy. According to Chet Hansen, General Omar Bradley's aide at the time, had Patton had the time, he probably would have done that.³⁵

One thing the movie significantly portrayed was Patton the person. He believed in reincarnation and believed that he had fought at the Battle of Carthage some 2,000 years before he stood there with Bradley. He was a poet and the film included parts of his poems. Coppola understood that Patton saw war in the classical sense and that Patton was the classical military leader destined to lead his warriors to a great victory over the Huns.³⁶

The film dramatized Patton's personal rivalry with Montgomery, as portrayed by some historians and people that served with Patton. His race to Messina was also said to be embellished,³⁷ but in his personal memoirs and letters to Beatrice, Patton made clear mention of beating the British to Messina. According to those present, Patton's rivalry was not with Montgomery, but with the British soldier. He believed the American soldier was seen as inferior to his British counterpart because of the defeat at Kasserine Pass. He needed to demonstrate the American soldiers' acumen by crushing the Germans in several successive engagements, to include securing Messina before the British.

Although this made for great screenplay, as Montgomery met tough German resistance and Patton was sweeping the North shore, Montgomery recommended that Patton secure Messina. Unsure of Montgomery's motives, Patton pounced on the opportunity. "This is a horse race in which the prestige of the US Army is at stake," he wrote to 45th Infantry Division Commander Major General Troy Middleton. "We must take Messina before the

British. Please use your best efforts to facilitate the success of our race." Patton saw this as a way to win acclaim and respect for his much-maligned troops.³⁸ Perhaps the rivalry was not embellished at all.

The slapping incident was not embellished, nor did it require any needed extra color. Patton actually slapped two different soldiers in Sicily. He slapped the first soldier with his leather gloves across the face then kicked him in the pants on his way out of the hospital door, and he threatened the second soldier with his pistol. The filmmakers merged the two events into one. Through several of Patton's actions, such as the visits to the hospitals and the kiss on the forehead of the wounded soldier propped up against the tank, the film provided evidence that Patton demonstrated great emotion for the wounded soldier or those killed in combat. He felt that hospitals were a place of honor for warriors wounded in combat, not for men suffering from battle fatigue or shell shock. The slapping scene demonstrated his true feelings, but also confirmed that his actions were wrong for an officer.³⁹

After the invasion of Normandy, Patton thanks Bradley for giving him command of the 3rd Army. Bradley informed Patton that it was not his choice; someone higher had directed the command. Although this was not a well-known event during the war, in correspondence to Frank McCarthy in 1966, Eisenhower wrote a "personal and confidential letter" about Patton to provide a "personal evaluation of my old friend." Eisenhower stated that on several occasions he had to personally intervene to keep Patton in positions of command during the war. Eisenhower never felt that Patton was as effective a commander as Bradley, but "he was genius in pursuit. Recognizing this, I was

determined to keep him in my war organization no matter how often the public might scream for some publicized or foolish incident.”⁴⁰

By the mid-1960s, the United States Army inventory of World War II era equipment was exhausted. Filmmakers had to search elsewhere to find adequate equipment to outfit and arm the impending Hollywood armies that would fill the screen. Spain was a poor country at the conclusion of World War II and the United States needed airfields in the Mediterranean. Spain decided it would trade the United States airfields for surplus Army equipment. It received tanks, aircraft, transportation vehicles, weapons, artillery, and just about any other surplus US military item available for the use of the airfields.⁴¹

Spain remained poor and lacked the facilities and resources to upgrade its military equipment. In the 1960s, it still used US World War II era equipment and kept it in remarkably good shape. The Spanish Army also had some German equipment dating from its friendship with Hitler. By now, Spain had been actively encouraging film companies to create their movies in Spain. It provided an itemized listing of prices for every type of weapon and the daily cost of using its military manpower by rank.⁴²

The battle scenes are great cinematic drama but are rarely accurate in their portrayal of armor. The German tanks at El Guettar are not German Tiger Tanks but United States M-48s converted to appear to be Tigers.⁴³ The US tanks used in *Patton* were not available during the North Africa campaign. The predominant tanks used by American forces in North Africa were the M4 Sherman tanks and the M5 Stuart light tanks. *Patton* appears to use M-47s or M-48s, which were not produced until well after

the war. The M24 has a similar body style of which 5,000 were produced, but it was not introduced in theater until 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge.⁴⁴

A Bridge Too Far was so historically accurate that it was close to documentary in context. Events that transpire in the movie are almost identical to those accounts as captured by Ryan and others. There were some embellishments to provide a storyline for the viewers, and some of the historical accuracies could have been left out to present a smoother flowing film.

Before the credits, before the opening scene, and before the first star crosses the silver screen, newsreel footage of bombs exploding and people dying is shown. A female narrator's voice announces, "It's hard to remember now, but Europe was like this in 1944." The narrator is setting the tone for the movie and wants the audience to go back in time and experience the war as if it were yesterday. The filmmakers are aiming for the sentimental and patriotic viewers, those that remembered the horrors of war and wanted to remember the heroics of the Allies, versus the inflation-plagued period of the late 1970s and the recent strategic defeat in Vietnam. The narrator continues, "The second World War was in its fifth year and still going Hitler's way." This statement is debatable, since, by the time of Market Garden, Paris has been liberated, as has Antwerp, and the Russians have defeated the Germans in huge tank battles at Kursk and Kharkov. Germany was retreating on both fronts. This statement is not meant to be historical, but to convince the audience of the necessity of the mission and the belief in its importance for an Allied victory. The narrator persists by saying that the Germans control most of Europe. She continues her narration with the invasion of Normandy on D-day, the

liberation of Paris, and the notion that the Allies were outrunning their supply lines. “Patton in the South and Montgomery in the North disliked each other intensely,” says the narrator. This competition sold well in Patton and appeared to be the common theme among the media. She indicates that the “long standing rivalry was fierce” and that there were not enough supplies to fuel both Armies. Each General wanted to defeat the Germans, but more importantly, each General wanted to beat the other one to Berlin. So, in September, Montgomery devised a plan that would complete the German defeat by Christmas and bring the boys home. It was Operation Market Garden.

Operation Market Garden was designed to invade Holland and open a passage across the Rhine River and into Germany. It consisted of the largest airborne assault in history. The task was for the airborne troops to secure bridges over the rivers and canals near three different towns. The purpose was to hold these bridges until the British XXX Corps could bring the armor forces across those bridges into Germany, and attack the German heartland from the Northwest. The airborne attack was the Market portion of the operation and the armor attack was the Garden.

The towns destined for capture each had a population of about 90,000 in 1944. Eindhoven was 13 miles from the start line, Nijmegen was 53 miles and Arnhem was 64 miles away. The plan called for each unit to hold the bridges until the ground force arrived, about 24 to 36 hours later. The British XXX Corps would have to rely on one small road for a rapid advance. The soil off the road was not conducive to cross-country driving because of the orchards, bogs, and deep drainage ditches. In some places, the road

was elevated almost ten feet above the surrounding countryside. Any heavy resistance could be seriously detrimental to the advance's reaching Arnhem in the allocated time.⁴⁵

Eisenhower reluctantly approved the operation after some political persuasion. D-day was established for 17 September 1944. The 101st Airborne Division was tasked to secure bridges over the River Aa, the larger Williams Canal at Veghel, the minor River Dommel at St Oedenrode, and the Wilhelmina Canal. Major General Maxwell Taylor, 101st Division Commander, deployed with all his infantry regiments, as he expected artillery support from XXX Corps. The 82nd Airborne Division was tasked to capture bridges over the River Maas at Grave and the Mass-Waal Canal, and then sequentially to secure the bridge over the Waal in the center of Nijmegen. Brigadier General Gavin, 82nd Division Commander, deployed with infantry and artillery, expecting he might have to hold out longer than expected. The 1st British Airborne Division's main task was to secure the bridge over the Rhine, together with the railroad bridge in the heart of Arnhem. They would be dropped six to eight miles from the bridge and have to either pass through or bypass the major town of Oosterbeek. Major General Uguhart deployed with a mix of infantry and artillery and about four days supply.⁴⁶

The historical embellishment begins with Lieutenant General Horrocks briefing the XXX Corps' commanders on the plan of attack. Horrocks informed the Irish Brigade Commander, Lieutenant Colonel J.O.E. ("Joe") Vandeleur (Michael Caine), that they would lead XXX Corps in the attack. Vandeleur thought to himself, 'Oh no, not us again.' He embodied the essence of the combat commander. He always wore combat garb, black beret, a .45 Colt strapped to his hip, and the adopted symbol of his tankers, a

flamboyant emerald green scarf. Horrocks once proclaimed, “If the Germans ever get you, Joe, they’ll think they captured a peasant.”⁴⁷ These two events were combined into one to provide the audience with Vandeleur’s thoughts prior to the invasion and to attempt to distinguish his character, that of a combat commander chosen to lead the attack for all the right reasons.

At 1400 on 17 September, 144 field guns began a rolling barrage in front of the lead units of XXX Corps. Another thirty-six medium guns were added and a separate contingent of 120 field guns in conjunction with a battery of 8-inch heavy guns began a shelling on known German troop concentrations and fortifications. At 1435, the lead ground forces of XXX Corps, the tanks of the Irish Guard under Vandeleur, clamored forward. The first nine tanks were quickly destroyed and heavy fighting ensued. The Irish fought through and eventually reached their first objective that night, an advance of only six miles.⁴⁸ The initial creeping barrage at the beginning of Operation Garden, the ground attack, demonstrated its effects from both the German and the Allied points of view. It was a very accurate portrayal of a creeping barrage, the effects and awesome power of artillery, and the ability of the defenders not only to survive a barrage but also to provide a viable defense immediately following.

Most of the historical context of the fighting followed the actual battle as historians have captured it. The 101st reached most of its objectives on day one, except for the bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal at Son, which was destroyed by a handful of German trainees. They had to wait for the erection of a Bailey bridge before XXX Corps could proceed.⁴⁹ In the film, soldiers race for the bridge and it explodes in front of them

to add suspense and drama to the assault. The 101st secured Eindhoven the next day and the Dutch crowded the streets in celebration of the Allied victory and the liberation of Holland, not realizing that the war was far from over and they were slowing down the XXX Corps attack.

The 82nd Airborne initially did not fair too well. They secured the Grave Bridge but the Germans exploded two of the three bridges over the Maas-Waal Canal. General Field Marshall Otto Moritz Walther Model, commander of Army Group B and the defense of Holland, and Wilhelm Bittrich, commander of the II SS Corps recently stationed in the Arnhem area, agreed that Arnhem was not the key, but stopping the Allied advance at Nijmegen and the Waal River was vital to success. Bittrich wanted to destroy the main bridge over the Waal in downtown Nijmegen, but Model refused, indicating the Germans needed it to mount a counterattack. The Americans needed to secure the bridge but the Germans held the north side. A river assault was planned to attack the bridge from both sides at once. The assault crossing started at 1440, just after the arrival of the boats, while Irish Guard tanks provided support fire from the near side of the bank. Two companies of the 3/504th, under the command of Major Julian Cook (Robert Redford), crossed the Waal west of the bridge under heavy German artillery fire. Half the boats made it to the opposite shore while six successive journeys brought the rest of 3/504th and 1/504th. The attack commenced with XXX Corps grenadiers attacking across the bridge. The first tanks crossed at 1910. In defiance of Model's orders, the local German commander ordered the bridge to be blown as the tanks crossed but the charges failed to explode. Later that night, without understanding the situation, Model

authorized Bittrich to blow the bridge.⁵⁰ The film included the river assault; the disagreement between the German generals on whether or not to blow the bridge; the problems bringing the boats forward due to traffic congestion on the small road; the defiance of orders by the local German commander who attempted to blow the bridge anyway; fire support by the XXX Corps; and the subsequent securing of the bridge at nightfall.

The British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem encountered the greatest difficulty. Historically, almost every small problem or event that they encountered or endured was included in the film, with a few variations. The 1st Division headquarters was located in the Hartenstein Hotel near the town of Oosterbeek. The Hotel turned into a hospital and cemetery inside a British defensive perimeter. The film depicted this well. The British held the north side of the Arnhem Bridge and the Germans held the south. Fighting raged daily and more than twenty German vehicles were destroyed on the northern ramp on the British side. Buildings were systematically destroyed by artillery from both sides and even the flamethrower assault on the German bunker located on the bridge was accurately replicated in the film. The attack did not destroy the bunker but it ignited the bridge, exploded an ordnance cache, and caused the bunker to be evacuated.⁵¹

Other historical items of interest included the 1st Airborne Division HQ's attempts to signal the allied planes where to drop the resupply by waving parachutes and flags, but to no avail. The British experienced communications problems throughout the fight. It was not just a communication hardware problem, but also a lack of corps staff experience on Browning's adhoc staff. Browning's staff was formed just prior to

Operation Market Garden. Resupply drops continued to fall into German hands because communication problems prevented the British from informing the air force that the Germans controlled the designated resupply drop zones. The British eventually used the British Broadcasting Corporation radios, which had continuous contact with London during the operation.⁵²

Both sides cooperated on treatment for the wounded on several different occasions. The British would pull back and allow the Germans to occupy certain houses so they could tend to the British wounded. A truce was declared on 24 September to transfer 700 wounded to the Germans with 500 more to follow suit the next day. Although seeming unlikely, the Germans agreed to these truces, possibly to better their post war treatment by the Allies. Model also ordered the evacuation of all of the civilians in the battle area. The next day, a Dutch underground unit that was assisting the British was disbanded.⁵³

The Polish Brigade's inclusion in the military operation under the 1st British Airborne Division also follows the historical framework of its activity during the operation. Polish involvement was rocky and their disgust with the operation was evident through a series of episodes: the airborne drop of the first Polish troops into a German held drop zone that resulted in only two anti-tank guns and a handful of soldiers surviving; the subsequent failed river crossing on rubber boats under heavy German fire, where only fifty Poles made it across and only thirty-five of them made it to the British division HQ at Oosterbeek; and the Polish commander's seeking documentation from Browning that he was ordered to participate in the operation.⁵⁴ Each of these events are

documented in the historical archives and included to provide proper credit to all of the Allied forces involved in the operation.

Attenborough went so far in his historical accuracy that even the “truck carrying the boat” explosion appears like an archive photograph of an exploding British ammunition truck on Hell’s Highway on 24 September.⁵⁵ The scene in which Brigadier General Lathbury, traveling with Uguhart (Connery), was wounded and had to be left in a nearby house was also factual. Lathbury later was nursed to good health and slipped back to friendly lines with the help of the Dutch underground. Uguhart, accompanied by two captains, had to seek refuge in an attic belonging to a sympathetic Dutchman; in the movie only one other person accompanies him.⁵⁶

The final scene has somewhat embellished actual facts. As the German soldiers close in on the wounded British surrounding the Hotel, the British break out into a low key patriotic song that gradually spreads among the men and gets louder. As the camera moves out, it shows the graves of men buried in the front yard. This scene is reminiscent of the dramatic effect of a previous cemetery scene in a previous Attenborough film, the final scene in *Oh! What A Lovely War*.

Perhaps the most significant scene is the concluding scene where the commanders are standing on a porch trying to find the single point of failure for the plan. “It was Nijmegen.” “No, it was the single road getting to Nijmegen.” “It was after Nijmegen.” “It was the fog. . . . in England.” The last quote almost got it right; it was the fog, but not in England. Maybe they should have read Clausewitz.

After the assault on Normandy in June 1944, most airborne units were issued the new M1943 field uniform. The previous lightweight uniform with diagonal front pockets was discarded for the more versatile and durable M1943. Paratroopers received brown lace-up jump boots designed specifically for jumping, and did not wear the Army russet boots issued to the common foot soldier.⁵⁷ In *A Bridge Too Far* American soldiers are wearing russet boots, which probably is correct. They are also adorned in the M1943 circa field uniform and paratrooper helmet with cupped chinstrap, which is historically accurate. At one point in the movie, James Caan is wearing the brown wool top and wool pants, not the M1943 field issue uniform. Although possible, it is highly unlikely that a soldier would be deployed wearing this uniform.

The weapons of choice in the airborne units were the M3 “Grease Gun”, Thompson sub-machine gun, and M1 carbine with folding stock. Most American soldiers in this film carried the Garand 30 M1 semi-automatic rifle, not the weapon of issue or choice of the airborne units.⁵⁸

Although the British produced several tanks for service in Europe, such as the Cromwell and the Churchill Mk VI, the Sherman tank was the most widely used tank among the Allies in Europe. The British designed their own variation of the Sherman, called the Firefly. This tank was the best armed of all the Shermans with a 17-pound gun, and was widely dispersed in small numbers across the British armor community, not consolidated in one unit.⁵⁹ The XXX Corps tanks in the film are all variants of the Sherman, except for several scenes of burning hulks, for which any vehicle’s steel hulk on fire would resemble a burning tank.

The *The Big Red One* is historically accurate in the macro sense, but incorporates a good deal of dramatic license. The 1st Infantry Division was assigned to the Center Task Force for Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. The primary objective of the Center Task Force was to secure the port city of Oran. They would accomplish this by simultaneous amphibious assaults at two beaches utilizing British ships and landing craft. The first, Z force, would land at Arzeu and the beaches nearby and attack Oran from the east, while the second, Y force, would land in the vicinity of Les Andalouses and conduct a coordinating attack into Oran from the west.⁶⁰

The 16th Infantry Regiment, of which Marvin's men are assigned, landed at Arzeu as a part of the Z force. The first wave landed at 12:55am against no resistance and received only small, unorganized resistance as they moved inland. Without a clear understanding of the French reaction in North Africa to the landing, several precautions were taken in an attempt to preempt any hostile French actions. Every soldier wore an American flag on his sleeve; the towns were bombarded with leaflets with letters from Roosevelt and Eisenhower indicating the American intent to free the French; each landing was equipped with a loudspeaker team that broadcast in French with noticeable American accents, "Nous sommes Americains" (We are Americans), "n'ecoute pas" (don't shoot),⁶¹ and "Nous sommes vos amis" (We are your friends). The reason for the detailed plan to ensure that the French knew the troops coming ashore were American and not British was because of the strained Franco-British relations. Another method of informing the French that Americans were landing on the beach was to use a mortar to fire pyrotechnics in the air that exploded in the shape of the American flag. Several of

these were fired without the desired effect; they provided an aiming point for French gunners to fire into the darkness.⁶² The replication of the leaflets dropped on the German positions, the American flag on the sleeve of the soldiers, and the loudspeaker teams functioning during the initial assault are reminiscent of historical accounts of events that occurred during the assault. The beach landing, however, may supply some artificial circumstances to provide for a more dramatic event.

The film depicts these landings with Vichy French in fighting positions on the beach reading the leaflets and discussing their reservations about killing Americans. An accidental discharge from the defending Vichy commander initiates a small exchange of gunfire that results in a few soldiers killed and wounded from both sides. The two sides then join each other and celebrate their union on the beach. The assault waves from the 1st Division stormed the shore at 0100, too dark for any defender to read a leaflet. The initial soldiers achieved tactical surprise and found very little resistance on the beaches. The 16th Infantry's first wave commenced their assault towards Ferme St Eloi almost immediately against light and unorganized resistance. In all accounts from the 16th Regiment sector, resistance was either non-existent or light and unorganized, and there were no beach reunions commemorating a cease-fire with the joining of two Armies in a truce.⁶³

The 16th Regiment was hit with winter rains and snow while deployed in the Kasserine Pass area. Once they secured Gafsa, torrential rains turned the area into mire, engulfing the troops and their equipment.⁶⁴ Soon after the dismal display at Kasserine Pass, Patton assumed command of II Corps, of which the 1st Division was a part. One of

his first orders was to ensure uniformity among the troops. All soldiers were required to wear a necktie. If a soldier was caught without a necktie, the fine was fifty to one hundred dollars.⁶⁵ The soldiers in the film never wore a tie nor did they hint at any possible repercussions for not wearing the tie. The weather remained relatively nice during the entire film. The filmmaker did not introduce the cold and rain of the North African mountains or the flies and heat of the desert plain.

The film depicts several historical events relating to the 1st Division actions on Sicily. The division was in close contact with German tanks while their armor was still at sea. The armor was defeated by a combination of naval gunfire and Army artillery. The 16th Regiment fought as part of the division in the central mountainous region around Troina, where some of the toughest combat occurred and cave fighting was common.⁶⁶ Fuller replicated this environment with his cave combat scene and the attack to destroy the single artillery piece on the Sicilian hilltop.

The beach assault at Normandy was filmed with very few extras and on a limited scale. The 1st Division assaulted Omaha beach on the left (East) with a Regimental Combat Team from the 29th Division on the right (West), all under command of the 1st Division. The 16th Infantry Regiment would land first with two battalions in assault and one in support on Easy Red, Fox Green and Fox Red beaches. Their mission was to secure a beachhead and reduce enemy fortifications to pass follow-on forces through. The Army-Navy Special Engineer Task Force had the special mission of clearing gaps through the obstacles. Through navigation and landing difficulties, of the sixteen demolition teams that were organized, only six complete gaps were blown in the

obstacles. Of these six gaps, four were made on Easy Red beach, which is where the E1 exit is located.⁶⁷

The landing craft carrying Company I of the 16th Regiment, Marvin's unit, were delayed almost one and a half hours on the landing due to navigational errors. They were so delayed in the assault that they hardly figured in the first wave and finally landed on Fox Green beach about 0800, minus two craft that capsized. The wristwatch on the arm of the dead soldier in the ocean indicates the squad landed on Omaha at 0630. Later, Marvin indicates that exit E1 is open; the time as indicated on the watch of the same dead soldier in the bloody water is 0915. Fox Green beach is farther to the East than the E1 exit. The E1 exit actually coincides with the western side of Easy Green beach.⁶⁸ Only four soldiers in Marvin's squad survived the beach assault. The beach assault in the film is almost a surreal experience as the soldiers peer over a berm watching their buddies attempt to explode a gap in the German wire obstacles. The combat noise appears to be background racket and a stray bullet occasionally sprays dirt in front of the soldiers' faces. The film's depiction of the beach assault does not coincide with historical accounts.

The film continues by generally following the exploits of the 1st Division across France. They come through the old battlefields near Soisson, where the 1st Division and the sergeant (Marvin) fought during World War I. The soldiers stop and look at the monument.

Marvin: That's a World War I memorial.
Carradine: But the names are all the same.
Marvin: They always are.⁶⁹

The film depicts the monument in almost a desert environment. The monument in Soissons as depicted by World War II footage is in an area surrounded by trees.⁷⁰

The 1st Division then fought into Belgium, where they attack Germans garrisoned in a psychiatric hospital. During the ensuing battle, one of the patients obtains a machine gun from a dead German and begins to randomly fire while proclaiming, “I am one of you; I am sane.” The inference to the audience is that perhaps the patients in the asylum are not the ones that need the psychiatric help.

Marvin invents the idea of the Big Red One for the 1st Infantry Division from a red piece of felt he took “from the cap of a Hun I killed” immediately after the armistice of the First World War. The 1st Infantry Division patch was worn from 31 October 1918, but the armistice was not signed until 11 November 1918.⁷¹

The film provides very little replication of large combat formations of soldiers and their equipment. Focused at the squad level with small-scale beach assaults and independent combat actions, the requirement for large amounts of World War II armor and equipment is rather minimal. Fuller did not use landing craft for either amphibious assault. A single ship with a fire on the deck in the background of the Normandy invasion represented his navy. He used no large tank or maneuver formations and disguised his small numbers by producing large amounts of smoke and close in shots of the actors to obscure the scene behind the actors. There was no air combat or close air support replication, nor were supply and transport vehicles portrayed. Fuller eliminated the requirement for big-ticket end items by focusing his script on the combat soldier and

not on the re-creation of combat missions. His largest requirement was for a few tanks and the individual soldier's basic issue uniforms and equipment.

The most significant discrepancy noted in the replication of the units and equipment was the employment of M4 Sherman tanks as German Panzer tanks. The Sherman has a distinct design whose appearance the best studio engineers cannot alter enough to produce the effect of German Panzer tanks on the battlefield. However, since the filmmaker's desire is to demonstrate the American infantry soldier's fear of German armor formations supported by infantry in their first combat action of World War II at Kasserine Pass, the lack of historically accurate German tanks is irrelevant. American tanks with German decals affixed are adequate.

For the most part, the uniforms used throughout the film were authentic in appearance in accordance with the uniform designs outlined in Chapter 2. The uniforms of World War II were never standardized in appearance for different shades of color. Soldiers in North Africa assaulted wearing the wool design that was prevalent at the beginning of the war. In the film's Sicily, however, they were wearing a lightweight cotton design that was predominately used in the Pacific Theater. The soldiers in the film also wore black boots instead of the standard issue russet boots.

Many soldiers on the Normandy invasion carried additional equipment. They were equipped with large metal breastplates to protect against small arms fire and many wore a type of belt life preserver to assist in water flotation. Soldiers carried extra ammunition bandoleers slung across their chests and additional hand grenades strapped to

their uniform pockets and web gear. These additional items were not present on the soldiers in *The Big Red One*.

Saving Private Ryan ensured accuracy of historical equipment and uniforms while using artistic license somewhat to portray missions and soldiers. Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks) is the commander of Charlie Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion. After an initial cemetery scene set in the present, the movie depicts men aboard landing craft on the way to Omaha Beach, 6 June 1944. The invasion of Normandy has begun.

The film is fictional so it is not designed to be accurate in the missions portrayed, but rather it is designed to follow basic historical accuracies, that is, units and equipment at Normandy. The filmmakers went to great lengths to ensure accuracy of period dress, equipment, weapons and tactics.⁷²

A requirement for Rangers trained in amphibious assault operations grew in 1944 as the need for special units increased. Their mission was to either spearhead an invasion or silence coastal defenses that might impede or disrupt landings. The 1st, 3rd, and 4th Ranger Battalions were devastated in Italy, so the 2nd and 5th Battalions were trained and prepared for the invasion of France.⁷³

The 2nd Ranger Battalion's mission during the invasion of Normandy was to assault large German gun emplacements at an area known as Pointe du Hoc.⁷⁴ The Rangers would assault up large cliffs using ropes and attack the German defensive positions at the top, hopefully obtaining the element of surprise. The battalion had six companies. The detailed plan required three companies, D, E and F, to assault the cliffs. C Company's mission was to accompany the first wave of the 116th Infantry Regiment

on Omaha, then turn west and eliminate enemy positions at Pointe du Percee. The 116th Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division was attached to the 1st Infantry Division for the assault and was assigned the western half of Omaha Beach, the Dog and Easy Green objectives. The other two 2nd Battalion companies, A and B, were attached to the 5th Ranger Battalion. Their mission was to wait in landing craft thirty minutes off shore and either follow the 2nd Battalion, or divert to Omaha and attack towards Pointe du Hoc from the land. If the original Ranger assault could secure the Pointe, they would land at the Pointe, link up, and continue with their respective subsequent missions. If the original Ranger assault did not have the Pointe secure, they would land with the second wave of infantry troops at Omaha and move inland to complete their assigned missions.⁷⁵ The message "Tilt" was sent at 0710 hours indicating that Pointe du Hoc was not secure and the following Ranger force should land at Vierville on Omaha.⁷⁶

C Company, 2nd Rangers (Miller's company) was composed of 64 men. They occupied two landing craft and landed on the Dog Green sector of Omaha Beach at H+15, or about 0645, to the right of the Vierville draw. According to the Center of Military History, Dog Green Beach was the worst beach to assault. The Germans had fortified positions guarding the Vierville draw and they had heavy flanking fire from Pointe du Percee. C Company landed at Dog Green with A Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division. Another factor affecting the landing was that there was a 1,000-yard gap between A Company on Dog Green and G Company on Dog White, allowing the Germans to concentrate fire towards either company from the untouched middle positions.⁷⁷

As the ranger craft made their way to the beach, they passed an A Company landing craft that got hit by artillery. Men were jumping over the side and getting dragged underwater by their heavy loads. A Company was decimated with losses early. Fifteen minutes after landing, all of A Company's officers were casualties, the majority of the sergeants were killed or wounded, and estimates put the casualty count at over two-thirds. A Company ceased to function as a unit. The men gave up any effort to move forward and tried to save the wounded, many of who drowned in the rising tide. The filmmakers incorporate the remnants of the lead units of the 29th Division, which we can assume are from the previously mentioned A Company, among others. When Miller reaches the berm he asks, "Who is in charge here?" A soldier from the 29th Division yells back, "You are." Prior to exploding the breach, one soldier yells that there are soldiers from Fox, Able and George companies on the beach. The replication of the confusion, individual acts of terror and heroism, and the leadership provided by officers and noncommissioned officers, regardless of their unit, are expertly interwoven during this scene. A more realistic scene has not been produced in the theater.

The two ranger craft were hit immediately during disembarking. The company commander's craft was bracketed by an anti-tank gun that killed a dozen men while the second craft zeroed in on the open ramp of the second craft, hitting fifteen rangers when the ramp opened. Rangers jumped over the sides and scrambled to shore. Too tired to run, they set out to cover 250 yards of sand to reach the base of the cliff. Only twenty-nine men made it.⁷⁸ Expertly recreated in the movie, this scene displays the horrific nature of the landing by the first assault waves. Survival was a matter of luck rather than

skill. The filmmakers also depicted the clear fields of fire demonstrated by the German defenders and the open targets the attackers presented.

A Navy demolition expert who needs to clear a lane for the tanks on the beach angrily confronts Miller. The engineer yells at Miller to get his men out of the lane. This is a very realistic confrontation from a historical standpoint. The confusion and competing missions of the men on the beach had never really been addressed in the movies before now.

The Army-Navy Special Engineer Task Force had the responsibility of clearing and marking lanes in the German defenses for follow on forces. A strong easterly current carried many of the boats off course; this added to poor navigation and many of the boats did not land at their intended beaches. Only five of the sixteen teams arrived in their appointed sectors. Once on the shore, men burdened with heavy equipment and explosives were prime targets for German gunners as the engineers unloaded in several feet of water. The majority of their equipment was quickly lost or destroyed, including thirteen of their sixteen bulldozers. Despite the problems, the teams continued their mission with what resources they could muster. Once the charges were in place, engineers had difficulty clearing the lanes of infantrymen passing through or seeking cover behind the obstacles that the engineers were destined to blow. Several charges detonated by artillery or other means killed or wounded many friendly soldiers.⁷⁹

The entire beach-landing scene incorporates a terrific replication of the deafening sound and chaos of an amphibious assault. Expertly placed cameras to capture the view from both sides of the conflict, combined with the exhaustive noise of combat, provided a

combat sequence unparalleled in motion picture history. But the filmmakers are not the only ones to credit. In Tom Hank's words, the actors were "laboring to not just get it right, but to get it accurate; despite how gruesome; despite how painful."⁸⁰

The planned exits from the beach were located in the cliff's draws. The majority of these were not cleared first, as assaults over the cliffs between the draws were more successful. Some of this is attributed to poor navigation that dropped the troops away from their intended draw assault positions, but conventional wisdom indicates it was because of the string of German defensive positions in the vicinity of the draws. The Germans assumed the assaults would aim for the draws, so they fortified them with additional bunkers and overlapping fields of fire. The American preparation fires were insufficient to dislodge the fortifications, so they had to be destroyed by ground forces.⁸¹

C Company, 2nd Rangers may have been the first to actually reach the top of the bluff, but not by attacking through the draw as planned. The rangers moved west along the beach to the 90-foot cliffs near Pointe du Percee. They looked for ravines or crevices to climb up the slope. They eventually found that with the help of their bayonets they were able to pull each other to the top. What was left of the company reached the top by 0730. Receiving fire from a fortified house, the rangers attacked the house only to find a German strongpoint complete with trenches and bunkers. While providing suppressive fire, the rangers assisted members of the 116th Regiment up the ravine. Toward the end of the afternoon, the combined group of men succeeded in securing the strongpoint, ending German resistance.⁸² This is the film's first deviation from a historical documentation of C Company, 2nd Rangers landing. The rangers appear to attack up a

draw and destroy the strongpoint instead of climbing the cliff and assaulting from the flank. This event is a minor deviation that actually adds drama, while not diminishing the historical context of the assault. Soldiers did assault the draw, but initial thrusts were unsuccessful. The intricate network of trenches and bunkers accurately portray the depth of the German defenses, although the clearing of these trenches took the better part of the rest of D-Day. C Company never cleared the Dog 1 exit, as portrayed in the film; they bypassed it. Engineers cleared the draw in the early afternoon after naval gunfire reduced many of the German gun positions.⁸³

The mission of Miller and his squad, to save Private Ryan, generates the most controversy among historical accuracy critics. Spielberg indicated that this film is a “morality play.” The story has a very deep moral center and that question goes to the heart of what this picture is all about. I hope it creates a lot of conversation, once people stop talking about seeing an arm and a leg fly off. Then they can start to talk about what this movie is really about, which is that central theme.”⁸⁴

The question of whether or not saving Private Ryan is a realistic mission is arguable, but the intent of the mission itself is not unprecedented. The most heralded group of brothers to die in combat is probably the Sullivan Brothers. Five of them served on the USS Juneau together and all perished when it was sunk in November 1942 near Guadalcanal.⁸⁵ A lesser-known story involves the Neiland Brothers. The four brothers, ranging in age from twenty-four to thirty-one, all served in different units during the war. One was shot down in the Pacific in May 1944 while two were killed during the invasion at Normandy, one on D-day and one on D+1. The last remaining brother was found by a

chaplain and sent home by orders from the Department of the Army. A unit was not sent to find him.⁸⁶

The mission presented to Miller appears to be possible in today's world of technological breakthroughs, but in 1944, it took four to six weeks to identify dead soldiers and notify the family.⁸⁷ In the film, Ryan supposedly had two brothers killed on D-day. It was impossible to get that information back to the United States in such an efficient manner.

The letter from Abraham Lincoln⁸⁸ that is read in the movie is authentic. The letter was written in 1864 and originated from the White House.⁸⁹ The letter from Lincoln, as read by General Marshall, is the spark that initiates Miller's mission.

Miller receives his new mission at approximately D+3 after he reports to his commanding officer that his casualties are thirty-five dead and twice that wounded. That figures his casualties at one hundred and five. C Company, 2nd Rangers only landed with sixty-four soldiers total.⁹⁰

Private James Francis Ryan was a member of Baker Company, 506th Airborne Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division. The mission of the 506th Infantry on D-day was to drop behind Utah Beach and secure the flank of the 4th Infantry Division as they pushed towards Cherbourg. The weather and navigation proved difficult for the night drop and paratroopers were scattered across the French countryside.⁹¹ Although several planes missed their designated drop zones by several miles, Miller would not have known of this mishap that early in the battle. He would have to rely on the original plan to search for Ryan and move towards the planned drop zones. The 101st Division dropped

behind Utah Beach, not Omaha, and Miller would have to travel from ten to fifteen miles through German-occupied territory to link up with the 101st. It would appear to be more feasible to assign this task to elements of the 4th Infantry Division that linked up with some members of the 101st Division on D+1.⁹²

Although the film is geographically challenged, several other historic facts were illustrated in the film. Miller's patrol soon realizes that the 101st drop was marred by confusion, missed drop zones, and poor communications with sister units. The squad stumbles across a large group of wounded soldiers and a wrecked glider with a general inside. Brigadier General Don F Pratt, assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division, was killed on Landing Zone E on the outskirts of Hiesville, when his glider wrecked during the landing.⁹³ The movie identifies him as Brigadier General Amen.⁹⁴ At this point, we have positively identified Miller's location in the film. He would have traveled about ten miles through German held territory and conducted two river crossings.

This film is unique from the previous studied films in the amount of resources available to the filmmaker. In 1994, Spielberg started his own studio, DreamWorks SKG. As the studio head and filmmaker, resource constraints were not prevalent in his planning, unlike barriers that other filmmakers have encountered. Financial outlays for modern movies are astronomical compared to those for the films already studied. *Saving Private Ryan* cost over twice as much to make as *The Big Red One* although only 18 years apart in production. Given the capacity to seek resources around the globe, Spielberg ensured that historically accurate equipment and uniforms were procured. The

film was made in Ireland and Britain with over 750 Irish extras. Many of these same extras battled on the fields of Scotland during *Braveheart*, so they were already trained in maneuver warfare.

Ian Bruce, the producer, stated that most of the tanks and supporting vehicles were fairly easy to find. The difficult items to find were landing craft. They eventually found sufficient landing craft in Palm Springs, California and had them shipped to Southampton for refurbishment. There were “twelve of these landing craft in the movie and several hundred in the background,” according to Bruce.⁹⁵

It took over three months to find the over 2,000 weapons used in the film, both American and German. Only 500 actually could fire blanks while the others were rubber replicas for the background shots. Every night, a maintenance team repaired, cleaned and painted the rifles for the next day of filming. They found some weapons in Germany but the majority of the weapons, including the American artillery, were found in England.⁹⁶

The World War II uniforms in existence today are mostly in museums and displays. To wear one in a movie such as this would most likely destroy it. Over 3,000 authentic uniforms were designed and procured by the costume designer to ensure accuracy in accordance with the time period. They even found the original production company of the World War II American boot and had 2,000 boots prepared. After all the uniforms and boots were consolidated, the costume designer put them through an aging process to provide a more authentic battle-worn appearance.⁹⁷

The airborne units wore replicas of the diagonal pocketed jump uniforms with jump boots. The rangers wore the standard M1941 issue fatigues with waist length field

jacket and boots with leggings. The soldiers in the landing craft wore the metal breast shield, waist flotation device and carried additional ammunition bandoleers across their chests. Other soldiers carried a variety of weapon systems on the beach, such as flamethrowers, bazookas and bangalore torpedoes. The film's replication of standard soldier uniforms, equipment and weapons was notable.

Conclusion

General Maxwell Taylor, commander of the 101st Airborne Division during World War II, gave an interview in 1975 and said he stopped going to military films after a few initial exposures because he found "little reality in the portrayal of war and military life, either in Hollywood or on TV."⁹⁸ Historical accuracy is the cornerstone of military movies. It provides the framework from which a story can be told. If uniforms and equipment are wrong for the time and place depicted, or if soldiers are not portrayed in a realistic manner, the film loses credibility among a certain segment of the population, that is, veterans, historians, and sometimes many critics. Although credibility is important, certain aspects of film creation outweigh those of historical accuracy. All nine of the films studied attempted to maintain historical accuracy at the macro level. Costs and hardware access overshadowed the desire for historical accuracy in certain and easily definable circumstances.

The primary aim of the movies selected was to display the courage of soldiers, heroics during missions, or the horrors of war; having accurate weapons, tanks, or missions was of secondary importance, an added feature rather than the desired endstate. Historical accuracy was followed as much as possible with deviations only to retain

dramatic effect. If historical accuracy could be accomplished without too much additional work or cost, then the filmmakers would oblige. If the additional work were costly, they would alter the items on hand.

Spielberg is the exception as he went to greater lengths than the rest to ensure historical accuracy in the combat scenes, and he had the means and resources to achieve it. Although based on a fictional mission, the actors are in period dress with authentic weapons using doctrinal tactics. Spielberg strayed on geographical locations of missions but that did not alter the significance of the film. Most viewers have no idea what the rangers did on D-day, and Spielberg's dramatic license falls within acceptable parameters. He provided his anti-war message by his demonstration of the true, unsanitized horrors of war. He made his film bloody and gory because that is the way war is. Spielberg said he wanted to "make it the way it was, not the way we've been making movies about it."⁹⁹

Two films were major recreations of historic events as depicted through the in-depth study of a war correspondent turned historian. *The Longest Day* recreates the Allied invasion of Normandy from the vantage points of almost all of the participants. *A Bridge Too Far* follows the historical events of Operation Market Garden and is in compliance with Ryan's book. Ryan conducted extensive research and interviews for his book, while Attenborough used a significant number of retired military consultants who had fought in the campaign. Although Operation Market Garden was not successful, the battle is mostly remembered for the courage and fortitude of the men who fought and

died there. Both films followed the documented history of the events to a great extent and only deviated in small areas, such as dialogue or combat scenes.

Historical accuracy does not end with the events. The majority of the films were accurate with their uniforms and equipment, although tanks were a difficult item to produce for most films. The only film to accurately portray tanks was *A Bridge Too Far*. The filmmakers were able to obtain through the US Army Sherman tanks scheduled for destruction. Other films used any type of armor they could find to represent tanks, assuming that the audience would not realize or care that the tanks were not authentic. The filmmakers' error in tank use was not a factor in the film's success: *Patton*, using American made M48s as German Panzers, was critically acclaimed, while *A Bridge Too Far*, despite its authenticity, was not.

Accuracy of equipment and weapons is followed to the extent possible. Any mix of Army surplus fatigues combined with matching leggings constitutes a viable American war uniform. Although the type of uniform is important, the wear of the uniform is also important. Very few soldiers are ever depicted with a rip or tear in the uniform. In *The Big Red One*, soldiers appeared quite clean most of the time, even when they were trying to appear dirty and tired. Garands and Thompson sub-machine guns were readily available to outfit actor-made armies.

Historical accuracy was more accurate than most pundits might give filmmakers credit for. Zanuck might have said it best when he indicated that films were based on historical events to the degree that the filmmakers could support it and that the historical

accurate scene was still a good story. If the story faltered, dramatic effect was inserted to keep the picture interesting.

¹H.R. Knickerbocker, *Danger Forward: The Story of the First Division of World War II*. (Atlanta, Georgia: Albert Love Enterprises, 1947).

²Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, *America's First Battles 1776-1965* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 240-265.

³*The Story of G.I. Joe* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1945), movie.

⁴Stofft, 240-265.

⁵Brigadier Peter Young, *A Dictionary of Battles 1816-1976* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1977), 477-478.

⁶Michael S Sweeny, *Appointment at Hill 1205: Ernie Pyle and Captain Henry T. Waskow* (Doctorial Paper at the E.W. School of Journalism, Ohio University, 1995), available from <http://www.kwanah.com/txmilmus/36division/sweeney.htm>; internet; accessed on 28 January 2001.

⁷Young, 478.

⁸Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), 209.

⁹*The Story of G.I. Joe*, (Hollywood: United Artists, 1945), movie.

¹⁰Colonel S.L.A. Marshall, *Bastogne: The Story of the First Eight Days In Which the 101st Airborne Was Closed Within the Ring of German Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1946), 8-13.

¹¹*Ibid*, vii-xii.

¹²Edwin P. Hoyt, *The GI's War: The Story of American Soldiers in Europe in World War II* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988), 537-538.

¹³Marshall, 115-118.

¹⁴*Ibid*, 250.

¹⁵Hoyt, 545.

¹⁶Peter Chamberlain and Henry L. Doyle, *Encyclopedia of German Tanks of World War II* (London: Wellington House, 1978, 1993), 88.

¹⁷Ibid, 88,119, and 120-133.

¹⁸Andrew Mollo, *The Armed Forces of World War II: Uniforms, Insignia, and Organization* (New York: Crown Publishers, inc., 1981), 58-59.

¹⁹Barry Jason Stein, *U.S. Army Patches* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 56 and Plate 19.

²⁰Stein, 58 and Plate 20.

²¹Christopher F. Foss, *Jane's Main Battle Tanks, Second Edition* (London: Jane's Publishing Company, Ltd., 1983, 1986).

²²Although I can find no evidence that Special Team Six did exist and was given this mission, I cannot say with clear confidence that it did not occur. Commando missions were commonplace during World War II, especially along the coast of France. That said, I don't think a commando unit could land forty minutes before the main body, destroy coastal fortifications, then have a cigarette on a calm beach as the wounded are being extracted, all while American and British troops are encountering upwards of 50-70 percent casualties a mere mile or two to their flanks.

²³This patch will reappear in *The Longest Day* on the British glider commando's right sleeve.

²⁴The towns' people got front row seats to watch the daily filming, which occurred in the actual French town. Seventeen years after the war many had not forgotten the German occupation. One night the German actors came goose-stepping through town practicing their maneuvers. This scared many of the people and they began to hurl rocks at the "Germans." The film crew had to assure them that these were actors and not Nazi troops.

²⁵The tank had been buried for seventeen years. A few mechanics and some spare parts and it actually worked again.

²⁶Suid, 151-153.

²⁷Ibid, 149-150.

²⁸Ibid, 141.

²⁹Ibid, 149.

³⁰Ibid, 252.

³¹“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*.

³²Patton Museum of Calvary and Armor, Fort Knox, available from <http://140.153.247.2/museum/gspatton.htm>; internet; accessed on 12 February 2001. There are actually two separate speeches on record at the museum. One is for his staff officers and one is for the soldiers.

³³George S. Patton, *War As I knew It*. Patton wrote, “Corps and Army Commanders must make it a point to be physically seen by as many individuals of their command as possible -- certainly by all combat soldiers. The best way to do this is to assemble the divisions, either as a whole or in separate pieces, and make a short talk.”

³⁴“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Rubin, 209.

³⁷“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*, interview with Chet Hansen, aide to General Omar Bradley, and interview with Colonel Cole Kingseed, military historian at West Point.

³⁸“Patton Races to Messina,” *American History*, April 2001.

³⁹“Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*. Patton was very emotional and would sometimes cry at the sight of the dead and wounded.

⁴⁰Suid, 246-247.

⁴¹Rubin, 202-203.

⁴²Suid, 256-257.

⁴³Peter Chamberlain and Henry L. Doyle, *Encyclopedia of German Tanks of World War II* (London: Wellington House, 1978, 1993).

⁴⁴Christopher F. Foss, *Jane's Main Battle Tanks, Second Edition* (London: Jane's Publishing Company, Ltd., 1983, 1986).

⁴⁵Stephen Badsey, *Arnhem 1944: Operation "Market Garden"* (London: Osprey, 1993).

⁴⁶Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *Airborne Carpet: Operation Market Garden* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1969), 41.

⁴⁷Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 165-167.

⁴⁸Hockley, 103-105.

⁴⁹Badsey, 53-55.

⁵⁰Ibid, 63-70.

⁵¹Ibid, 75.

⁵²Ibid, 52.

⁵³Ibid, 76-77.

⁵⁴Ibid, 73-76.

⁵⁵Badsey, IWM archive photograph B10124A, 79.

⁵⁶John Baynes, *Urquhart of Arnhem: The Life of Major General RE Urquhart, CB, DSO* (London: Brassey's, 1993).

⁵⁷Andre Mollo, *Army Uniforms of World War II* (Billericay, Essex, Great Britain: Blandford Press Ltd., 1973, reprinted with corrections 1974, reprinted with corrections 1977) 58-59.

⁵⁸John P. Langellier, *The War in Europe From the Kasserine Pass to Berlin: The Illustrated History of The American Soldier, His Uniform and His Equipment* (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1995) 40-41.

⁵⁹George Forty, *World War Two Tanks* (Bournemouth, England: The Book Package Company Ltd., 1995), 8-55.

⁶⁰Society of the First Division, *Danger Forward: The Story of the First Division in World War II*, H.R. Knickenbocker, Jack Thompson, Jack Belden, Don Whitehead, A.J. Liebling, Mark Watson, Cy Peterman, Iris Carpenter, Colonel R.E. Dupuy, Drew

Middleton, and former officers of the Division, (Atlanta, Georgia: Albert Love Enterprises, 1947), 10-14.

⁶¹This could very well be miscommunication on the part of the chain of command, which was prevalent. Soldiers thought they were yelling “don’t shoot” when in fact they were yelling “don’t listen.”

⁶²Society of the First Division, 24, Blythe Foote Finke, *No Mission Too Difficult: Old Buddies of the 1st Division Tell All About World War II* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, inc., 1995), 70-71.

⁶³Ibid, 24, and Finke, 65-75. This appears to be a strong case of dramatic licensing. Fuller appears to be demonstrating the eventual outcome of the entire Torch operation through one scene replicated on the beach. After the initial forces landed, minor resistance was sustained for only a day or two in the 1 ID sector. Resistance was much stronger on the Casablanca landing areas. After the initial Vichy forces were subdued, a truce was declared on day 3 of the operation and Vichy forces were united as French forces and joined the Allies. To help the audience understand the situation facing the soldiers of the 1st, he summarizes the first few weeks through the narrator on the boat ride over and with the beach scene. It also enables him to demonstrate the initial reluctance of Mark Hamill to shoot an enemy soldier and allows him to insert his message that there is a difference between murder and killing.

⁶⁴Society of the First Division, 62 and 66.

⁶⁵Finke, 105; and “Patton: A Rebel Revisited,” *The History Channel: History vs. Hollywood*.

⁶⁶Society of the First Division, 126-136.

⁶⁷Society of the First Division, 175-185.

⁶⁸American Forces in Action Historical Action Division, War Department, *Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, Facsimile reprint, 1984, CMH Pub 100-11, Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹*The Big Red One*, (Hollywood: United Artists, 1980), movie.

⁷⁰ *Fighting Divisions of the ETO: An American Military Classic* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Video Cassettes, 1972), movie.

⁷¹Barry Jason Stein, *U.S. Army Patches* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

⁷²Official *Saving Private Ryan* website, available from <http://www.rzm.com/pvt.ryan/index.html>; internet; accessed on 3 March 2001.

⁷³Jerome J. Haggerty, *A History of the Ranger Battalions in World War II* (New York: University Microfilms International, 1982), 202-204.

⁷⁴James D. Ladd, *Commandos and Rangers of World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 188-184. Pointe du Hoc was misspelled on many Allied orders; it was spelled Ponte du Hoe. Many historical accounts and records still refer to it as Pointe du Hoe.

⁷⁵Haggerty, 208-211.

⁷⁶Ladd, 189, As was the case in many of the landings that morning, the ranger landing craft came to shore three miles east of Point du Hoc in the vicinity of Pointe du Percee. They had to divert towards the correct Pointe perpendicular to the coastline and received accurate fire from German defensive positions. This navigational error cost them 30 minutes and ultimately required the order 'tilt' to be given.

⁷⁷*Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, 45 and 47.

⁷⁸*Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, 45-47.

⁷⁹American Forces in Action Historical Action Division, War Department, *Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, Facsimile reprint, 1984, CMH Pub 100-11, Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 42-43.

⁸⁰Saving Private Ryan Bonus Footage video accompanied the purchased movie.

⁸¹*Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, 57-58.

⁸²*Ibid*, 75-77.

⁸³*Ibid*, 104-108.

⁸⁴Mr. Showbiz, available from <http://www.mrshowbiz.com>; internet; Stephen Schaefer interview with Steven Spielberg; accessed on 12 March 2001.

⁸⁵Castle Town Press Online; available from <http://www.castletown.com/Brothers.htm>; internet; accessed on 15 February 2001, Soon after their death, an outpouring of support from the public, the United States President and even the Pope was received by the family. Congress soon passed the Sullivan Law that prevented brothers from serving on the same ship. The Army obliged by preventing brothers from serving in the same division, but many times this did not prevent them

from storming the same shore at Normandy or any other beach. The Navy still has a destroyer named the USS The Sullivans.

⁸⁶Saving Private Ryan Bonus Footage video accompanied the purchased movie; interview with the Neiland family. The brother shot down over the Pacific was captured by the Japanese and not dead as suspected. He later escaped and returned home so two of the brothers survived. The brother that was sent home was found by a chaplain.

⁸⁷Dr. Lawrence Suid, phone interview with author, 17 March 2001.

⁸⁸Abraham Lincoln online; available from <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/bixby.htm>; internet; accessed on 17 March 2001;

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of 5 sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine that would attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid down so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. Yours very sincerely and respectfully, Abraham Lincoln.

It was later revealed that only two of Mrs. Bixby's sons had actually died. One deserted, one was honorably discharged, and the third was either a deserter or died as a POW. It is still arguably a great letter.

⁸⁹Brown Alumni Magazine online; available from http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Brown_Alumni_Magazine/00/9-99/elms/ghost.html; internet; accessed on 22 March 2001.

⁹⁰*Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, 45.

⁹¹Leonard Rapport and Arthur Northwood, Jr., *Rendezvous With Destiny: A History of The 101st Airborne Division*, Madella, Minnesota: House of Print, (1948), 99-103.

⁹²Of course, they also could have radioed the command post of the 101st.

⁹³American Forces in Action Historical Action Division, War Department, *Utah Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, Facsimile reprint, 1984, CMH Pub 100-11, Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 15; Leonard Rapport and

Arthur Northwood, Jr., *Rendezvous With Destiny, A History of The 101st Airborne Division*, Madella, Minnesota: House of Print, 1948), 119.

⁹⁴Although a fictional movie, real events are portrayed throughout the film. The names were changed to maintain the fictional basis.

⁹⁵Official Saving Private Ryan website, available from <http://www.rzm.com/pvt.ryan/index.html>; internet; accessed on 4 March 2001.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸Suid, 12. This interview was provided prior to the portrayal of his role in *A Bridge Too Far* or the release of *Saving Private Ryan*. It is possible that *Saving Private Ryan* could have changed his attitude.

⁹⁹Schaefer.

CHAPTER 5

THE SOLDIER

The GI, he lives so miserably and he dies so miserably¹

Ernie Pyle

Introduction

A film's success is predicated on the story and the ability of the actors to sell that story to the audience. The actors in war movies are depicting soldiers, their lives, and their actions in the time of armed conflict. These portrayals, in turn, assist in shaping public opinion about the military. The films studied provide a variety of views concerning soldier craft and the way they live. This chapter looks at the depiction of officers, enlisted, and their interaction as portrayed in the movies versus the written history of soldiers during World War II. Not every film examined contained portrayals of officer and enlisted. Some films focused only on officers while others focused solely on the enlisted. Patton, for example, is a movie based on a biography of one man and does not contribute much to this chapter.

Those serving have often viewed the portrayal of soldiers in movies with disdain. As one author put it, "a soldier would rather be found dead in a stockade that refer, among his buddies, to some movie-soldier as an example of what happens to men in war."² The lack of reality in early war pictures stems from the lack of reality in the premedia-hyped audience's vision of war. The lack of reality also coincided with the inability of studios to replicate the dramatic scenes that accompany war.

The Films

The characters in *G.I. Joe* presented a broad cross-section of America and demonstrated soldier skills and interaction very realistically. The film provides a solid look at the combat leader and the soldiers he leads in a very straightforward manner. The producer, Lester Cowan, set the tone early when he sent his scriptwriter, Arthur Miller, to wander any military post Miller wanted to find what was in soldier's heads. Cowan told him, "I don't want any imitations of the movies you've seen. I want the soldier as he is. I want the story of GI Joe."³

Lt Walker is a compassionate and competent leader who looks out for his men. He gets them turkey at Christmas by gunpoint and is tormented by the list of casualties in his unit. He confides in Pyle that he cannot look the new replacements in the face anymore and does not want to know their names or where they are from. The film clearly demonstrates the loneliness of command as Walker is seldom seen with other troops; he is always by himself in the command post or his hooch, unless Pyle comes to visit. He also comes from a broken family evidenced by his lack of mail during mail call, although he inquires. There is the Polish-American who is very amiable. He is married with a child and volunteers for every mission because he thinks that every mission is a step closer to home. He eventually suffers from combat stress, a topic not breeched in many combat films. There is the tall man, Murphy, who thinks he is a modern man and should be in the air corps. As the statistics showed, fifty percent of enlistees would have opted for the air corps if allowed. Murphy gets married to a nurse during a lull in the fighting, and then he does not return from a patrol. Then there is Private Mew. He is the

quintessential simpleton required in every squad; not too bright, but caring and loyal. He has no family back home so he is consumed with the decision of who receives his insurance money if he should die. After he splits it up among several people, he has to cross them off the list one at a time when they do not come back from patrol. Then there is the war movie requirement of the second generation Italian soldier from Brooklyn, Dondaro. He always has sex on the mind and usually survives the conflict. But in the end, Donaro is hit the hardest by the death of Captain Walker.

As for soldier interaction, G.I. Joe shows the humanity and innate kindness of American soldiers as they care for a stray dog, or provide a soup line for displaced Italians. The film demonstrates the many functions of the steel pot as a foot soaker and a sock washer. The troops enjoy their coffee every chance they get; they smoke cigarettes and tell jokes; and they scramble for mail call to see if they got any news from home. They listen to the Bob Hope Christmas special on the radio and they get a three-minute shower during a break. They almost knock each other over trying to get turkey that Pyle brings in the hooch for Christmas, but yet they are careful to save some for those who are on guard or patrol. The spirit of teamwork is also clearly brought forth. The men are solemn when they lose a comrade, but understand the mission continues. The G.I. is dirty, wet, hungry, and unshaven but he still maintains that spirit that won the Second World War. The stress of combat is evident and the film's display of combat fatigue is prominent. And in typical American fashion in a foreign country when trying to communicate with the locals, one G.I. exclaims, "Don't you understand perfect English?"

The depiction of the soldiers in *Battleground* is considered by some to be extremely accurate portrayals of the soldiers that Ernie Pyle and Bill Mauldin (the world-renowned cartoonist) came to know so well.⁴ As well they should be since the screenwriter was a veteran of the Ardennes, the script advisor was the acting division commander for the defense of Bastogne, the technical advisor was the division G3, twenty additional actors used by MGM were veterans of the 101st and the defense of Bastogne, and the director already produced arguably the greatest infantry focused film of all time, *G.I. Joe*. Several scenes portrayed in the film were taken from real life experiences of these men and others like them, as captured by historians and unit narratives immediately following the battle. For example, when Pirosh was a new arrival in Europe, one of the men had found thirteen eggs and wanted to fry them. Before he could find a pan, they were ordered to move out. During the move, they were hit by machine-gun fire and the soldier hit the dirt very slow in order to not break the eggs.⁵ This event, portrayed by Holly, was one of many inserted into the movie to bring levity to a very trying time. This event makes the soldiers more human to the audience, instead of the stereotypical stock of soldiers trained to kill the enemy. If the men mentioned above could not accurately portray soldiers in conflict, then it possibly could not have been done.

The soldiers' uniforms, equipment, and weapons were accurate and detailed in accordance with the standard of the time. Most soldiers wore the circa M1943 battle dress uniforms with new field jacket, indicated by the hip length and four pockets. The wool knit cap was widely used in the movie as well, as it was the primary means for a

soldier to keep his head warm. It is interesting to note that the 101st Airborne wore the 1941-pattern jump uniform with diagonal front pockets prior to and during the invasion of Normandy. All the new soldiers in theater arrived in the M1943 combat uniforms and the majority of the soldiers in the 101st were issued the M1943 combat uniform set sometime after the invasion of Normandy, probably while they were on break after the invasion and before the Holland campaign.

One of Pirosh's main obsessions was to show the progressive nature of fatigue and shock and the extreme conditions of the operation. He wanted to demonstrate to the audience sleep deprivation, lack of personal hygiene, and the subsequent dirtiness of the soldiers. He wanted the uniforms to look as though they were slept in for thirty days so he made sure they were "dirtied up."⁶

The cold winter of the Ardennes was not only unexpected but also incredibly miserable for the grunt. Most of the soldiers in the movie wore the double-breasted wool overcoat, or greatcoat, that was the primary source of warmth during the cold winter months. Although bulky and not easy to maneuver in while worn, it provided the much needed warmth the men sought. Many of the men deployed to Bastogne without rubber or overboots and the standard issue lace-up combat boot was not waterproof. During a day of foraging for supplies within Bastogne, somebody found 2,000 burlap bags. One thousand soldiers got burlap bags to wrap around their feet, just like Sergeant Kinny and the chaplain.⁷

Although Pirosh and Wellman went through great pains to ensure a realistic film depicting the miseries the soldiers endured during the Ardennes campaign, filming on a

sound stage in Hollywood made certain aspects of nature's effects on the human very difficult to replicate. They wanted to imitate the extreme conditions encountered during the Bastogne defense through progressively dirty soldiers; the effects of combat, such as Holly's temporary cowardice and Hanson's spontaneous heroics; the effects on Abner and Kinny of the weather and lack of proper equipment; and the attempts by some soldiers to escape their duty as an infantryman, such as Kip, Pop, or Bettis. Despite attempts to convey exactly how cold and difficult it was, the use of artificial "Hollywood" snow could not hope to substitute for the feeling of cold metal on skin, icicles hanging from frozen helmets and faces, or the natural speech impediment incurred when one's face is cold. The soldiers never see their breath, even when it is snowing. Many of these effects would have been impossible to replicate unless the filming was actually done in cold weather.

The final aspect of the soldier examined is his attitude toward authority and life as a soldier. The common theme in *Battleground* is that when there is a tough job to do, call on third platoon. Complaining is the natural pastime of the infantry soldier but, because of strict rules of censorship at that time, not once in the movie was there any profanity. MGM had a difficult time getting the terms of surrender included in the film. They finally determined that there was no substitute for "nuts" that would have the same effect as the one word answer to the German terms of surrender. The censors capitulated and "nuts" was removed from the barred list of words.⁸

Common soldier complaining as depicted in *Battleground* follows:

A two star general flies around looking for a place that's too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter...has more wind and rain and snow...then he plants the American flag there.⁹

When told to complete a detail or the platoon has a patrol, the common responses are sarcastic or cynical but rarely argumentative or disrespectful.

This is for the birds.
Beats anything I ever stuck my finger in before.
That's what I like about the infantry; you always know what's going on.
For once I'd like to know where I'm digging is where I'm going to stay.¹⁰

The one indication of possible argument between a soldier and his superior in the movie was when Kip responded to orders to move, "Third platoon, anytime there's a dirty detail." The platoon leader quickly responded with, "let's not have any talk like that soldier." The filmmakers in this case strove to make the soldiers obedient, albeit sometimes cynical.

The filmmakers portrayed another aspect of G.I. life quite well in the film; the American spirit of ingenuity and ability to adapt to one's surroundings. When the intelligence reports indicate that Germans are dressed in American uniforms and infiltrating the area, the common challenge and password are no longer the only source of identification. A humorous, yet serious, challenge occurs while Holly is on patrol and stops a jeep with a major in the front. The talk moves to baseball, then movie stars, then to common life in America.

Hey Joe, whadda ya know?
Just got back from a Vaudeville show.¹¹

This exchange breaks the monotony, clarifies the identities of both sides, and demonstrates that most Americans had the same knowledge and interests.

Conversely, *Attack!* had very few soldiers who had more than small roles. Instead of a movie like *G.I. Joe* or *Battleground* depicting small units and the role of the soldier in combat, this film focused on the role and divergence of officers. The main characters were all officers from Parker to Cooney to Woodruff and Costa. The other supporting characters were a “good ole” platoon sergeant from “bourbon country”, the loyal and quiet company clerk, and the mandatory New Yorker, Bernstein from Yonkers. Others filled in supplementary roles, mostly as casualties or non-speaking fillers.

The central theme of cowardice within the officer corps and the struggle by two lieutenants in dealing with their cowardly commander is the heart of the story. Leadership, or lack thereof, endangers the soldiers, therefore the lieutenants struggle as to what they should or should not do to protect the lives of the men, especially when their initial attempts to have Cooney relieved through the battalion commander are thwarted.

Costa, engineered to be the movie’s hero, is the courageous type in the face of battle but lacks certain qualities the Army desires in a leader. He is not the leader or role model desired among the officers’ corps, although he is revered by his troops. They envision that Costa will stand up and fight for what is right for the platoon, which he will, but on the vice side, he openly and willfully threatened his commanding officer. After threatening his commanding officer and continuing with the ill-planned attack on the town of Linelle, Costa decided to discard the Geneva Convention and the rules pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war by indicating that, “They don’t apply to us in a wise like this.” He then pushed a German captain out the door to be shot by the German troops surrounding the house in which they were pinned. These types of actions by

officers were often depicted in Vietnam era films but seldom portrayed in films before Vietnam. Most audiences and pundits overlook Costa's actions, as they believe he is doing what is required to ensure the safety of his troops. Most forgive him because the central theme is the incompetence of Cooney and the political aspirations of the corrupt Parker. Costa is the hero, therefore he is right. The audience's moral judgment is manipulated into believing Costa is right because of the way in which his character is portrayed.

One man, Bernstein from Yonkers, plays the role of the sarcastic and cynical troop. He has all the wise guy lines and appears to be in every frame where a smart guy line is needed. He starts in the coffee line, then he is talking with Costa, then he makes it to the small house on the outskirts of Linelle, then he makes it back out of the house and to the headquarters. This movie ensures all the main characters make it to the final scene. Although he admits to being out of shape due to "too many cigarettes", Bernstein passes the physical endurance test with the enemy shooting all around him, twice. He maintains the notion of the American popular scene by indicating that Parker and Cooney are old "vaudeville buddies" and he received the "million dollar wound", a broken leg, that would win him a trip stateside as soon as they got out of there.

The able and competent platoon sergeant played the role of the troop with common sense, taking a situation and deeming what made sense at the time, and displaying that wisdom to those around him. He had great respect for Costa and blamed Cooney for Costa's death. At the end, when Lieutenant Woodruff has killed Cooney and is going to turn himself in, it is the sergeant who says:

What happened here, what really happened here, and what happens at a court-martial are two different things.¹²

These words and the three witnesses all firing shots into the body of Cooney after his death is the filmmaker's method of indicating to the audience that the soldiers do what they feel is right in a war environment. Although killing is wrong and Americans are taught that from a very early age, sometimes events happen in war that cannot be explained by rules and regulations. In this case, the death of Cooney although tragic, saved countless lives of other soldiers that may have been let down by his lack of command leadership. In other words, incompetent leaders in the Army must be shot to save lives.

After Woodruff reveals the plot to conceal the true cause of Cooney's death, Parker attempts to make things better by continuing his pattern of lies and deceit, a precursor to his future of political persuasion. The filmmaker highlights two areas here. First, he demonstrates the common deceit and cunning of a person looking out for himself. The "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" mentality. Later he indicates that he does not care what happens to Cooney as long as the town is held. Second, although emotions in war are powerful influences on an officer's actions, the integrity of the professional officer must come to the forefront. With this notion in mind, Woodruff calls General Parsons, the division commander, to report himself and the whole dreadful ordeal. These officer depictions are not erroneous in terms of events that did happen in World War II. The lack of respect for the incompetent Cooney and the request for his removal is not unprecedented. In January 1945, officers of one battalion in Burma asked for and were granted the removal of their commander because of his inability to make

sound decisions. There were also reports of officers shot by their own men, although official records of this sort remain mute.¹³

D-Day, The Sixth of June highlights two areas of concern for the officer corps during World War II; superior-subordinate relationships and officer values. No enlisted soldiers have more than token roles as drivers, clerks or other fill-in roles. The love story is centered on a married American Captain, a British woman he met, and a Captain turned Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army. The British officer plays a supporting role and is not a focal point of the film or this study.

The superior-subordinate relationship can be a contentious area to explore even during ideal circumstances. Parker's initial and only identifiable superior in the film, prior to Wynter in the final assault, is Lieutenant Colonel Alex Timor. Timor is a self-assured glory hound who exudes confidence in his own abilities. He clearly articulates his distaste for West Pointers; encourages a climate of competitiveness with his peers; and condones immoral behavior among his subordinates. Timor is not a role model of the officer corps but he is a by-product of the war effort. He is a "Do as I say, not as I do" officer. He preaches operational security yet talks to the press and almost discloses the entire secret commando operation on the sixth of June because of his need for attention. But perhaps his greatest, or worst, line is when he says, "Parker, hope you make third base," when Parker is leaving for a date with Russell. Timor's character is not out of the ordinary and is supported by a poll that indicated 70 to 80 percent of enlisted men questioned during the war thought that officers put their own welfare above that of their troops.¹⁴

The deeper issue this movie tackles involves the values of the United States Army officer corps. The United States expects its officers to be men of sound mind and body, morally straight and physically strong. There is a conscious decision among many supporting members of the cast to collude in extramarital affairs, even though loved ones back home worry about their well-being during the war. These actions trivialize the sacred bond of marriage by institutionalizing adultery as common practice among officers in the Allied Corps in London. Not only is it condoned, but openly encouraged by the officers presented in the film. Even the British women openly mention returning to their husbands after the war is over.

The other aspects of soldier life include smoking, drinking and mail call. These are universal among the soldiers. It is a common thread that holds them all together. Liquor is the modern day equivalent of the wonder drug that cures battle fatigue and stress. The first thing Timor does when he disembarks the ship from the Dieppe raid is to open a bottle of bourbon, then he stops at a bar on the way home to have another drink.¹⁵ As seen in previous movies, scotch, brandy, bourbon, or wine all assist in ensuring that the American soldier can maintain his focus and direction.¹⁶

Soldier interaction and soldier stories are held to a minimum in *The Longest Day* as Zanuck focuses on the strategic picture. He uses individual soldier participation to demonstrate heroics or levity in a dangerous situation but following a certain set of soldiers through the action is not his goal. The majority of the soldier play is among the officer corps and the services of the other nations. This study focuses on the interaction of the US soldiers and their experiences in war, not those of the international community.

The illustration of soldiers relaxing while waiting for combat is a common scene among war movies. *The Longest Day* demonstrated those same images of soldiers gambling then trying to borrow money; receiving mail; talking about women; spreading rumors they heard from a friend somewhere; and getting chow. Reminiscing about home changes the image of the soldier from one of a killer to that of a young American boy playing in Anytown, USA in the eyes of the audience. One G.I. was camping with his father while another dreams of his girlfriend. Superstition enters in the decision cycle of some soldiers, especially on the eve of battle. One soldier remembers the last time he won a large amount of money; it was immediately followed by bad luck. He immediately takes his \$2,500 he just won playing craps and returns to the game to lose it all back, hoping to change his “luck” for the invasion.

Complaining is a common G.I. past time and they complain about anything and everything. A key ingredient in this film to show camp life while waiting for the invasion order involves the chow line and the cooks. The food line is long and winds through the rain, giving the viewer the impression that that is the way it is every night. The cook is attempting to ensure the chow line continues to move. With a dull, almost irritating voice he constantly repeats, “Snap it up. Shake the lead,” as he slaps a large spoon full of “food” on each soldier’s plate. A young G.I. queries in jest, “You expect us to eat this slop again?” And the cook quickly snaps back, “I don’t care what you do with it Mac. Eat it, throw it out. I get paid for cooking it.” Then the cook nonchalantly returns to his dutiful chant, “Snap it up. Shake the lead.” The common verbal sparring

between the soldier and the cooks is brought to light to assist the audience in garnering a better understanding of life at camp and the verbal volleys that accompany it.

Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Vandervoort, played by John Wayne, enters his division commander's office to enquire about the order to conduct the invasion, and the possibility of changing the location of his drop zones. Wayne plays the quintessential military officer who trains and prepares his men until the final hour, regardless of the weather. He is smart, dedicated, and respected by his superiors and subordinates alike. During this exchange, the commanding general advises Wayne to ease up on himself and his troops. He says, "Sometimes a battalion can be sharpened up to too fine a point. Sometimes a commander can too." This is leadership defined; the superior-subordinate relationship; the commanding general understanding the personality of his subordinate and knowing when to rein him in a little.

A more notable line of Wayne's and another example of leadership is when Wayne is with soldiers on D-Day and they are looking for their objective, the town of Saint-Mere-Eglise. One of the soldiers indicates a direction to the town because of the road sign and Wayne looks at his compass, and then says, "Doesn't anyone in this outfit look at their compass besides me?" With that comment, he directs them in the correct direction towards the town and instructs them to tear down the street sign. As a leader, Vandervoort was responsible for securing the objective. In order to accomplish that mission, he had to know the proper direction to move and was cognizant enough to instruct the removal of the sign to prevent misdirection to any follow-on forces. He was a leader in charge and a hero for the audience.

Religion is a common theme in this film. One soldier receives rosary beads in the mail. An 82nd Airborne chaplain dives into the flooded swamp to look for his communion case that he dropped during the jump. Most of the key leaders recognized God in some form, whether they were wondering whose side he was on or just acknowledging God was on the battlefield. A German officer even wondered aloud whose side God was on, as if he was not sure. This part was added no doubt to appease the German government and their producer.

Acts of temporary cowardice or fear were captured on film when, for example, Private John Steele, played by Red Buttons, witnessed the horror of war while hanging from the church steeple after his parachute gets caught. He froze in fear as he watched his fellow soldiers die in combat. Whether or not he could have assisted will never be known but the fact that he failed to try indicates the utter fear described by so many soldiers who fought there. He appears to be in good spirits later in the film even though his hearing is gone.

Profanity among the soldiers was once again very minimal and there was a reason. The Production Code Office refused to approve the “casual profanity” in Zanuck’s script and the obvious substitutions for four letter words. Words stricken by the censors included crap, muck it, motherlover, bastards, damn, and hell. The censors also had a problem with what appeared to be “an excessive amount of slaughter.” For the most part, Zanuck ignored the requests and filmed what he deemed historical.¹⁷

The Big Red One tells the story of the First Infantry Division through the auspices of one squad. Approximately 50,000 men of whom 4,325 died in battle, served in the 1st

Infantry Division during the Second World War. Few men actually served from Oran to the Elbe, as the laws of chance were too great.¹⁸ Soldiers of the 1st Division won almost 21,000 medals, including sixteen Congressional Medals of Honor, while capturing over 100,000 prisoners.¹⁹ After the Algiers and Tunisia campaigns of North Africa, the 1st Division was decimated. Attrition in the rifle companies was so high that their average company strength was little more than a reinforced platoon.²⁰

The squad depicted in this film provides its breakdown from the stereotypical war films of previous releases; a European language speaker,²¹ a coward, a farm boy and a troop from the Bronx. The grizzled veteran sergeant keeps them together. The squad is the focal point. Officers are never introduced nor do they even pass through the squad area. After the fighting in Tunisia, only four of the original twelve-man squad were still alive; approximately the same attrition percentage as the rest of the division.

Soldier conversation and actions during their relaxation periods focus on women, home and personal conversation. Every rest period involved eating chow. This squad did not eat from the chow line or a hot meal, but rather always from a can. Soldiers also used their \$10,000 worth of G.I. insurance as a bargaining tool.²² For the first time, a soldier was depicted cleaning his rifle, and rifle cleaning was demonstrated during several different scenes; an indication of disciplined soldiers. They also learned tactics from their mentor, the sergeant:

[Do] you know how you smoke out a sniper?
You send someone out and see if they get shot.²³

Later in the movie, a soldier indicates the changing mood of the squad by asking, “[Do] you ever notice no one talks about home anymore, or women?”

Replacement soldiers were kept away from the soldiers socially. The stigma of being new is that new soldiers do not last long in combat so veterans choose to not learn their name. Often the new soldiers names were mispronounced or the “old soldiers” would not remember meeting them during training or previous engagements.

We looked at replacements as dead men with temporary use of their arms and legs.²⁴

The conflict between a soldier and his responsibility to the squad in his unit was evident throughout the film. Griff (Mark Hamill) could not shoot an enemy soldier. He lacked the intestinal fortitude to function as an infantry soldier in combat situations. Although he did blow the breach during the Normandy invasion, he did it under direct threat from the sergeant. It is very suspect that a cowardly soldier would last three years in a combat squad. The squad would push him out; he would become a casualty or feign an injury; or the leadership would move him to a non-combat role in the rear. That type of soldier is a cancer on a squad and his failure to comply with his responsibilities as a sharpshooter makes him a liability to the squad who could hinder future operations.

In *Saving Private Ryan*, the composition of the “squad” organized under Miller to search for Ryan includes a Jew, a Brooklyn-Irish wise guy, a book writer, an Italian, and a farm boy. Although Spielberg indicates this composite was not planned as homage to the stereotypical Hollywood multi-ethnic diversity war movie, he did indicate that Brooklynites deserved their place in war movies. He cited that over 450,000 Brooklynites participated in World War II while nearly 100,000 lost their lives, proving that “Brooklyn took the brunt of serving in the Pacific and Europe.”²⁵

Leadership is a strong theme in this film; specifically the leadership of Captain Miller and the ways he copes with various crises during the execution of their mission. Historians have determined that leadership of individuals to motivate men and organize actions in the face of the murderous fire on Omaha was the decisive factor attributing to the American victory.²⁶ There are several instances in the movie when the character and moral courage of Miller are displayed. It is interesting to note that Spielberg picked a common school teacher to play the role of commander instead of a career soldier. Miller displays his leadership early in the movie when he is in the landing craft. His hand shaking and noticeably nervous, he reminds his men to keep their breaches clean. After his calm reminder to his men about weapons maintenance, he says, “I’ll see you on the beach”; a reassuring gesture to his men that no matter what they encounter, he will be there with them. Miller’s relationship with his men is one of respect and trust. Although he nearly experiences mutiny when he decides that the squad will attack the machine gun position, his demeanor allows him to maintain control through quick wit and courage. The most telling illustration of the relationship of an officer to his men is the following dialogue when the squad is continuing debate on the execution of the mission. One of the squad members thinks his mother should be able to get him out of the mission.

[It is our] duty as soldiers, we all have orders and we have to follow them;
that supercedes everything else including your mothers.
Even if you think the mission is FUBAR?
Especially if you think the mission is FUBAR.²⁷

When confronted with the question of why he never gripes about missions or about the Army or about the war, Miller responds:

I don't gripe to you. There is a chain of command; gripes go up. You gripe to me then I gripe to the battalion commander.²⁸

The troops display their respect for Miller through their comments. Vin Diesel, the Italian, tells the new corporal that he “loves ‘im,” [Miller] and Reiben indicates that the “CO was assembled at OCS [officer candidate school] from spare parts of dead GIs.” The relationship between Miller and his sergeant (Tom Sizemore) is one of equal trust and respect. They share moments together that only two men in those unique positions could share. Whether it is discussing the exploits of past troops, or the guilt of the dead soldiers in the company, the Sergeant keeps watch over Miller. When Miller moves out from behind cover to draw enemy fire, Sarge says “Captain, if your mother saw you doing that she'd be very upset.” Miller responds with, “I thought you were my mother.”

During the entire mission, Miller maintains his sense of humor while haunted by the memories of the men who have died under his command. He reminisces about old soldiers and keeps a count of how many soldiers in his command had died (94). He tries to rationalize to himself that for every man that got killed, he saved perhaps ten or twenty times that many.²⁹ To counter the devastation of the war on him mentally and physically, he would provide snippets of humor to hide his own anguish. When confronted with a German loudspeaker spouting propaganda, Miller said in jest, “The Statue of Liberty is kaput? That's disconcerting.” He asked for clean sheets and a hotel with room service while staying with the 101st in Neuville.

Soldier interaction was portrayed through a band of men who may or may not have been from the same squad or platoon but who are brought together for this mission. The 2nd Ranger Battalion was organized and began training as a unit in early 1943³⁰, so

they had been in the same company for over a year and half. The camaraderie was evident through the blowing of kisses, sharing of innermost feelings, and the pain in their eyes when one of the squad was killed or wounded. The conflict in the squad over the execution of orders arose from the mutual respect in the squad and the genuine feeling that saving one man was not worth a single life in that squad.³¹

Profanity was prevalent in this film, vastly greater than in any other film studied. The common term used throughout the film was FUBAR. FUBAR originated during World War II as a predominately Marine Corps and Navy slang term; but slang has a tendency to become Joint if it is worth repeating. A more common term used in the Army during the Second World War is SNAFU. SNAFU originated with the Army in the 1930s but also crossed service borders.³² SNAFU was so popular that there was a Team SNAFU organized by the 101st Airborne Division during the defense of Bastogne.³³

Soldier fear and survival instincts were well portrayed. The landing scene demonstrated the different reactions of men in combat from confusion, complete terror and mental shut down, to temporary system overload due to excessive explosions. Survivors of the beach assault reported hearing bullets hit the ramp door before it was opened. When the ramp was lowered, they could see the hail of bullets hit the surf and whiz through them. Some men dove under water while others jumped over the side of the landing craft.³⁴ Stiff, weakened by seasickness, and burdened with heavy loads, many soldiers lacked the strength to move quickly out of the water that was knee-deep and higher in many places. Many were utterly exhausted before they reached shore and still had to move over 200 yards to seek cover near the berms. Most men who made it to

the forward cover, did so by walking under increased German fire. Those that hunkered down near obstacles or destroyed vehicles merely prolonged their difficulties and suffered heavier losses.³⁵ Spielberg's depiction of men vomiting in the boat, jumping over the side, and struggling through the water accurately portrayed these events. Perspective from the German positions allowed viewers to witness the mass of men on the beach and how slowly they moved, even in the sights of a German gunner.

Conclusion

Several films, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, *Battleground*, and *The Big Red One*, depicted one squad as a microcosm of a military unit during the war and followed that squad almost historically along the lines of the unit to which it was assigned. One major deviation occurred during *G.I. Joe* when the 18th Infantry Regiment was depicted fighting in Italy. This scene was, however, appropriate for the film because it was during this battle that Pyle wrote his Pulitzer Prize winning article about the fallen commander; the culmination of the movie.

Soldier portrayal is a unique subject. This study of soldiers provides a glimpse of the changes in soldier portrayal over a period of time and also the changes as censors allowed more realistic depiction of war in general, and soldiers in particular. Each movie provided some information on soldier behavior, either officer, enlisted or both. Several movies focused on a single squad and their interaction, providing a powerful display of camaraderie and field life.

As the historical distance between the actual event and the production of the movie increased, the image of the soldier appeared to shift also. There appears to be a

significant difference between Wellman's grunt in *G.I. Joe* and Spielberg's grunt in *Saving Private Ryan*. The language, the way the soldiers carried themselves, and their demeanor all seem to shift towards a fundamental change in the soldier depiction. The soldiers in *Private Ryan* appear to be actors attempting to portray 1940s soldiers while the *G.I. Joe* soldiers appear to be real soldiers.

There are a few reasons that could account for this difference. First, *G.I. Joe* used veterans of the European Theater who were on their way to the Pacific as extras. Many of them had speaking lines and Wellman made the actors live and train with the soldiers during the production. Although Spielberg's soldiers went through a boot camp, it was only ten days, a far cry from having actual veterans of the conflict on location living daily with the actors. Second, *Private Ryan* was produced 53 years after the end of World War II. During this time, the culture and customs of the American society have changed. To depict the soldiers of 1940 means to depict the culture, as most soldiers were citizen soldiers. The further the filmmaker's experiences are from that time and culture, the more difficult it is to portray it accurately. Soldier dialogue in the earlier movies focused on the fog of the missions, not knowing where they were or where they were going. The life in the squad was the soldiers' entire frame of reference. *The Big Red One* provided a narrator to guide viewers through the movie and the soldier's thoughts, so the soldiers appeared to understand and know exactly what was happening all the time, probably not realistic. Third, the majority of the actors in *G.I. Joe* and *Battleground* were unknowns whereas *Private Ryan* is riddled with stars.³⁶ In *Private Ryan*, Captain Miller is not Captain Miller the ranger company commander with a delicate mission; he is Captain

Miller who is really Tom Hanks, the Academy Award winning actor. The unknown actors provide a deliberate realism to the scenes as the audience does not relate to that character from a different movie.

By the time *Saving Private Ryan* is released, the soldiers all appeared more educated, and more likely to challenge the commander than in previous movies. The language is vastly different, for example:

I'm a Catholic and I say bomb it! I've got a wife and kid.
Think I would die for a piece of stone?³⁷

Don't you understand perfect English?³⁸

Why don't we hire a few spies so we know what's going on once in while?³⁹

A two star general flies around looking for a place that's too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter...has more wind and rain and snow...then he plants the American flag there.⁴⁰

This is for the birds.
Beats anything I ever stuck my finger in before.
That's what I like about the infantry; you always know what's going on.
For once I'd like to know where I'm digging is where I'm going to stay.⁴¹

This is bullshit!
You got that right!⁴²

...[this] entire mission is a misallocation of government resources...seems to me sir, that God gave me a special gift and made me a fine instrument of warfare...⁴³

Hey Joe, whadda ya know?
Just got back from a Vaudeville show.⁴⁴

I'm an American for crying out loud, they're the enemy. . . .
how can they call me the enemy?⁴⁵

When comparing the supposedly less educated soldiers of films, Jackson, the *Private Ryan* bumpkin, appears to be fairly intelligent as evidenced through the above stated dialogue. Ricks from *Attack!*, on the other hand, is the more the conventional simpleton.

Ranger battalions were motivated, specially trained soldiers designed to conduct special missions. It is possible that they could have been a little wiser than the average grunt but they probably also would have been less critical of their mission and commander. A ranger with a bad attitude most likely would have been shipped back to a regular line unit. Rangers were trained for specialized missions, they did not expect to be used for conventional warfare and therefore could have seen finding Private Ryan either as an insult to their professionalism and a waste of their unique skills, or as a challenge of finding a single soldier deep behind enemy lines. Every soldier in *Saving Private Ryan* had an opinion on how to complete the mission and presented that theory to the commander. In previous films, the soldiers complained to each other and their sergeants, while officers quickly quelled derogatory comments.

Third platoon, anytime there's a dirty detail.
Let's not have any talk like that soldier.⁴⁶

Although seen as 1990s actors portraying 1940s soldiers, the soldier portrayals in *Saving Private Ryan* still provided essential elements of soldier interaction and squad development. The camaraderie, professionalism in combat performance, and caring for each other was clearly evident in several scenes throughout the film. They did not alienate viewers or take away from the story by increasing the common vocabulary of the soldiers. The camaraderie in this film is reminiscent of that in *G.I. Joe* and *Battleground*.

The level of profanity is also the greatest of any film, more reminiscent of the soldiers in *Platoon*. The soldiers of the Second World War cursed, but this image has never been portrayed on the silver screen to the degree that it is displayed in *Saving Private Ryan*. Common to all films was soldier interaction either through mail call, chow, cards, or break-time and story telling. The soldier bond or brotherhood was evidenced in each movie.

Saving Private Ryan also brought the demise of the infallible American soldier in combat. It is the first movie studied in which an American soldier loses a knife fight with a German. In *Battleground*, three separate but simultaneous knife fights resulted in three American victories while Marvin in *The Big Red One* knifed opponent after opponent without ever receiving a wound.

The officers portrayed in these films provided a variety of leadership examples that articulate the characteristics of the officer corps during the period. Miller, from *Saving Private Ryan*, could be used as a case study for a leadership class for his methods of defusing tense situations, crisis action decision-making in the face of adversaries, and building a team so each soldier understands the importance of what he is doing as part of a unit. The officers from *Attack!* provide images of all that is wrong with some military officers in conflict situations; officers that are incompetent and looking out for themselves at all costs. The films clearly demonstrated the loneliness of command and the compounded effects of losing soldiers on the physical and personal demeanor of the officers.

World War II movies supposedly lost their audiences to the Vietnam War movies throughout the eighties and into the nineties. Large recreations were costly, and it was deemed that the audience was not as interested in World War II. As DOD pressure and censorship weakened, filmmakers could delve into the more seedy aspects of war, such as, criminal activity and war crimes. Vietnam provided the perfect conduit for these movies because the war was fresh in the minds of the audience, the public viewed it as a failure, and the audience attraction to World War II had waned. Because of this, the fiftieth anniversary of D-day came and went without a major Hollywood production on the event.

¹ Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film, Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 142

² Arthur Miller, *Situation Normal...* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), 1.

³Ibid, 2.

⁴Rubin, 37, 41.

⁵Ibid, 25.

⁶Ibid, 32-33.

⁷Hoyt, 542.

⁸Rubin, 36.

⁹*Battleground* (Hollywood: MGM, 1949), movie.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²*Attack!* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1956), movie.

¹³Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 261.

¹⁴*Ibid*, 132.

¹⁵There appears to be a common and growing theme here. *G.I Joe, Battleground*, and especially *Attack!* have all used some form of liquor to cope with the rigors of combat. Normally the hero only uses it as a social drink or when relaxing but the stressful anti-hero uses it to deal with stress as an instrument to cope with the certain aspects of command or leadership.

¹⁶Profanity is still held to a minimum and not commonplace.

¹⁷Suid, 150 (The actual memo stated “We are concerned with what seems to us to be an excessive amount of slaughter in this story. We realize that it is impossible to tell the story of the invasion of Normandy without indicating the staggering loss of human life. We do urge you, in those scenes you stage, to minimize the dramatization of personal killings. We think that such an effort on your part would avoid the ‘bloodbath’ effect.”) Zanuck’s ignoring the majority of their recommendations is another example of the power of the censor diminishing.

¹⁸Society of the First Division, Introduction. It is interesting to note that Fuller would select five men to serve together from North Africa through Czechoslovakia without losing a single man. None of them got promoted either in three years of combat.

¹⁹1st Infantry Division homepage, The Big Red One, available from <http://www.1id.army.mil/home.htm>; internet; accessed on 12 January 2001.

²⁰Society of the First Division, 80.

²¹During one of the Italian speakers translations with the Sicilian boy, he uses the word Jesse James. I’m not sure this is correct Italian and do not think that the little boy knows Jesse James.

²²The troop in G.I. Joe used it because he had no family to leave the money to and it was a way for Wellman to show the changing face of the unit without actually illustrating the dead bodies.

²³*The Big Red One* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1980), movie.

²⁴*Ibid*.

²⁵Schaefer. The term “brunt” is arguable considering over 16 million men served in the Army alone (includes Air Corps).

²⁶*Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, 57.

²⁷*Saving Private Ryan* (Hollywood: DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures, 1998), movie.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Compared against the commander in *Attack!*, Miller is a vastly superior officer. But against the commander in *G.I. Joe*, they have many of the same traits.

³⁰Haggerty, 204-205.

³¹Of course, that is also considered self-preservation because the one man in the squad that may be killed while fulfilling a mission you do not agree with, may be you.

³²William L. Priest, *Swear Like a Trooper* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Rockbride Publishing an imprint of Howell Press, Inc., 2000), 98 and 195.

³³Leonard Rapport and Arthur Northwood, Jr., *Rendezvous With Destiny: A History of The 101st Airborne Division* (Madella, Minnesota: House of Print, 1948), 472.

³⁴Society of the First Division, 180-181.

³⁵*Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)*, 44.

³⁶Robert Mitchum was a relative unknown prior to *G.I. Joe*.

³⁷*The Story of G.I. Joe* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1945), movie.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Battleground* (Hollywood: MGM, 1949), movie.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Saving Private Ryan* (Hollywood: DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures, 1998), movie.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Battleground* (Hollywood: MGM, 1949), movie.

⁴⁵*Attack!* (Hollywood: United Artists, 1956), movie.

⁴⁶*Battleground* (Hollywood: MGM, 1949), movie.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

Reporter in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

The movies selected for study in this thesis provide a variety of war movie types, whether an epic re-creation of a historical event; the depiction of a great leader in the form of a biography; or the use of war to tell a story of soldiers or a unit. The filmmakers' ulterior motives and preconceived notions of warfare played an integral part in the final outcome of the film. They attempted to maintain historical accuracy at the macro level unless it hindered the story development, then some artistic license was evident to maintain the film's course. Soldier development was interesting and hinged on attempts of later generation actors accurately portraying 1940s soldiers.

The answer to the primary question of whether or not these movies accurately reflect the true nature of military life and actions prevalent at the time is not a simple yes or no. In order to answer the question, this thesis concentrated on two secondary questions to determine if the framework for accuracy was present. Did the filmmaker strive for accuracy and was there DOD involvement? These two questions establish the conditions for demonstrating historical accuracy and were studied in chapter 3. Next, this thesis determined if historical accuracy was followed and to what extent, followed by an analysis on the depiction of the soldiers.

As discussed previously in chapter 3, the movies selected accurately display the military art and science of the United States Army to the extent the filmmaker desired.

The filmmaker's desire, motivation, and ability to financially support his film was critical in the final accuracy of the movie. DOD involvement signaled another step towards historical accuracy as each script submitted was scrutinized for correctness. If a script was inaccurate, it was either denied assistance or sent back to the filmmaker with proposed changes. These two actions assisted in providing the framework for accuracy in the end product.

DOD involvement consisted of technical advisors, men, and equipment that were representative of the time. As the date of the film's production became more distant from the time of the actual event, the amount of support DOD could provide was inversely proportional. The ability of DOD to provide veterans of World War II as technical advisors waned in the 1960s and was basically non-existent in the 1970s and beyond. All World War II era equipment was gone from the Army inventory and the authorization to provide large numbers of troops to act as extras was difficult to obtain. By the time *A Bridge Too Far* was made, DOD provided no troops, although it permitted troops on leave to participate. Therefore, for *The Big Red One* and *Saving Private Ryan*, there was no real assistance DOD could provide.

DOD always attempts to ensure the accuracy of films that they support. If DOD provided assistance, it would go as far as to include biographies for fictional characters to ensure that their rank and ribbons were commensurate with their experience and assignments. Accuracy of uniforms and actions were critical for DOD assistance and these items were investigated in detail.¹

Historical accuracy is the cornerstone of military movies. It provides the framework from which a story can be told. If uniforms and equipment are wrong for the time and place depicted, or if soldiers are not portrayed in a realistic manner, the film loses credibility among a certain segment of the population, that is, veterans, historians, and sometimes many critics. Although credibility is important, certain aspects of film creation outweigh those of historical accuracy. Costs and hardware access overshadowed the desire for historical accuracy in certain and easily definable circumstances.

The question of accuracy is more a question of the degree of accuracy. Each film attempted to follow some semblance of large-scale accuracy while maintaining the right to insert dramatic content to what could otherwise be considered a dull scene. These movies portray the heroics and missions in a fairly accurate manner. The filmmakers replicated the wartime Army in their vision, whether they served or not. They each had a message to send, and they each had a reason for sending it. Overall historical accuracy was significant, but below the big picture, several aspects of historical accuracy were circumvented to keep the story interesting. Soldier portrayal changed with the time, as did DOD involvement. All nine of the films studied attempted to maintain historical accuracy at the macro level while maintaining an interesting story.

The most critically acclaimed movies in this study, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, *Battleground*, *Patton*, and *Saving Private Ryan*, were all historically accurate to a certain degree. Each film incorporated a few fictional items or misrepresentations, whether deliberately to assist in the storyline, or inadvertently as the result of a simple oversight by the technical advisors and production staff. Either way, these oversights did not

detract from the reality of the film and most likely were not noticed by any viewer except for history and accuracy pundits. Most viewers do not care if the soldier's boots were the right color, and I would argue these small details do not lower the quality of the film. On the other hand, *A Bridge Too Far*, which was very accurate historically, was not as successful, perhaps because it followed the events too closely and was a difficult story to follow.

The relevance of this study is articulated through the perceived public support of the military. Since 1986, the American public has had more confidence in the United States military than any other organization, to include churches, the Supreme Court and the Presidency.² The year 1986 was the same year that *Top Gun* and *Platoon* were released, two very large military box office successes. This is no indication that movies alone change the opinions and perceptions of the audiences but every form of media provides a means to send a message to the receiver. Last year, over 74% of Americans attended at least one movie, the highest percentage in history and well above the 55% that attended a movie in 1988.³ With the ever-growing popularity of movies, films are a viable system with which to communicate visions to an audience.

After the enormous success of *Saving Private Ryan*, Director Steven Spielberg, lead actor Tom Hanks, and author Stephen Ambrose joined the crusade to build a World War II memorial in Washington, D.C. as a tribute to those men who defeated fascism. The movie was a conduit to further their efforts to have people like Spielberg's father properly recognized for their accomplishments.

Audience reaction to certain movies in the context of this thesis is difficult to ascertain. Exit polls were never conducted and the public's perceptions of the movies were never captured in print, save one, *Private Ryan*. Spielberg's compilation of all the emotions, events, and history of World War II into an explosive cinematic performance spawned a book, *'Now You Know': Reactions After Seeing Private Ryan*. The book is a collection of the emotional effects of the movie on World War II veterans, their families, and the common public that had no connection to the war. The writings in this book are clear indicators of the effects of certain movies on the audience.

The idea that films influence public perception is not new. As mentioned earlier, the Air Force noticed an increase in recruits after the release of *Top Gun*, while the Marine Corps received additional recruiting assistance from *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Another film that may have had a lasting impact on the public in a measurable way is *Patton*. On 8 December 2000, Gallup conducted a poll to determine the greatest American military general of all time. The answer was not Washington, Grant, McArthur, or even Eisenhower; it was General George S. Patton, selected by 17% of Americans. General of the Army and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower was selected by 14% while General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was selected by 12%. The interesting note on the poll is the divide between age groups on whom they selected. The youngest voters, 18 to 29, were split between Colin Powell and George Washington. Powell received his fame from the Gulf War and is currently still in the news and very popular with the media, while Washington is fresh in the minds of the younger generation from their recent school history. The next age group, 30 to 49, overwhelmingly selected Patton. This

age group was in their early impressionable movie-watching years when *Patton* was first released. It is interesting to note also that this age group selected Powell two to one over Eisenhower, another indication of the power of the media. The next age group, 50 to 64, selected Eisenhower as the greatest with 26 percent, while Patton and MacArthur followed with 17 percent and 14 percent respectively. The last age group, 65+, and those that have memories of the war and the exploits of the three Generals, selected Eisenhower almost four-to-one over Patton. They also selected MacArthur over two-to-one over Patton. This pattern suggests that the older generation was less influenced by the movie version of Patton than by their memories of what they read and heard during the war. Although this poll is not scientific proof that the movie *Patton* altered the public's perception of General Patton, it is suggestive that the movie presents a case that the public understands Patton's military accomplishments more than any other general because of the movie. History books in school devote time to the study of Washington, Lee, Grant, Eisenhower, Marshall and MacArthur among others but very little is devoted to Patton. The public has to shape its opinions from somewhere, and the movie appears to be as good a conduit as any.⁴

The Department of Defense recognized the importance of the motion picture industry and recognized their contributions with a ceremony at the Beverly Hilton Hotel on 30 November 2000. During the concert and recognition ceremony, Secretary of Defense William Cohen acknowledged several films for their positive portrayal of the military and their respective service members.

Hollywood has played a role in the security of this country throughout history. Back in World War I, movie stars and celebrities

helped push liberty bonds. In World War II, many of the celebrities raised over a million dollars to support that war. Films such as *Top Gun*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Men of Honor*, and *Pearl Harbor* pay great tribute to the military. The film industry is important in shaping what people think about our military and supporting them. Thank you for all that you do in portraying the men and women who serve us, their patriotism, their courage, their sense of honor. We in the Pentagon wanted to say “Thank you” to Hollywood.⁵

Military leaders should take note that war movies affect the American populace. The movie’s effects on the public’s perception, in turn, influence recruiting and retention, and assists in mobilizing national will towards a strong defense. The United States Army met its recruiting goal in 1999 after missing it in 1998. The Department of Defense attributed its success to the hard work of military leaders among other reasons; maybe they should have also thanked *Private Ryan*.

¹Philip M. Strub, Special Assistant for Audiovisual, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, interview by author, Pentagon, Washington D.C., 25 January 2001.

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