"THIS IS FOR FIGHTING, THIS IS FOR FUN": POPULAR HOLLYWOOD COMBAT (WAR) FILMS FROM THE FIRST GULF WAR TO THE PRESENT (1990-2015)

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Abstract:
"This is for Fighting, This is for Fun": Popular Hollywood Combat (War) Films from the First
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Hollywood has been making war movies since it began making movies. Widely credited as the first 'Blockbuster,' and one of the first films to establish Hollywood narrative techniques and conventions, D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, *Birth of A Nation*, is an epic melodrama about the American Civil War ending with a literal marriage of the North and the South in the form of a young white heterosexual couple, solidifying the connection between war, families, and nation-building that has become the framework of the genre; hetero-nuclear families are the basis of the nation and war is a threat to these families, but ultimately also a critical component of nation-building/strengthening. These ideologies persist in contemporary combat films. The First Gulf War and those in Iraq and Afghanistan have had a major impact on this genre and this project investigates the (sometimes radical) shifts in representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality in popular Hollywood combat films made and released since the first Gulf War (1990) with a particular emphasis on more recent films (2005-2015) since these are the films which have received the least, if any, scholarly attention. Building on existing cultural, feminist, film, and postcolonial theory using a case study of selected popular Hollywood combat films and based primarily upon close textual analysis of the films themselves, this dissertation argues that these post-Cold War combat films are vital in creating and reinforcing cultural scripts about gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, and war. This analysis adds to the field by identifying key cycles in the genre and arguing that, in fact, the ideologies of these films whether intentionally or not, reinforce the idea of a white, American, male-headed household as the norm to be protected, removing 'Others' from the frame, and implying that war is somehow natural, unending, and/or unavoidable, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophesy wherein the more it happens, the more we seek to represent it, to gain mastery over it, the more natural and unavoidable it seems, and the more it continues to happen and seem normal and on and on into perpetuity.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Hollywood Combat Films, The 'Birth' of a Nation and a Genre

Hollywood has been making war movies since it began making movies. Widely credited as the first 'Blockbuster,' and one of the first films to establish Hollywood narrative techniques and conventions, D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *Birth of A Nation* is an epic melodrama about the American Civil War and its connections to and impact on the gendered, sexualized, and racialized relationships between people, families, and nation-building; the film ends with the literal marriage of the North and the South in the form of a young couple whose families are, respectively, from those parts of the country, solidifying the connection between war, families, and nation-building. The framework thus established in this film -- hetero-nuclear families as the basis of the nation and war as a threat to these families but also ultimately a challenge to be risen to and overcome, a critical component of nation-building and strengthening -- has carried forward throughout the genre and still has strong echoes in today's combat films.

Hollywood's preoccupation with war doesn't end with *Birth of a Nation*; multiple Hollywood films have been made about every major conflict that America has been involved in since. The films of this genre, frequently vehicles used to display special effects techniques and more able to transcend language barriers than some other genres (e.g. dramas), are often very popular and therefore reach and influence a wide audience. Since the Vietnam War was a first in many ways,[1] many theorists including Susan Jeffords, Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud, and Robert Eberwein have noted major shifts in representation in films made after this war. Significantly less critical attention, however, has been paid to the films of this genre since then, particularly those released after the Cold War, despite the fact that the Gulf Wars and those in

Iraq and Afghanistan have also had a major impact on this genre. This project will therefore investigate the (sometimes radical) shifts in representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality in popular Hollywood combat films made and released since the first Gulf War (1990) with a particular emphasis on more recent films (2005-2015) since these are the films which have received the least, if any, scholarly attention. This dissertation fulfills the requirements for a PhD in Communication and Culture specializing in the streams of Media and Culture, and Politics and Policy using a case study of selected popular Hollywood combat films; it is comprised of an analysis of the films' circumstances of production and consumption and is based primarily upon close textual analysis of the films themselves.

Given the ongoing American military presence and political turmoil in and around Iraq and Afghanistan, studying contemporary Hollywood combat films, specifically those that have been made about these wars and those preceding them, is essential to our understanding of these conflicts, this genre, and Western popular and political culture more generally. Studying popular Hollywood cinema is imperative because of its ability to reach a wide North American and global audience; the worldwide circulation of these films ensures that they are an extremely influential cultural force both within North America and beyond. These films, therefore, are critical in terms of their role in creating and reinforcing cultural scripts about gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, war, and the culture within which they are produced more generally. This dissertation therefore seeks to answer the question: How and why do these contemporary Hollywood combat films fit into and/or change the genre of which they are a part, and what (gendered, sexual, racial/ethnic, and national) ideologies do they promote?

Overall, this research question taps into a number of complex and pressing issues and sheds light on the role(s) that combat films play in Western society's understanding of itself,

'Others,' and its role in armed (international) conflict. Examining the ways in which gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, and 'the Other' are represented in contemporary popular Hollywood combat films reveals a great deal about the culture within which these films are both produced and consumed. Drawing on cultural theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and post-colonial theory, and using cinema studies techniques of textual analysis, this research will reveal not only the Western ideas about gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality that contemporary popular Hollywood combat films espouse, but also the extent to which these films have an impact on the way viewers think about international conflict and America's role in it. This research will build on the existing work in multiple fields by applying the findings of previous work on the genre[2] to more recent films to determine what changes, if any, have occurred or are occurring in the genre and will add to the field by arguing that, in fact, the ideologies of these films whether intentionally or not, reinforce the idea of a white, American, male-headed household as the norm to be protected, completely removing the 'Others' involved from the frame and, therefore, from consideration. In order to avoid such critiques, Hollywood must focus on telling more inclusive stories that aim to represent a broader spectrum of war experiences that do not start from the assumption that war is somehow natural and/or unending and unavoidable. Otherwise, these cultural products risk creating and falling into somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophesy wherein war, however bad it might be, is represented and perceived as natural, inevitable, and unending, and the more it happens, the more we seek to represent it, to gain mastery over it, the more natural and unavoidable it seems, and the more it continues to happen and seem normal and on and on into perpetuity.

This project will largely be based on the method of close textual analysis, taking a case-study approach to the combat film genre. The research will draw on the theoretical bodies of film

theory, cultural theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and post-colonial theory to examine the representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality in popular Hollywood combat films. Because examining all of the war films ever produced by Hollywood is an impossibly large task, this project will examine only popular (high-grossing and/or award-nominated/winning) Hollywood combat films (only those with a majority emphasis on active-duty soldiers in combat with an 'enemy Other' and/or in a foreign theatre of war) produced and released since the first Gulf War (1990) with an emphasis on combat films produced and released in the last ten years (since 2005). Films covered include: *Courage under Fire* (1996); *G.I. Jane* (1997); *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); *The Thin Red Line* (1998); *Three Kings* (1999); *The Patriot* (2000); *Black Hawk Down* (2001); *Pearl Harbor* (2001); *Band of Brothers* (2001); *We Were Soldiers* (2002); *Jarhead* (2005); *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006); *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006); *Stop Loss* (2008); *The Hurt Locker* (2008); *Generation Kill* (2008); *The Pacific* (2010); and, covered in the conclusion, *Act of Valor* (2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *Fury* (2014) and *American Sniper* (2014). To be clear, this selection only includes films that concentrate the majority of the plot/screen time on American ground soldiers' experiences of active duty/combat in a 'foreign' theatre of war and that are based on real, historical conflicts (from the American Revolution and Civil War through to the current/ongoing War on Terror); for the sake of a manageable and coherent sample of films, it does not include comedies, musicals, training camp films, home-front or returning veteran films, POW films, films depicting solely submarines and/or planes, foreign films, films mainly about soldiers from countries other than the United States, or films based on fictional conflicts, nor does it include videogames or regular television series. Because all of these films are popular and North American, there are no issues of access.

Far from existing simply as a reflection or mirror of historical events, these films are cultural artifacts that speak to and can tell us something about the sociopolitical circumstances in which they were produced. Henry Jenkins' recent work on *Convergence Culture* is particularly applicable to this genre which seems, at points, to be gravitating towards or at least drawing from the new media phenomenon of soldiers creating and uploading their own 'home movie' type films of helmet-camera footage edited to popular music (e.g. Kimberley Pearce's *Stop Loss*) and tie-ins with cross-marketable cultural products like videogames. These films also have the ability to ideologically impact the culture(s) in which they are released and consumed. This analysis begins from the standpoint that these films have a great deal to tell us, not only about the way that Hollywood sees (or wishes to represent) the United States and its involvement in international conflicts, but also about the way viewers think and feel about their own gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality, and about these conflicts on the whole.

Violent conflicts are high-pressure situations and therefore bring existing cultural tensions to the fore, making them much clearer than they might otherwise be. The ideological significance and impact of depicting violence onscreen are carefully traced by Stephen Prince, and more generally treated by Hannah Arendt, and Slavoj Žižek. As a result of this unique position, combat films are particularly rich sites for sociocultural analysis. For example, Michel Foucault's theories about the relationship between knowledge and power play out in the repetition of these combat narratives within Hollywood; the repetition of these stories, an attempt at mastery, gives the teller(s) of these stories power according to Foucault's formulation. Studying the representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality in times of crisis/conflict and within these films about conflict is, therefore, particularly vital and revealing. Foucault's concepts surrounding the construction of the subject (and docile bodies) are too

particularly interesting in the case of soldiers, whose bodily and behavioural comportment are extremely rigid and require strict self-policing. Also significant is the question of what message these onscreen representations of self-discipline send to the viewer and what impact these messages have on spectators' own self-discipline and the creation of docile spectatorial bodies.

The production of docile bodies is important not just in terms of the creation of national subjects, but also in terms of the production of gendered and sexual subjects. These combat films, in fact, *all* dwell in some way or another on the connection between war, gender relations, families, and nation-building. Tracing the relationship between national subjects and sexuality and the representation of sexuality onscreen is therefore, of paramount importance. Linda Williams' work *Screening Sex* provides a general background from which to approach the representation of sex and sexuality onscreen, while other works apply more directly to the representation of masculinity and sexuality and the military onscreen.[3] On the other hand, the intensely male-centred nature of these films lends itself to a queer reading,[4] therefore potentially undermining or at least destabilizing the idea of the American military man as head of household and nation-building-block. The ideological significance of these representations of gender, sexuality, and violence and their link to family and nation-building is revealed in a close examination of combat films with an eye towards the representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality therein.

Also important to consider in investigating combat films, particularly those concerning wars involving non-Western nations is the representation of the 'enemy Other.' Attention to these types of representations is particularly imperative considering the international nature of all recent American conflicts, particularly those ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the way in which these films represent the Other also often says a great deal about America because this

Other is the opposing negative against which America constructs its own identity as the 'norm.'

Feminist and post-colonial theories, therefore, have a great deal to contribute to this discussion.

Here lies the significance of Gayatri C. Spivak's concept of the self-consolidating Other to the

project. Spivak's formulation of the subaltern[5] is also particularly fitting here, given its

connection to the idea that those who are in charge of telling the stories ('speaking') are those

who can be heard, and therefore, are those with the power. A feminist post-colonial analysis will

draw on these concepts to examine the ways in which both women and racialized Others are

largely subaltern within this genre, given that theirs are not the stories being told, but more

importantly, in most cases, they are not the ones doing the telling because their subalternity

means they are outside the arena of communication altogether. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's

critique of capitalism[6] and the profit motive are also important to include in any discussion of the

ways in which an extremely influential and extremely profit-oriented industry such as

Hollywood represents marginalized groups. Edward Said's work on the representation of

Middle-Eastern peoples and Islam[7] are also invaluable contributions here. He traces how the

representations of these groups of people and this religion have changed over time, yet their

ideological impetus and effect have largely remained the same. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn

Studlar extend Said's work to film,[8] and Sherene Razack's work[9] details the practical

ramifications of these ideologies which are being played out in film and media.

Linked to Razack's work is perhaps the most important aspect of examining the

ideologies of these films: their real-world impact. Many theorists' works underline the

importance of real-world action and consequences,[10] and this dissertation argues that, whether

intentionally or not, the ideologies of these films reinforce the idea of a 'White, American, Male-

Headed Household' as the norm to be protected, completely removing the Others involved from the frame and, therefore, from consideration.

Genre:

The first and most attention in this literature review will be devoted to genre since a thorough background in this area is necessary to explain the theory behind the (sample) selection and omission of films for this dissertation. A great deal of important work has been done on the war film genre, notably by Jeanine Basinger in *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. It is a slippery topic, especially in terms of generic classification. Questions arise about what 'counts' as a war film and then what the differences are between them e.g. combat films vs. home front melodramas; films based on historical events and individuals vs. set during a historical conflict but based primarily on fictional events and/or individuals vs. films about fictional conflicts. Scholars such as Robert Eberwein have also done work on war films generally[11] emerging from particular times and places, noting the differences between war films made during a conflict and those made long after.[12] There is also a great deal of work that has been done on war cinema from different countries such as British war cinema and German war cinema.[13] Several texts have been written about American war films generally[14] and there have also been a number of influential works published on American representations of specific conflicts.[15] The more precise question of representations of gender and sexuality in war films has also been addressed in scholarly work though none deals exclusively with the period of films studied herein.[16]

Although a great deal of work has been done on older war films, particularly those made during and about the Second World War and the Vietnam War, significantly less has been written about contemporary Hollywood combat films, particularly those focusing on the most

recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; studying these newer films in light of work on previous war films and on the combat genre in general is essential because doing so will reveal significant shifts in the genre. Studying these contemporary films in terms of their representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality is also essential since little work of this sort has yet been done. In drawing on the vast body of existing literature on American war films, as well as on filmic representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality, many new insights into Western culture and American participation in international conflicts stand to be gained.

At its root, this dissertation is a genre study. It closely and carefully analyzes the combat film, a subgenre of the war movie as delineated in Jeanine Basinger's work *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. As to the importance of genre, Basinger's explanation of it helps reveal the significant impact that the repetition of certain cinematic conventions has on both audiences and filmmakers alike. Using pirate films as an example to explain how genre functions, Basinger writes:

> If you have seen a group of pirate movies, you remember how pirates (on film) dress, talk, and act. Since film is a powerful visual medium, crowding out any sense of reality, you accept the images of a pirate movie as a picture of how pirates were [or are]. You remember the images, and use this acquired knowledge to explain pirate behaviour whenever a "pirate" appears on film. Furthermore, filmmakers, consciously or unconsciously, begin to use and repeat and refer to this "knowledge" of the audience's. (Basinger 2)

This 'knowledge,' then, when it is cultivated about a true-life subject such as soldiers, war, and the military, begins to influence audiences' "knowledge" of and feelings about the people and situations depicted onscreen.

Basinger's work also asks and answers the important question: "Why should one film be identified as a specific genre and not the other?" (Basinger 3). In cinema scholarship, she writes,

> Most scholars have accepted the labels placed on films by the industry itself. They have assumed the presence of the genre they are discussing ... They have not catalogued every film they felt fit a genre's assumed definition and thus have not confronted the very tricky nature of the genre… This has led to a sense among some people that generic families are apparent and rather clearly definable. It is assumed that everyone knows the definition of any particular genre. And why not? Genre is the known definition. But how and when does that definition become known? How does a genre grow, evolve, and endure? Why does it stay alive over different historical periods? And how does it differ from [one period to another] if at all? (Basinger 4)

It is these questions that Basinger sets out to investigate, if not answer, in her study, hoping to learn "something about the larger topic of genre itself" (Basinger 4) along the way. Basinger's project reveals that such a study is difficult for many reasons, particularly "because it takes years of viewing … [and] also because the genre is alive. The films don't always behave the way they are supposed to. They change, shift ideology, vary themselves, merge with other genres, hide their stories in new clothes, lie dormant, and then reappear" (Basinger 5). Despite the difficulties, Basinger argues that "the careful viewing of a great many films for a list of recurring characteristics with which to prove the observation of – and thus existence of – a genre definition is only one aspect of a genre study, a respectable piece of historical scholarship," but also that "tracing that definition forward, seeing how it changes and undergoes an evolutionary process over a period of years, should [also] be of interest to anyone studying genre" (Basinger 5). That is precisely what this dissertation aims to do: use Basinger's meticulously crafted definition of the combat genre to examine more contemporary films of the genre, map the genre's evolution over a period of time, and discover how it functions not just as a group of films unto itself, but as a cultural force with the ability to help construct and shape audience 'knowledge' and feelings about its depictions of war and human relationships.

As indicated by the title, Basinger's work deals almost exclusively with WWII-era films, and she argues that the genre or subgenre of combat films emerged in this period, claiming that it did not exist previous to WWII, and did not undergo any significant changes in later years and through subsequent wars:

> World War II gave birth to the isolation of a story pattern which came to be known and recognized as the combat genre, whether it is ultimately set in World War II, in the Korean War, or in Vietnam … before World War II, this combat genre did not exist. Certain of its characteristics may have been present in earlier films of various kinds, but although war films did exist, and combat in war on film did exist, the combat genre did not. (Basinger 13)

Perhaps more importantly, she also contends that "the pattern of the World War II combat movie is now the most common pattern for all combat movies" (Basinger 9). She asserts that her book is "an example of what can be learned from an intense observation of a single genre," rather than an "answer to all the questions of genre" (Basinger 5).

In much the same way, this project aims to advance Basinger's definition of the combat genre forward, beyond the scope of her original study. While there are a number of different ways to approach such a topic, Basinger chose to study primarily the films themselves, because "things *are* learned [from staring at the screen], and thus we need to figure out not only *what*, but also *how* and *why*" (Basinger 6) and that is exactly what this project aims to do. Basinger begins her monumental task by making certain basic assumptions, namely that such a genre exists, and that it is a representative genre (meaning representative of the concept of genre and how genres typically function), before delving into the more difficult task of eliminating films. She begins by eliminating films with misleading titles, newsreels, and foreign films (Basinger 9-10). While the first two considerations are not as applicable to the project at hand, Basinger's third basis for elimination is quite important. Of it, she writes: "because of the nature of this study, which is

about American generic patterns of film – our world, our culture, our artists, our movies –

foreign films were eliminated" (Basinger 10), a decision which was "difficult, but necessary"

(Basinger 10). There are enough complications within a national generic study without

introducing the complications/complexities of studying foreign films of the genre and, for this

reason, foreign films have been eliminated from the sample in this dissertation as well. Basinger

also rules out "military films not involving active combat" – a crucial decision that draws the line

between 'war films' and 'combat films' for Basinger. Films eliminated for Basinger on this basis

include: "(1) Wartime Films, (2) Military Background Films, (3) Training Camp Films, and (4)

Military Biographies" (Basinger 10). For the same reasons, this project too, will not consider any

of these types of films, being instead restricted solely to films in which active duty combat

represents the majority (or at least a very significant portion) of the film's screen time.

So what *is* a combat film, then, besides a film in which active duty fills predominates the

running time? Basinger makes the good point that genres begin as a set of films from which we

can make a 'list' of common characteristics. For example, if one were asked to think about what

makes a 'sci-fi film,' one might reply: aliens/monsters, time-travel or an unfamiliar or somehow

strange setting, and advanced technology, etc. Basinger argues that "a simple test for any genre is

whether or not you can, in fact, generate such a list. If you can, it's a genre. If you can't, it

probably isn't" (Basinger 14-5), and indeed, she comes up with just such a list for WWII combat

films: "the hero, the group of mixed ethnic types… the objective they must accomplish, their

little mascot, their mail call, their weapons and uniforms" (15). And indeed, as she argues, most

of these items are still key elements of contemporary combat films (with the possible exception

of the mascot and the mail call – which has been replaced or at least augmented by phone calls

and internet-based/electronic forms of communication). Except while most of these elements are

still staples of the genre, they have changed: the heroes aren't quite so heroic, the mixed ethnic

group is a lot more mixed than it once was, the weapons are different, and perhaps most

significantly, the objectives are not always as clear or morally righteous. After her extensive

engagement with the sample (films she deems WWII combat films based on her aforementioned

criteria for elimination), Basinger proposes a list of generic requirements using the film *Bataan*

(1943) as a guide/model:

- The Group as a democratic ethnic mix …
- A hero who is part of the group, but is forced to separate himself from it because of the demands of leadership.
- The objective …
- The internal group conflicts …
- The faceless enemy …
- The absence of women (after opening scenes).
- The need to remember and discuss home, and the dangers involved in doing so.
- The typical war iconography and narrative patterns of conflicting and opposite natures
- The journeying or staying nature of the genre: in a last stand, they win or lose; in a journey, they also win or lose.
- Propaganda, the discussion of why we fight and how justified it is
- The events combatants can enact in their restricted state: writing and receiving letters, cooking and eating meals, exploring territory, talking and listening, hearing and discussing news, questioning values, fighting and resting, sleeping, joking.
- The attitudes that an audience should take to the war are taught through events, conversations, and actions.
- The tools of the cinema are employed to manipulate viewers into various emotional, cultural, and intellectual attitudes, and to help achieve all the other goals.
- Information the audience already has in terms of prior films, stories, newsreels, magazines, comic books, experience, etc. is put to use, as when images associated with horror films surround [a] death …
- A location in time, place, and military service is established aided by maps, military advisors, and official dedications.
- Death. (Basinger 56-7)

While a number of these items Basinger identifies remain integral elements of the combat film as she argues (e.g. A location in time, place, and military service is established aided by maps, military advisors, and official dedications), a number of these items have also changed in significant ways (the ethnic mix, the hero, the objective, the 'faceless' enemy), and there are a few new items identified in this study that are not included on Basinger's list (e.g. self-reflexive inclusion of media coverage/personnel). Of course, Jeanine Basinger is not the only film scholar to have treated this particular genre, though, in a way, she is the first to have painstakingly, and conclusively proven that it is, indeed a genre. This project is similar to hers in its rigorous definition of genre and selection and screening of films, and though not as comprehensive in its scope (tackling only popular, profitable Hollywood films, where Basinger includes all American combat films) this project is more in-depth in its close critical discourse analysis of the films included in the sample.

Investigating the concept of genre more generally, Rick Altman contends that in some ways film genre theory is little more than an extension of literary genre theory, but in other ways it has become its own beast, with its own major players (13). Altman identifies a number of problems that he sees with his own and his contemporaries' genre studies, writing: "while it is easy to understand how genre's multiple definitions and associations might lead to some confusion, it is even easier to appreciate how a concept of such versatility should capture the imagination of film critics (leading some to mistake the concept of genre for a critical panacea)" (15). Altman suggests that contemporary film genre theorists generally operate according to a set of shared assumptions, namely, that "genre is a useful category because it bridges multiple concerns," (14) that "genres are defined by the film industry and recognized by the mass audience," (15) that "genres have clear, stable identities and borders," (16) that "individual films

belong wholly and permanently to a single genre," (18) that "genres are transhistorical," (19) that "genres undergo predictable development," (21) that "genres are located in a particular topic, structure and corpus," (22) that "genre films share certain fundamental characteristics," (24) that "genres either have a ritual or ideological function," (26) and finally, that "genre critics are distanced from the practice of genre" (28). While some critics, including this one, do certainly operate on the basis of some of these assumptions, other items on this list sell critics and scholars short.

Certainly, genre as a category or lens does bridge multiple concerns: it allows the critic to include an examination of the socio-political/historical conditions of films' production, the patterns within the films themselves (e.g. mis-en-scene), star theory, auteur theory, ideologies, and even audience/reception. Similarly, Altman's charge that many critics assume that the film industry creates these genres and that they're recognized by audiences is held up by Basinger and Doherty's research.[17] In the case of the WWII combat film, the impetus for such films can fairly clearly be located within the industry and the political forces at play at the time; it was beneficial to the industry and to the various braches of the armed forces to create quasi-propaganda films about the war to both educate and persuade audiences of the necessity and moral righteousness of American participation in it.[18] With other genres, and other, more contemporary iterations/cycles of the combat films genre, however, it seems less obvious or clear-cut that the definition of the genre emits solely and directly from the industry. In fact, many would argue that the pressures of the profit motive often dictate studio-production based on predicted popularity, creating a chicken/egg dilemma – are genres created by the industry or does audience preference for genre films cause a proliferation of similar films, thereby creating the genre? So too persists the assumption Altman identifies as underlying most genre scholarship: that audiences recognize

these generic patterns. In fact, though, the critic too, him/herself a member of the audience, must recognize these patterns before s/he can begin a genre study, meaning that at least some audience members recognize these generic patterns, and thus also potentially troubling Altman's assertion that critics assume themselves to be outside of or distanced from the practice of genre. Another quick look at Basinger's work further undoes Altman's assertion that critics presuppose that "genres have clear, stable identities and borders," (16) and that "individual films belong wholly and permanently to a single genre" (18); Basinger does an incredibly thorough job revealing that generic borders are anything but clear and stable and that films more often than not fall into multiple genre categories.

Altman's contention that recent genre criticism treats genres as transhistorical is perhaps a more complex claim. He asserts: "Likening genre to myth provides clear gains for genre theorists. This strategy provides an organizing principle for genre study, transmuting what might have been a hollow commercial formula into a culturally functional category, and thus lending the prestigious support of cultural anthropology to the heretofore lowly study of popular genres" (20). While this argument might hold true, it seems pessimistic and uncharitable to assume that all critics simply take this approach to gain scholarly legitimacy. It is equally as plausible that genre films can be *both* part of a hollow commercial formula *and* part of a culture's myth-making, for what are myths if not the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves (and those around us)? This approach also follows through to Altman's claim that genre scholars assume that "genres either have a ritual or ideological function" (26) where the ritual approach sees audiences as "the ultimate creators of genres" whose narratives "grow out of existing societal practices," and the ideological approach which takes genres to be created by a superstructure (government or industry) as a means of addressing its subjects/clients (audiences). Again, it's

not clear that genres can't have both a ritual and ideological function, and to claim either or both is not necessarily simply a play on the critic's part to claim legitimacy for their work – why study genre if not to understand how and why it works, and what function it has in society?

Also closely linked to Altman's claim that recent genre theory treats genres as transhistorical is his claim that recent genre work assumes that "genres undergo predictable development" (21). He claims that many critics use a "human life" or "biological evolution" (21) model to understand changes in genre, whereas he favours seeing generification as a process (54-68). Perhaps the key here is to understand that while genres are ever-changing, their patterns are likely less predictable than either of these models allow for, as they shift throughout history, responding to social, political, and economic factors which are not always foreseeable. Finally, to Altman's claims that genre scholars assume that "genres are located in a particular topic, structure and corpus," (22) and that "genre films share certain fundamental characteristics," (24) I would agree, but argue that this assumption is somewhat necessary, and not as problematic as Altman may think. As Altman himself makes clear, defining genres is a difficult and slippery process given the number of elements one could use to classify genres (certain visual and/or aural elements, stock characters and narratives, the studios' advertisements, the stars and directors, etc.), but just because the process is imperfect does not mean that we should abandon it altogether. Tough decisions about which films to include and which to leave out will always have to be made when undertaking a genre study, but as long as the selection/omission process is carried-out thoughtfully, logically, and transparently, the benefits of genre study will outweigh the drawbacks.

Overall, Altman argues that critics, reviewers, and theorists associate films with a particular/dominant genre to suit their own purposes (to give legitimacy/coherence to their use of

the concept of genre) whereas studios have different, profit-related reasons for appealing to genres: "far from explicitly identifying an individual film with a specific genre, studios work hard to multiply the number of genres with which a film is implicitly identified" (144). The main difference is that studios attempt to create as many genre connections as possible to attract as wide an audience as possible, whereas critics and reviewers might make reference to multiple genres, but are more motivated to strongly link a film to a single, dominant genre in order to lend credibility to the concept of genre (Altman 123-9). Altman therefore claims that "the history of genre theory may thus conveniently be retold as the history of user [producer, critic, consumer] attempts to conceal their own activity and purpose" (101) and that we therefore -- specifically in the case of Hollywood and Washington during WWII, when genre vocabulary and classification changed significantly -- "need always to ask 'who speaks this generic vocabulary? to whom? and for what purpose?" (108) and "consider genre not as a quality of texts, but as a by-product of discursive activity" (120). In other words, critics, consumers, and producers alike each have their own reasons and purposes for deploying genre and genres should therefore not be thought of as simple stable, neutral entities but as dynamic forces with political, social, and cultural power.

While some of the pitfalls of genre theory that Altman identifies have clearly been addressed and avoided by subsequent genre studies (e.g. Basinger, as previously outlined), this project acknowledges Altman's comprehensive analysis of the practice of genre study and seeks to incorporate the more fluid, less stable, and less-transhistorical approach that he advocates, recognizing that genres are built and shaped by all users (producers, critics/reviewers/theorists, and viewers), and are subject to change over time (though not necessarily in predictable ways), and that not all films fit easily into one category, contending that genres might serve both a ritual and ideological function. Finally, Altman's work is relevant to the current project in that he, too,

links genres to nations (195-206), arguing that generification and nation-creation are each a similar process, and that "against all likelihood, genre theory might actually be a useful tool for analyzing relationships between populations and the texts they use, for whatever purpose they might use them. Against all expectation, genre theory might actually help us think about nations" (206). This dissertation takes up that project and furthers it by arguing that not only are generification and nation-building similar processes, but also that we can and should analyze genres and genre films in terms of their contribution to or detraction from processes of nation-building.

Steve Neale's book, *Genre and Hollywood*, much like Altman's, and appearing at roughly the same time, aims to review and synthesize existing work on genre theory generally and on certain genres (including the war film) specifically. In terms of genre theory generally, Neale suggests that it can be broken down into two types of categories (though they are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive): firstly, aesthetic theories, which "deal with the aesthetic components and characteristics of genre," and secondly, "those that deal with their social and cultural significance" (207). In citing the works of Thomas Schatz and John G. Cawelti,[19] Neale, like Altman, is careful to stress that while there are aesthetic and narrative patterns at the heart of the conception of genre, the concept's messiness always needs to be kept in mind, and may, in fact, be more interesting to study than its categorical neatness. Neale argues, like Altman, and Hans Robert Jauss and Ralph Cohen whose work he draws upon,[20] that "genres, literary or cinematic, are best conceived of as processes" rather than as stable unchanging or steadily changing entities (217). Thus for Neale, genres should be conceived and used as analytic categories with the fact in mind that the "repertoire of generic conventions available at any one point in time is always *in* play rather than simply being *re*-played, even in the most repetitive of

films, genres, and cycles … That is why it is so difficult to define genres in anything other than basic terms (a war film is about the waging of war)" (Neale 219). In his discussion of socio-cultural approaches to genre, Neale again closely echoes Altman in arguing that while these approaches have largely been split into ritual and ideological categories (which both have problems), a combination of both methods is likely the least problematic approach (Neale 228). Neale, however, favours a more empirical, political-economic industry-centred approach.

While Neale works on genre more generally, he also writes briefly about the war genre. In synthesizing work on war films specifically, Neale asserts that "for the most part, the category 'war film' is uncontentious: war films are about the waging of war in the twentieth century; scenes of combat are a requisite ingredient and these scenes are dramatically central" (125). Importantly, echoing Basinger and lending support to the film selection criteria herein, he also specifies that the category "excludes home front dramas and comedies and other films lacking scenes of military combat" (Neale 125). Helpfully, Neale traces the initial use of the term 'war film' "in the industry's relay" to descriptions of films set in the Civil War and/or Indian Wars around 1909 (125); this doesn't necessarily mean that films which might retrospectively 'count' under Neale's definition of 'war film' weren't made before this period, only that this is the first recorded appearance of the term within industry publications. Neale's work also supports this study's categorization of the period's films into cycles by neatly summarizing others' work on the genre, noting the shifts or 'phases' (129-130) critics have identified in the genre's history, notably the changing conventions post-Vietnam (131-2) and the connection between this particular genre and masculinity (to be explored in much greater depth in this project) (132-3). This emphasis on masculinity, claims Neale,

> is not the only conventional but otherwise unusual feature of the
> Hollywood war film. Its close relationship to US foreign policy, its

regular stress on cooperative goals, its frequent critiques of extreme individualism, and its routine emphasis on the extent to which its characters lack knowledge and control of their environment, their activities, their enemies and their fates all tend to make it the exception rather than the rule among Hollywood's genres" (133).

In large measure, then, both Neale and Altman identify significant and ongoing issues with generic criticism and theory, but suggest that its benefits ultimately outweigh its drawbacks, or at least that it remains a useful avenue of inquiry.

The take-aways from Altman and Neale's works are then that genre should not be conceived of as confined solely to Hollywood (though it does have deep historical and contemporary connections with it), and that it should be conceived of as a process, continually changing and being redefined with the addition of each new film, the passing of time, and the shifting of social concerns and audience appetites. They argue that genres should be conceived of in terms their visual, aural, and aesthetic similarities, but also in terms of the patterns created by these iterations and repetitions, and in terms of both their ritual and ideological functions – not solely as dictated by audience demands, yet not solely as dictated by industry/government concerns either.

Originally published in 1986 with subsequent editions released in 1995, 2003, and most recently in 2012, Barry Keith Grant's influential collection, *The Film Genre Reader*, gathers several of the most important contributions to film genre theory in one place, providing a coherent model of the history of this sub-field of cinema studies. Grant himself defines genre films simply as "those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations" (xv). Grant's introductory comments reveal the extent to which the project at hand is appropriately placed within a generic context:

> Genre criticism has been able to accommodate the interests of newer approaches to film, and in fact may be seen as a locus of the overlapping but often separate concerns of auteurism, Marxism, semiology, structuralism, and feminism. Similarly, the more contemporary interest in issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality, and in audience reception in cinema also finds much ground for analysis in the fertile fields of genre (Grant xvii).

Several of the field-shaping texts gathered in this collection deserve attention and are worth mentioning because they inform the project at hand. Andrew Tudor's contribution,[21] like much early genre scholarship, deals with the "empiricist dilemma" of genre, whereby critics and scholars must have a category before being able to group films to analyze, but the process of analysis is supposed to be the thing that leads to the development of the category, resulting in a tricky catch-22. Tudor also famously puts forth the claim here that "genre notions are not critics' classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions … [meaning that] Genre is what we collectively believe it to be" (Tudor 6-7). Dealing with similarly elemental concerns, Edward Buscombe, in his chapter,[22] adds to initial formulations of genre theory by arguing that "a genre film depends on a combination of novelty and familiarity. The conventions of the genre are known and recognized by the audience, and such recognition is in itself a pleasure" (Buscombe 22-3). Once such initial concerns in genre theory were dealt with, the scholarly lens, not surprisingly, turned towards and tried to theorize instances of genre blending/mixing.

Janet Staiger, for example, in her contribution[23] argues with illustrative examples that film genres were never pure (185) and contends that to use the term 'hybrid' to describe a film that draws upon conventions from multiple genres is really a misappropriation of a theoretical term whose original meaning requires a meeting of two languages and/or a cross-cultural conversation – certainly not the case in the mixing of two genres ultimately emerging from the

same (Hollywood) system. While many of the pieces collected in the volume agree on such

central issues as these, a few issues such as the opposed ideological/ritual approaches to the

function of genre divide the group.

Exemplifying the ideological approach to genre discussed at length by Altman and Neale,

Judith Hess Wright argues in her chapter,[24] much like Adorno might,[25] that these films (genre

films) are popular because they dramatize an audience's fears and 'reconcile' the conflict to

prevent/dissuade/discourage the audience from actually thinking about and acting on the conflict

outside of the theatre:

> Genre films produce satisfaction rather than action, pity and fear rather
> than revolt. They serve the interests of the ruling class by assisting in the
> maintenance of the status quo, and they throw a sop to oppressed groups
> who, because they are unorganized and therefore afraid to act, eagerly
> accept the genre film's absurd solutions to economic and social conflicts.
> When we return to the complexities of the society in which we live, the
> same conflicts assert themselves, so we return to genre films for easy
> comfort and solace – hence their popularity. (Hess Wright 42)

Hess Wright argues then that "genre films address … conflicts in a simple and reactionary way"

(42) and that this is possible for three reasons: "First, these films never deal directly with present

social and political problems; second, all of them are set in the nonpresent" (42-3) and "third, the

society in which the action takes place is very simple and does not function as a dramatic force in

the films – it exists as a backdrop against which the few actors work out the central problem the

film presents" (Hess Wright 42-3). She also contends that "the genre films focus on four major

conflicts," (43) one for each of the western, the horror, the science fiction, and the gangster,

which are the only genres she treats. She sees each of these genres as dealing with a separate

problem, with no overlap between them, and argues that "the problems posed by these

contradictions are solved simply" (Hess Wright 43). Hess Wright's approach here is somewhat

reductive, pessimistic, rigid, and limited. For example, when she claims of horror films that "the

social order out of which these monsters spring is posited as good – it must remain unchanged," (47) she begs the question: if the existing social order is so good, why does it produce these heinous monsters? Thomas Sobchack's chapter in the collection[26] takes a similar approach, basically contending that genres are conservative rituals dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Hess Wright's and Sobchack's works here then, are examples of the limitations of a strictly ideological approach to genre, as discussed at further length by Altman and Neale.

Taking a much less cynical approach to the question/function of genre, Jean-Loup Bourget's chapter[27] essentially argues that "whenever an art form is highly conventional," (51) as in the case of genre, "the opportunity for subtle irony or distanciation presents itself all the more readily" (51). In other words: "escapism can also be used as a device for criticizing reality and the present state of society. A utopian world that calls itself a utopia is not escapist in the derogatory sense of the word; rather, it calls the viewer's attention to the fact that his or her own society is far removed from such an ideal condition" (Bourget 52). According to Bourget then, genre films, rather than simply existing as mindless escapist fare ensuring audience compliance with the status quo, are perhaps more capable than non-genre films of achieving social critique.

In response to the type of argument that Bourget makes about genre films' unique ability to exercise social critique, Barbara Klinger[28] is concerned with what she sees critics isolating as the 'progressive/subversive' genre. She argues that "the major axis upon which the progressive argument revolves is this valuation of inventional [sic] signifiers, wherein 'difference' is conferred with deconstructive capabilities and a subversive effectivity" (Klinger 86). Klinger views this approach as problematic, arguing that "there is a strong impulse to overestimate the effectiveness of textual signifiers in determining the text/ideology relation" (87). She contends that difference does not necessarily equal progressiveness: "innovations in the system do not

entail sudden and complete renovations, but are mutations that genetically engineer the modifications necessary to the maintenance and perseverance of the system" adding, "in short, no film genre is an island. The individual work itself intrinsically reflects and modifies the diachronic characteristics of the system" such that "the notion of difference, even a staunchly innovative one, seems firmly entrenched within the vicissitudes of the system" (Klinger 88). Genre, then, for Klinger, "is an exigent permutation of this system which thrives on a play of variation and regulation," (89) such that difference does not signal rupture, but is, rather, an integral part of the system of genre itself when accompanied and counter-weighted with sameness (adherence to conventions).

In a more moderate example of the ritual approach, Thomas Schatz[29] advocates viewing a "Hollywood movie as an industrial and cultural document as well as an autonomous aesthetic artifact" (92). Relying on earlier literary genre and semiotic theory, Schatz contends: "like language and myth, the film genre as a textual system represents a set of rules of construction that are utilized to accomplish a specific communicative function" (97). Rather than seeing this communicative function as a superstructure transmitting an ideological message to the docile masses, however, Schatz's perspective on the genre film is that "it is, on the one hand, a product of a commercial, highly conventionalized popular art form and subject to certain demands imposed by both the audience and the cinematic system itself" (100) but, "on the other hand, the genre film [also] represents a distinct manifestation of contemporary society's basic mythic impulse, its desire to confront elemental conflicts inherent in modern culture while at the same time participating in the projection of idealized collective self-image" (Schatz 100). He argues that taking this perspective allows scholars to "consider the genre film and the film genre in the same analytical context, examining … [them] from a culturally responsive perspective that

acknowledges their shared as well as their distinctive individual qualities" (Schatz 100-1).

Essentially, then, Schatz argues for a more moderate middle ground, somewhere in between Wright's pessimism and Bourget's optimism, but still tending more towards a ritual rather than ideological approach.

In his own contribution to the volume, "Experience and Meaning in Genre Films," Barry Keith Grant similarly disagrees with an ideological approach, instead advocating for a focus on audiences' experiences and reactions to the films and their relationship to the meanings of the films. While one may be in agreement with Grant's claim that "while most film-goers do not go to the literal extreme of attempting to live generic conventions directly, … audiences do model their values and behaviour to a significant degree according to those conventions" (116-7), one wonders *how* he proves this claim – how do we know that these films do influence audience thoughts/feelings/actions and to what degree? Grant goes on to give examples of films with "obvious" metaphoric connections to contemporaneous social/political developments (117), and contends: "surely one of our basic ways of understanding film genres, and of explaining their evolution and changing fortunes of popularity and production, is as collective expressions of contemporary life that strike a particularly resonant chord with audiences" (117), but these metaphors in film and assertions hardly support claims about audiences' behaviours being affected by these films. Grant's concluding statement that "the aspects of myth and ritual so central to genre films require us to understand not only the logic behind their construction but our individual and collective responses to them as well" (128) is sound; the issue of audience experience of and real-life reaction to films is one that is central to the question of film study, but is not one that can be answered with theoretical work and textual analysis alone; empirical data collection in the form of sociological surveys, experimental psychology, and more would

doubtless shed more light on this under-examined element of the cinematic realm and might even be required to develop satisfactory answers to these persistent questions, but are, unfortunately, outside the scope of this study.

Linda Williams,[30] like Grant, concerns herself with embodied experience in what she, borrowing from Carol Clover,[31] terms "body genres" or 'gross out' films – pornography, horror, and the 'woman's weepie' or melodrama. While Williams' work is still grouped in the theory section of the Grant volume rather than in with the specific genre criticism, in developing her theoretical concept she does deal in more specific genres and concepts than many of the preceding texts. She hopes that her work might lead in "a new direction in genre criticism that would take as its point of departure – rather than as an unexamined assumption – questions of gender construction as well as gender address in relation to basic sexual fantasies" (143), an issue addressed within this dissertation. While Williams doesn't deal with the war/combat film directly, I'm interested in the links between her conception of the way in which horror operates and the ways in which combat films, with their visual foregrounding of excessive violence (144), might function in similar ways. Williams' point that "most of our important studies of masochism – for example, those by Gilles Deleuze, Kaja Silverman, and Gaylyn Studlar – have all focused on the exoticism of masculine masochism rather than the familiarity of female masochism" (Williams 150) is well taken when it comes to the genres that she focuses on, but in the case of war/combat films, it is primarily the male body which is subject to sadism/masochism, an issue that will be explored in further depth herein. Williams' more central points, "that identification is neither fixed nor entirely passive" (151) and that "the more useful lesson [of her approach] might be to see what this new fluidity and oscillation [of identification] permits in the construction of feminine viewing pleasures once thought not to exist at all" (153)

are also significant to keep in mind for the project at hand, where the genre audience/addressee is presumed to be male, but where female spectators (including the author of this study) might also be experiencing significant pleasures. A final note on Williams' contribution: she, too, makes effective use of the ritual approach, arguing that "each deployment of sex, violence, and emotion is a cultural form of problem solving; each draws upon related sensations to address its problems" (153) and that "horror is the genre that seems to endlessly repeat the trauma of castration, as if to 'explain,' by repetitious mastery, the original problem of sexual difference" (155). So if war/combat films are close in nature to horror films in terms of their depictions of violence, what is the war/combat genre trying to 'explain' through repetitious mastery? This question will be central to the project at hand.

A final theorist of note from the 2003 edition of this genre studies collection, whose approach is adopted in this study is Robin Wood, who in a relatively early piece[32] argues, speaking of contemporaneously popular film theories (montage theory, Bazin's realist theory, deconstruction, auteur theory, etc.), "each theory has, given its underlying position, its own validity" (Wood 60) and so, most importantly, "critics – whose aim should always be to see the work [the film] as wholly as possible, as it is, [should] be able to draw on the discoveries and particular perceptions of each theory, each position, without committing themselves exclusively to any one" (60). This openness to multiple approaches both within the discipline and in a more largely interdisciplinary sense is integral to the examination of Hollywood combat films within this work.

Lastly, a new contribution to the theory section of the 2012 edition of the *Film Genre Reader* (*III*), Leger Grindon's "Cycles and Clusters: The Shape of Film Genre History" is a very important piece of genre scholarship significant to the study at hand. In it, Grindon argues that

"attention to cycles of production will more readily reveal patterns in a genre that emerge over a range of films" (Grindon 42) and defines the terms 'mode,' 'genre,' 'cycle,' and 'cluster.' In his formulation, mode is the broadest category, encompassing multiple genres and sometimes being transnational (e.g. comedy and romance); genre is a more specific set of conventions "including plots, characters, and settings, which portrays long-standing dramatic conflicts vital to the culture" (Grindon 44). More specifically still, a cycle is "a distinctive and more focused category, a series of genre films produced during a limited period of time and linked by a dominant trend in their use of genre's conventions" (Grindon 44). Importantly, Grindon contends that "a cycle becomes generic when it extends beyond a particular company, character, or filmmaker, and its formula is replicated with variations across the film industry or entertainment world. A generic cycle is contained within a limited time (a decade for example)" (Grindon 44), which is the case for the cycles of war films I identify and analyzed herein: 1) the early cycle, 1990-1999, appearing after and sharing some qualities of the cycle of post-Vietnam films (1978-1989), 2) the nostalgic/regressive middle cycle, 1999-2004, sharing many qualities of and nostalgia for the WWII combat genre identified by Basinger, and the later period cycle 2005-2010 which shares similarities with the earliest cycle of the period. The conclusion of the study suggests that the films from 2010 to the present may signal a new cycle more akin to the middle-period cycle than the later-period cycle identified and analyzed herein. About the importance of cycles, Grindon continues: "attention to the cycle as a sub-unit of a film genre is an important means of isolating and investigating the factors propelling change," adding, "furthermore, historical analysis of film genres benefits from a sharp focus on cycles of productions, as a focus on cycles responds to the critical call [e.g. Altman & Neale] to emphasize the breaks and discontinuities in genre rather than a smooth evolution" of genre (Grindon 45). This dissertation

aims at exactly this, locating and analyzing three distinct cycles within the period of combat

films studied and the potential emergence of a fourth in films from 2010-2015.

Finally, Grindon defines a cluster of films as resulting when "genre films fail to generate

a coherent model or common motifs among productions from the same period. Such groups can

be distinguished as clusters rather than cycles" (Grindon 45). Grindon stresses that "without

incorporating every [film of the genre] … this model accounts for dominant trends" in the genre

as a whole (Grindon 45). Like many scholars before him, Grindon also notes the conflict in past

genre theory between ritual/ideological approaches, and, as others have, identifies that each

approach has limitations, primarily that that "these concepts are colored by the implication that

genre films exploit their audience" (49). He instead proposes a model similar to Rick Altman's

concept of the generic crossroads wherein:

> The socially critical elements underlying the crossroads [approach]
> present genre as a more dynamic cultural force than either the ritual
> celebration or the ideological entrapment models would suggest. The
> process of generic engagement allows audiences to enjoy cultural
> resistance and may even leave them disappointed with the return to
> safety. As a result, genres are not so much a means of social containment,
> but rather, a vehicle for spectator exploration of provocative terrain. (49)

Grindon also agrees with Tudor that the solution to the 'empiricist dilemma' of

delineating genres is to rely on the "'common cultural consensus,' by which he [Tudor] means

the prevailing opinions of filmmakers, critics, and audiences" (Grindon 50). So, setting aside that

issue, he notes that "film genre scholars generally divide historical development between

external causes arising from the surrounding culture and shifting internal elements evident within

a genre's movies. The key link between external causes and internal changes is the social

conflicts animating a genre" (52). As such, he argues that "four external factors work together to

generate the rise and fall of genre cycles: commercial success, industrial compatibility,

supporting cultural phenomena, and sociopolitical events. Most immediately, genres cycles grow from a hit film that other producers rush to emulate, combining the successful pattern with engaging variations" (53). In line with Steve Neale's work, then, Grindon argues that "film genres feed off of each other and thereby consistently incorporate new elements" (54), shifting and changing in the process. Grindon continues: "Deleyto argues that works on the margins often provoke the greatest change because of their intersection with conventions from various genres … The experimental stage of a genre" (54), therefore, "often develops as a spin-off from an established form" (54), so "the relationship of any individual film genre to the constellation of genres popular at any particular time is vital in understanding genre evolution" (54). Indeed, the significance of the connections between the combat genre and other popular genres will be addressed throughout this study, particularly in the conclusion.

Getting into the specifics of each influence on the shifts within genre categories, Grindon says that "film industry factors such as censorship, developing technologies, and shifts in industrial organization also influence generic development" (54), but that "audience desires must be linked to Hollywood priorities if a genre is going to sustain the formal stability and meaningful address necessary to flourish" (Grindon 54). Sometimes, then, visual technologies/aesthetic techniques develop as a response to incongruities between industry regulation (e.g. censorship) and audience desires. Importantly though, industry imperatives are not sufficient to sustain a genre; audiences must be willing to buy into the genre in order for it to continue to succeed. Citing another related and influential factor, Grindon writes: "maybe most vitally, genres regularly draw upon related entertainment culture, whether hit plays, popular performers, comic books, or video games" (54-55), an aspect explored in greater depth in chapter two. In light of contemporary convergence culture,[33] this argument certainly holds true now

more than ever, and the overlap between war games and war films is a remarkable and required area of inquiry regrettably outside the scope of this project.

Grindon continues his examination of the factors that influence shifting cycles within genres by noting that "political trends, shifting audience demographics, and the values and problems of society at large also play a vital role" (55), and tracing the shifts that WWII caused within the romantic comedy genre as an example. He finishes this section by claiming that "world events and social trends shape popular filmmaking, though the influence is filtered through or, as Neale writes, mediated by existing situations and aesthetic forms" (Grindon 55). So, as convincingly argued and articulated by Grindon, "internal changes can be charted in the play between dominant and subordinate traits within a genre" (55), and "the reshuffling of dominant and subordinate positions among the conventions in cycles is a key to tracing a genre's evolution" (Grindon 55-6). To conclude Grindon sums up:

> An emphasis on cycles and clusters enhances our understanding of film genre history. The concept of cycles and clusters offers a valuable intermediary perspective between individual films and the genre as a whole. This perspective can offer more precise insight into the influence of social forces and the evolution of generic conventions. Of course, the mapping of a genre's cycles and clusters is itself an act of interpretation and evaluation and, as such, is open to ongoing debate. (57-8)

In this influential new edition to Grant's volume then, Grindon makes a compelling case for the study of cycles within film genres, however subjective and interpretive it might be, to help trace the history of the genre and map both the internal and external influences shaping these shifts. This is exactly what the project at hand aims to do with the most recent cycles of the combat film genre, from 1990 to the present.

Drawing all of the theoretical work on genre together, some common themes emerge: genres are difficult to define because of their non-rigid borders, overlap, and the 'empiricist

dilemma'; genres are not wholly products of a commercial system designed to keep its audience

down and maintain the status quo – audiences (through various factors including their

embodiment, buying power, and willingness or unwillingness to participate in the system of

genre and/or engage with specific genres) also play a crucial role in determining generic patterns;

because genre depends on a 'contract' with or set of expectations on the part of the audience, it is

culturally specific and changes over time, relying on repetition, but also difference (we don't

want to see the exact same film over and over again, only the same general patterns); these

differences then can, but do not *necessarily*, signal 'rupture,' and may in fact, on the other hand,

be part of the system of genre itself, an inherent feature preventing stagnation. Finally, questions

of how audiences' experiences with genre films affect their thoughts, feelings, and

actions/behaviours in the real world -- outside the cinema/viewing context -- is a very important

question, and one that may not be satisfactorily answered with textual/theoretical inquiries alone.

Along with this work on genre theory more generally, there is a wealth of scholarship

more specifically focused on Hollywood war/combat films that bears mentioning given its close

relationship to and influence on this study. For example, Lawrence H. Suid's *Guts and Glory:*

The Making of the American Military Image in Film Revised and Updated Edition primarily

studies the relationship between Hollywood and the military in terms of funding and

collaboration and, to a lesser degree, the representations of the military in the films themselves.

His chronology traces this fraught relationship throughout film history: from what he terms "The

Golden Age of Military Movies" (up to America's entry into WWII), where there was virtually

unchecked co-operation between the film industry and the military, and a fairly singularly

positive portrayal of the armed services onscreen; through the various cycles of the WWII-era

films; through the acrimonious Vietnam and post-Vietnam period, where portrayals of the

military became much less rose-tinted and much less assistance, whether credited or un-credited was obtained from the various military branches; to what he terms the *Top Gun* era, where the relationship was somewhat 'rehabilitated,' in the late 1980s and '90s.

While Suid's compendium is incredibly in-depth and certainly well-researched, it contains a number of unsubstantiated claims and uncritical value judgments. An important (though not necessarily answerable) question of significance to the project at hand that Suid's work raises, however, is the issue of what level of responsibility filmmakers dealing with 'real' historical events have to strive for verisimilitude and how much military cooperation is required to attain this verisimilitude. In other words, what are the limits of 'dramatic license'? While Suid examines many films outside the scope of this project (comedies, musicals, peacetime films, etc.), his in-depth revelations about the co-operation (or lack thereof) between Hollywood and the military are essential to understanding the creation of these films and the images of the military that they ultimately project. Further, while Suid doesn't concentrate on fatherhood or families specifically, the opening quotes from Gen. George Patton that he uses as a structuring device throughout the text relate well to this project's concentration on military fatherhood: "Thirty years from now, when you are sitting around your fireplace with your grandson on your knee and he asks you what did you do in the great World War II, you won't have to say, 'Well, I shovelled [sic] shit in Louisiana'" (qtd. in Suid 1). Similarly, although he doesn't follow through on it in any substantial way, Suid hints at the link between military masculinity, violence and sexuality when he quotes Joseph Heller's description of his wartime flying experience: "There's something sexual about being in a big plane, with a *big* gun and having *big* bombs to drop" (qtd in Suid 6). The gendered, often phallic and sexual nature of war alluded to here is central concern of this project.

Suid also makes the good point that war movies are a relatively more culturally acceptable way of justifying the representation of extreme violence onscreen: "Despite all the hand-wringing about media violence, particularly in Hollywood movies, following the high school massacres in Littleton, Colorado, in April 1999, no one cited the extreme violence in *Saving Private Ryan* as a contributing cause of the slaughter" (8). While again he does not follow through with a significant critical examination of any of these elements in his work, Suid's introduction does allude to many of the elements (fatherhood/families, sexuality, and violence) that are examined herein. Finally, and most importantly, Suid's empirical research shows that in some cases, the popularity of a combat film can in fact cause increases in actual military enlistments (Suid 19, 32, 42), standing as some of the only concrete proof that representations of the military on film can and do have direct effects on the ways in which audiences think/feel about, and act towards war and the military.

As noted, many theorists and critics have treated the WWI and WWII periods with regard to filmic representations,[34] and many too have treated the post-Vietnam area,[35] but fewer have dealt with the periods/cycles since then. Notable exceptions include Michael Hammond's "Some Smothering Dreams: The Combat Film in Contemporary Hollywood" in Steve Neale ed. *Genre And Contemporary Hollywood*; Lina Khatib's *Filming the modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World*, which compares and contrasts American and Middle Eastern cinematic representations of the Middle East; Cynthia Weber's *Imagining America At War: Morality, Politics & Film*, which reveals and examines the US's somewhat optimistic and idealized imaginings of itself in combat films, taking a ritual approach by arguing essentially that the U.S. keeps repeating and/or re-working old images of itself in war in part because it's dissatisfied with its historical actions/inactions and in part to deal with the uncertain future in a

post 9/11 context; perhaps the most helpful and closely related texts to my own work herein are Robert Eberwein's *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film*, which intimately examines the representations of masculinity and sexuality in Hollywood combat films from early cinema to present, and his *The Hollywood War Film*, which takes a surface look at a number of popular war films across film history; more recently, Douglas Kellner's *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* deals with a much broader range of films, but has sections specifically devoted to "Hollywood's Terror War" and "The Cinematic Iraq War"; and finally, Martin Barker's *A Toxic Genre*, which analyzes the production and reception of Hollywood's films about the Iraq War with an eye towards understanding why they have largely been failures (critically, monetarily, and in terms of audience). Other less directly related works that bear on this project include several works on general media representations of war, and the War in Iraq specifically: the second edition of James Der Derian's *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial Media-Entertainment Network*,[36] which scrutinizes the complex relationships between converging technologies, 'virtuous ideologies' and actual conflicts; Andrew Hoskins' *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq*, which illustrates a direct link between the ways in which a war was/is represented in the media and the way it is collectively remembered (what he terms 'public memory'); Roger Stahl's *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*, which more broadly examines the ways in which real wars are presented as entertainment, in effect recruiting the viewers/users as virtual soldiers by inviting them to become actively involved in the spectacle of war; and finally, Stacy Peebles' work on American soldiers' personal accounts of their time in Iraq, *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq*, which deals primarily with soldiers' written accounts (whether in the form of novels, and/or blogs) of their tours in Iraq, some of which were subsequently adapted

for the screen and whose filmic versions will be examined herein (e.g. Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*). Of course, there is also plenty of genre scholarship on other genres which are closely related to the war/combat genre and therefore have significant applicability to many of the films and concepts developed in this project.[37] While providing a wealth of background information, including empirical research in some cases, none of these texts engages specifically and solely with the particular period/cycles of films I'm attending to nor has precisely the same focus on representations of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, family and nationality, making this work a unique and necessary addition to an existing body of scholarship.

Masculinities/Fatherhood/Families

Of course, with this project's additional focus on gender, the wealth of scholarship on gender, and particularly on masculinities and screen representations of such must be considered. Aside from the Foucauldian perspective sketched out previously, there is a great deal of other, more specific scholarship to draw on. Developing out of the feminist movement and simultaneous development of women's and feminist studies in academia and becoming popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a wave of scholarship devoted to masculinity (later masculinities) emerged in this relatively early period of gender study. Several key theories, theorists, and texts appear as part of the work produced at this time. Susan Jeffords' work *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* deals specifically with the feminization or at least demasculinization of America and American (military) masculinity during and shortly after the Vietnam War, and its subsequent remasculinization in film franchises such as *Rambo* and *Missing in Action*. Antony Easthope examines traditional notions of masculinity in popular culture in *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* and looks specifically at the ways in which masculinity is enacted in situations of war,

among other contexts. In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, Ina Rae Hark and Steven Cohan gather together some of the most important essays on masculinities in cinema including: Steve Neale's work on "Masculinity as Spectacle," Barbara Creed's work on "Dark Desires: Male Masochism in the Horror Film," Cynthia Fuchs' "The Buddy Politic," and chapters by Chris Holmlund, Yvonne Tasker, and Susan Jeffords on muscular masculinities of the 80s and 90s. This subject is taken up at further length by Jeffords in her own book, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* and is a structuring element of the ideas and arguments advanced in the fifth chapter of this dissertation. Steven Cohan's *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* sheds light on the representations of men onscreen in an earlier period, but nonetheless contributes to an understanding of the history and development of the onscreen representations of men, their masculinity, and sexuality. One of the landmark texts of the masculinities field, R.W. Connell's simply titled *Masculinities* deals not only with the gendered dimensions of masculinity, but also attempts to tackle the various ways in which these gender roles and expectations can be and are tied into sexuality as well. These links between gender and sexuality and even between gender, nation, and war are taken up by David Savran in *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary Culture* and Donald Moss in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Man: Psychoanalysis and Masculinity*. Finally, most recently published and most closely linked to the present project is Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald's *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film*. While all of these texts contribute to this project's theorization of masculinity, most do not engage with war films and none deals specifically with the period studied herein.

Also significant to this dissertation are a select number of works on women's relationships to/with war, necessarily limited by the (recently-lifted) American ban on women's

participation in front-line combat, and the representations of families onscreen. Specifically, Kelly Oliver's *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media* (2007) and Yvonne Tasker's "Soldiers' Stories: Women and Military Masculinities in *Courage Under Fire*". The theoretical framework set-out by these scholars lays the groundwork for this dissertation's investigation of the representations of masculinities, femininities, and families that is so central integral to these contemporary Hollywood combat films.

Sex/Violence

As indicated by some of the citations in the genre section, the links between gender and sexuality also extend to links between war and sexuality. The examination of this close connection between masculine sexuality and the violence of war onscreen is aided by work such as Hannah Arendt's work *On Violence* in which her postulation that power requires the public will and that violence, therefore, only exists in the absence of power, complicates traditional conceptions of war and perhaps explains the long conflicts in Vietnam and Iraq. Slavoj Žižek's *Violence* also calls into question traditional understandings of violence and attempts to re-categorize it (violence) in order to propose possibilities for minimizing it or at least un-blinding ourselves to its various, less-common and sometimes more subtle iterations. More specific to film, Steven Prince's somewhat empirically-focused edited volume *Screening Violence* includes essays from Vivian Sobchack and Carol Clover, and raises (though does not necessarily answer) the once hotly-debated question of whether watching violence onscreen predisposes individuals to commit or oppose acts of violence in their offscreen lives, or whether watching violence makes no difference whatsoever in people's behaviour. Linda Williams' previously mentioned *Screening Sex* is also significant in that it builds on her previous work on body genres in the aforementioned Grant volume, but looks specifically at pornography. Its insights into the powers,

pleasures, and pitfalls of watching sex onscreen become useful tools when considering the onscreen representation of not just sex, but violence as a part of and/or substitute for sexual acts.

Feminist/Post-Colonial Criticism

There are also numerous overlaps in the representations of gender and sexuality and race/nationality in combat films. These connections and tensions become increasingly obvious in high-pressure situations such as armed conflicts. As a result, the final area of scholarship that this project draws upon to examine these representations is feminist/post-colonial theory. Of particular significance is Gayatri Spivak's concept of the self-consolidating Other, the idea that individuals and groups define themselves in opposition to an Other but that that Other is often just a projection of devalued and disowned traits of the self often leading to the violent (r)ejection of the Other. Related and of equal importance is her concept of the subaltern (1988), the idea that the discourse of the West (in this case Hollywood war films) subjugates and silences the subaltern in such a way that any discourse between the dominant group and the subaltern group becomes impossible. Perhaps of most importance, though, is her concept of white men saving brown women from brown men[38] (allegorizing the relationship between colonizer and colonized), which bears heavily on recent and contemporary representations and conceptualizations of the Gulf War and the more recent War on Terror / Second Iraq War. The continuing legacy of Spivak's work will also be examined and incorporated via a more recent take on the concept of the subaltern: *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris.

Closely related to and equally as important to this project as Spivak's work is Edward Said's work in *Orientalism*, *Covering Islam*, and *Culture and Imperialism* in which he carefully documents the ways in which the West has consistently controlled literary, artistic, and media

representations of the East, constructing the people and the place as Other in various ways (e.g. devious and dangerous and/or swarthy and sensual). More recent scholarship has traced this practice to film.[39] Finally, Chandra T. Mohanty's *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* is helpful for its focus on the problems associated with neoliberal capitalist globalization, certainly a concern when considering the incredibly profit-oriented realms of Hollywood and war.

Off-screen: Real World Consequences

A final and perhaps most considerable collection of theoretical work helps to anchor the analysis of these contemporary films in the solid ground of real-world consequences. Beginning with Benedict Anderson's analysis of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, this group of theorists' works focuses on the real results of the types of nationalism represented in and potentially fostered by these films. Using concepts from Susan Sontag's work *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Lauren Berlant's edited collection, *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, and Judith Butler's works *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* and, perhaps the most specific to the armed conflict that is the subject of the present investigation, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (a follow-up to her previous work, *Precarious Life*). Last, but not least, Sherene Razack's *Casting Out, the Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* perhaps best reveals the startling real world consequences of the depictions and attitudes created thereby in these Hollywood combat spectacles.

However pessimistic these titles may sound, the aim of this study is not to simply point out the negative side of these films. Instead, the project seeks to understand the continuing popularity of these films, what cultural function they might be serving, and, by tracing the shifts in the cycles over even a relatively brief period of time, reveal the ways in which, while their

ideologies might be conservative and even potentially harmful, the almost-hysterical repetition of the same representations might eventually (or already?) be their own undoing, paving the way for more constructive future productions.

Overview

The following chapter reveals the ways in which these post-Gulf War combat films are increasingly intertextual and part of convergence culture, reinforcing the idea so prevalent throughout the genre that, as a character from *Jarhead* says, "All wars are different, all wars are the same." First examining the ways in which middle/regressive period miniseries *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* use various techniques to convey nostalgia for a morally righteous and intimately familial set of values the chapter then contrasts this with the ways in which early-period and later-period films' intertextuality instead conveys a sense of depthlessness and repetition more concerned with mass culture and the public sphere than with the private, familial modes of communication represented in the middle-period texts. This break-down of the period into cycles (early: roughly 1990-1997, middle: roughly 1998-2004, later: roughly 2005-2010, and the most recent: 2010-2015) continues into the following chapters as a way to illustrate the shifts in representational strategies in these cycles of films.

The third chapter examines the representation of women in the war films of the period, arguing that while they are largely absent in all of the cycles, what presence they do have is as phantasms or symbols for ideological values; in the earliest part of the period they stand in for societal concerns about women's place – should women be allowed in front-line combat or will their presence hinder the impenetrability of the American military? In the middle-period films women represent the homefront and the traditional familial values that this cycle of films reinforces – they are a moral centre, a righteous reason to fight, and what the men of war are

fighting to get home to. In the later-period films, however, women, far from being a moral centre, are represented as duplicitous cheaters and potential enemy Others; in each case, women are not really important in their own right but rather stand in as screens onto which social/personal anxieties are projected.

The discussion of enemy Others is developed with respect to race in the fourth chapter where the overwhelming focus on white American men's narratives in the combat genre serves to uphold the conservative gendered and racialized status quos that buttress the chauvinist, jingoistic ideologies that pervade and undergird the convergent culture of American militarism. As in most categories of analysis herein, the early and later period cycles of the period have much more in common with one another than with the middle period; they are generally much more ambivalent in their representation of 'good' Americans and 'bad' Others than the middle period films, which are the most regressively stereotypical in their representations of women, people of colour, and heteronormative American family values. The latest generation of combat films within the period, though, is particularly significant in terms of its attempts to deal with the representations of 'enemy Others' and 'civilian Others,' with the distinction between these two frequently blurring (seemingly justifying the continuous outward spiral of conflict).

The fifth chapter reveals that Others in combat films are not always external, racialized Others; sometimes the American military is 'threatened from within' by what I've termed soft bodies (in opposition to the hard bodies typical of post-Vietnam War film franchises like *Rambo* and *Missing in Action*). These soft bodied (whether physically, mentally, or both) internal threats are often Othered in many of the same ways as racialized enemy Others explored in the fourth chapter (association with racialized Others, feminized, and/or accused of homosexuality). The fifth chapter reveals how conflict between the individualism of the hard body and the docility

required by military training creates tension within the soldierly body. Soft bodies *must* be and are always either re-assimilated or violently rejected in the post-Vietnam films examined in brief, but a seemingly greater tolerance for 'softness' emerges in the Post-Gulf War films. In these films, the bodies are still mostly hard, but the qualities that make a man a good leader and soldier are a lot 'softer' – possessing internal mental or emotional intelligence in early films (*The Thin Red Line*), family values and brotherly love in the regressive period (*The Patriot*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Black Hawk Down*), and self-awareness or introspection in the later period cycle (in *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker* and *Generation Kill*). In each case, however, these 'softer' elements must never get in the way of one's soldiering, must never become a threat to the unity of the military unit and by extension the nation (if they do, they must be fixed or r/ejected as in the Vietnam films).

The theme of internal strife carries forward from the fifth chapter into the sixth, which explores infighting and breakdowns in the chain of command and communication through the concept of the fog of war. As with the previous chapter, there is a clear connection between the way these bonds between soldiers are figured in the later-period films and in Vietnam films (uneasy, strained and at times even violent or deadly). Too, like the post-Vietnam films, there is also a certain level of disrespect for the chain of command in many early and later films of the period wherein senior officers are no longer friendly paternal figures (as they are in the middle period films); instead, they are demanding and even violent/abusive and therefore do not command the respect of their subordinates. In the middle cycle of the period, however, the representations of martial brotherhood are much more collegial and less fraught with tension; this cycle frames the relationships between men in a much more positive light, focusing on the brotherhood of men, the respect for military authority, and the 'leave no man behind' policy.

Whether men are portrayed as cooperative brothers in arms and supportive father figures or these relationships are slightly more fraught with tension, familial relations (whether literal biological relations or more symbolic paternal/fraternal relations) play a large part in many combat films and therefore are the analytical focus of the seventh chapter. Soldiers' inability to maintain functional heterosexual relationships and fulfill paternal duties in the later period combat films signals a sharp departure from the middle-period films where romantic and familial relationships are paramount and much less troubled. Despite these relatively large shifts in the representation of familial relationships, a strong American masculinity is still always presented as the basis for the success (or failure) of the American nuclear family, and, therefore, the American nation.

A final and related trend, perhaps the most significant and also the most troubling revealed across these post Gulf-War combat films, is the repeated assertion or suggestion (touched upon in the second chapter) that war is somehow natural, inevitable or unending. The paternal legacy of war explored in the seventh chapter also feeds deeply into this ideological message, and like most of the other representational patterns explored herein, this trend carries across films from the early part of the period to the later part but with significant differences in the ways in which this message is transmitted across these cycles of films. In some early and later period films the question is metaphysical; war is constructed as a naturally destructive force in man's environment. In other later period films war is represented as an ongoing destructive force at a more individual level, having different effects on different people: death, crises of masculinity and military duty, and difficulties readjusting (or even a complete inability to readjust) to civilian life. While these films may seem to critique the ongoing nature of the conflicts and the government policies enabling them, they ultimately ideologically support the

message that ongoing war is unavoidable or somehow 'natural' and therefore destined to be unending. Perhaps simultaneously the most exciting and dangerous of the trends exhibited by this group of films, the suggestion that war is inevitable and/or never-ending is particularly poignant and contemporarily pertinent to a world that is, if not in a state of total war, in a state of constant war.

The ninth and final chapter draws all of these ideas back together, returning to the framing concept of *Birth of a Nation* and suggesting the potential emergence of a new cycle of films (2010-2015) more akin to the middle/regressive cycle identified herein than the early/later period films. These concluding remarks point out all of the types of films that were necessarily left out of the sample (suggesting directions for potential future research), and argues for the continuing significance of genre study and broad application of the study's findings by pointing out their applicability to other popular genres including the zombie genre, Westerns, police-procedurals, etc. Hopefully identifying these representational patterns is the first step toward 'shifting the frame' in the future.

Chapter 2

Made for TV: *Band of Brothers & The Pacific* and Intertextuality/Reflexivity in *Three Kings*, *Jarhead*, *Stop Loss*, and *Generation Kill*

Already repetitious by their very nature as genre films, the repetition of themes, images, sounds etc. in combat films is made increasingly visible and more densely layered by the rise of convergence culture. Convergence culture, defined by Henry Jenkins as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2), is clearly at work in or at least reflexively referred to in a number of recent/contemporary Hollywood combat films. This type of convergence simultaneously works to reinforce the gendered, racialized, and class-divided American-family-values status quos represented in war/combat genre films, but may also be the sort of semi-hysterical repetition with difference that might eventually be used to begin to question or shift these values.

Given that Vietnam was the first 'television war,' it follows logically that there is a more prominent trend in post-Vietnam war films towards self-referentially showing the ways in which wars are subject to media attention. For example, in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) the protagonist, Joker, writes for the military newspaper. Further, while he is out in the field, a television camera interviews him and the group of soldiers he's travelling with about their experiences. Before they do, however, the cinematographer and sound-equipment operator cross seemingly unwittingly in front of the camera, quite a jarring experience for the film's viewers, who are likely not expecting to see a camera crew in front of the camera, potentially breaking or at least disrupting their suspension of disbelief. This trend of self-referentially alluding to media coverage of wars

has persisted in films produced and released since the first Gulf War. The intertextuality of film and television and fact and fiction in HBO's twin productions *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2011) situate them as a significant entry-point into the almost self-reflexive ways in which the more recent cycles of this Hollywood combat film genre are dealing with convergence culture and the increasingly intense television and news media coverage of armed conflict. The ways in which wars are 'made-for-TV' is explored further in many of the more recent wave of combat films including: early-period film *Three Kings* (1999), and later-period films *Jarhead* (2005), *Stop-Loss* (2008), and finally, coming full-circle back to HBO's miniseries, *Generation Kill* (2008).

<u>*Band of Brothers*</u> and <u>*The Pacific*</u>

Television wasn't yet commonplace during WWII and therefore the war wasn't covered by the media in quite the same way as it was during and after Vietnam. This doesn't mean that WWII has been entirely absent from television, however. Two incredibly popular made-for-television documentary/dramas about WWII have been prepared for and aired recently on HBO: *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010). These mini-series are much like films in that they were produced and released in a similar timeline to a motion picture, with significant participation from well-known Hollywood figures (e.g. Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks as producers/director and various recognizable Hollywood stars such as Damian Lewis, Ron Livingston, Donnie Wahlberg, among many others). The series are also, therefore, closely linked not just to the film industry generally, but to a number of other Hollywood combat films specifically – producers Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg also both worked on *Saving Private Ryan* and actors that appear in the miniseries also appear in other combat films.[40] More importantly, the content is not serialized indefinitely in the same way that a regular television

series is; instead, it is conceived of, aired, and released as one unit, rather than as separate groups of episodes (like seasons of a regular television series), making the final product more like a long movie than like a typical television show. For these reasons, these two HBO miniseries, as well as the more recent HBO series *Generation Kill* are being included in this study.

Band of Brothers is based on the eponymous book by historian Stephen Ambrose and traces the experiences of E (Easy) Company, the 506th Regiment, of the 101st Airborne Division from drilling (training) to Normandy through Europe and all the way to Hitler's Eagle's Nest in the final episode. While it deals exclusively with the one company's experiences, based on the testimony of surviving soldiers, its range is still quite expansive. On the other hand, the series only captures the European war front, and misses out on the sometimes quite different experiences of those soldiers who were sent to the Pacific front. Therein lies the impetus for the series' sister project, *The Pacific*. Released in 2010, this second series follows three Marines: Eugene Sledge, Robert Leckie, and John Basilone, each part of a different regiment of the 1st Marine Division, rather than centering on the experiences of an entire company. The series is based on Robert Leckie and Eugene Sledge's memoirs *Helmet for My Pillow* and *With the Old Breed* (followed by its sequel, *China Marine*) respectively, as well as *Red Blood, Black Sand: Fighting Alongside John Basilone from Boot Camp to Iwo Jima* by Chuck Tatum, who fought with John Basilone, and original interviews undertaken by the filmmakers.[41]

While most of the other-medium references in each series are to letter-writing, and newspapers (obviously for the maintenance of historical verisimilitude, television having not yet become commonplace technology during WWII), small elements of self-reflexivity and pre-convergence intertextuality are still discernable in both *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. These elements are clearly recognizable in the DVD menus and the opening credits of *Band of*

Brothers; the menu screen shows 'air mail letters' and screen-captures from the episodes which appear as old black and white photographs with the names of the episodes paper-clipped to them (emulating other types of cultural/historical documents). Similarly, the opening credits are black and white/sepia-toned, grainy and scratched to emulate celluloid photography and flip-book-style stop-motion techniques. These methods/tactics fit with Frederic Jameson's conception of the nostalgia film, which he argues is "never a matter of some old-fashioned 'representation' of historical content, but instead" (19) is an approach to the "'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image" (Jameson 19). The repeated visual references to letters (addressed to a singular reader or small family audience), photographs, and paper documents/files in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* represent a much more personal, private, intimate, and necessarily delayed and serialized form of communication than the YouTube-style videos featured in later films about more contemporary conflicts (like *Stop Loss* or *Generation Kill*), which seem to be directed at a much wider, more public audience (though they are never explicitly uploaded or shown to anyone other than the soldiers featured in the films of which they are a part). This difference in mode of communication(s) and reference to more intimate forms of communication is arguably not just used to maintain historical accuracy, but is also designed to connect the WWII miniseries to a moral, ethical image, and particularly to connote the familial values that many WWII-era films seek to uphold, maintain, and reinforce.

Other instances abound in the miniseries in which the filmmakers foreground the use of communication technologies and films within films. Particularly, in the opening episode of *Band of Brothers*, the soldiers are repeatedly shown watching a training and preparedness propaganda film, the actress in the film admonishing the actor: "If you're so interested in serving the cause, why don't you join the army?", foregrounding the use of films for recruiting purposes. In the first

instance, a soldier walks in front of the projector, obscuring the image as the sound of the film

spooling through the projector comes to the fore, drawing the miniseries viewers' attention to the

film projection technique. Similarly, in a later episode, Part 7 "The Breaking Point," more

explicit reference to other war films is made when two main characters, Winters (played by

Damian Lewis) and Nixon (played by Ron Livingston), are discussing some of the men. Of one,

Winters says: "Shamus has seen too many war movies, thinks he needs to yell all the time." This

type of unselfconscious mimicry of scenes from earlier war films calls to mind two of Frederic

Jameson's hallmarks of postmodernism: first, that pastiche, "a neutral practice of such mimicry,

without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse," has replaced parody

under postmodernism such that "pastiche is blank parody" (Jameson 17); second, that "concepts

such as anxiety and alienation are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern," and

that "the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter's fragmentation" (Jameson 14). The

fragmentation of the subject reads in the soldier's failure to recognize that his own behaviour is

based on a character in a film. The senior soldiers' recognition that their junior officer's

behaviour is motivated by the experience of war films, rather than by the experience of war

itself, however, suggests a slightly more-tongue-in-cheek, parodic reading of this scene than the

more pastiche-like layering of other cultural elements that Jameson associates with

postmodernism and that appear in some of the more recent films of this genre to be discussed at

greater length herein.

In the very same *Band of Brothers* episode, the commanding officers are told to instruct

the soldiers to "smile for the folks at home" if the soldiers with cameras come over, because

military men must "keep up the moral for them folks back home," clearly gesturing, then, to the

capturing of newsreel footage. The staged nature of this type of footage is then immediately

undercut when Winters promptly questions the order: "Why?", to which his commanding officer (C.O.) replies: "Damned if I know." Each episode also begins (with the exception of the last episode, which ends with it) with the talking-head-style testimony of the actual surviving veterans of Easy Company, upon whose experiences the series is based. These opening interviews serve to relatively seamlessly blend the fact of their survivor testimony with the fictional dramatization that follows, but they also play an important part in the layering/convergence of history, in that the second survivor to speak makes explicit reference to Vietnam: "We was attacked. Maybe we're just dumb country folk … where I come from, but it wasn't like Korea or Vietnam, we was attacked and a lot of us volunteered." This scene is particularly important for the ways in which it seamlessly references and almost blends historical periods and multiple wars (postmodern convergence, a layering obscuring historicity), but also the way in which it draws on the ethos of survivor testimony and therefore blurs fact and dramatization.

These types of blending and layering, which have been and will continue to be the concern of this chapter, and specifically this reference to Vietnam, which Jameson terms the "first most terrible postmodernist war" (44), conform to his definition of postmodernism, which includes: "a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or simulacrum" and "a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality" (Jameson 6). He goes as far as to say that what we call "intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth" (Jameson 12), arguing that even intertextuality only gives the illusion of depth while actually only existing as surface. So while a WWII survivor can make reference to how his experience was not like Vietnam, the blending of his testimony into a fictionalization in which

soldiers shout all the time because they've watched too many war movies actually serves to flatten historicity rather than create depth. Postmodernism, for Jameson, then, is clearly linked to Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum,[42] Jameson asserting that the "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion ... is at the least compatible with addiction – with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and 'spectacles' … It is for such objects that we may reserve Plato's [and Baudrillard's] conception of the 'simulacrum,' the identical copy for which no original has ever existed" (Jameson 18). Under this formulation, and in the example of the real talking heads blended into their fictionalized counterparts,

> the past is thereby modified, what once was … has meanwhile itself
> become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic
> simulacrum. Guy Debord's powerful slogan is now even more apt for the
> 'prehistory' of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative
> past is a little more than a set of dusty spectacles. In faithful conformity
> to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as 'referent' finds itself
> gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing
> but texts (Jameson 18).

But, Jameson argues, this process is not "accompanied by indifference: quite the contrary, the remarkable current intensification of an addiction to the photographic image is itself a tangible symptom of an omnipresent, omnivorous, and well-nigh libidinal historicism" (18) that Jameson likens to nostalgia. He writes that "nostalgia does not strike one as an altogether satisfactory word for such fascination (particularly when one thinks of the pain of a properly modernist nostalgia with a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval), yet it directs our attention to what is a culturally far more generalized manifestation of the process in commercial art and taste, namely the so-called nostalgia film" (Jameson 19). These nostalgia films, on which Jameson writes at length, are attempts, he argues, "through this new discourse, to lay siege either to our own present and immediate past, or to a more distant history that escapes individual existential

memory" (19). These claims fit well a series like *Band of Brothers*, which tries desperately to cling to the historicity of WWII via black-and-white and sepia toned replicas of photographs and letters, talking-head interviews with survivors, and whose production and release seemed tinged with a whiff of desperation at the looming mortality of many of the remaining WWII survivors.

A departure from *Band of Brothers*' focus on the visual, *The Pacific* draws more on allusions to writing, specifically newspapers and graphic novels, rather than photographs and film; its introductory credits are styled to look like charcoal sketches which then transition into live action footage. Perhaps more importantly, main character Robert Leckie (played by James Badge Dale) is a writer for his local newspaper at home before he enlists, a job he returns to at the end of the series. He also writes (but never sends) letters to a woman from his neighbourhood in whom he is romantically interested. When Leckie leaves for basic training, his father asks: "What do you need that typewriter for?" to which he responds, "I thought I might fight by day and write by night." Indeed, the adaptation of written works for the screen, a form of intertextuality, arguably an early form of convergence, is underscored by the fact that the miniseries itself was based on memoirs written by some of the characters it follows, a fact which is revealed in the closing episode's final title screens which give updates of the protagonist's post-war activities, focusing on their families and careers. This focus on families, neighborhood romances, letter-writing, and careers at small-town newspapers again reinforces this miniseries' possession of the qualities of Jenkins' nostalgia film.

Much like the intimate quality strived for with repeated use of photos and personal letters in *Band of Brothers*, here, the focus on the protagonists' post-war families and careers portrays them as honest, hard-working family men, some of whom went on to become war historians by converting their wartime letters into memoirs. This emphasis, as well as the inclusion of the

talking-head testimony of the aging surviving veterans gestures to at least a desire to preserve, if not a full-on nostalgia for the past, a strong desire to 'go back to the good old days' where not only technology was simpler, but morals were simpler too, and America was always 'the good guy.' Both miniseries' verisimilitudinous camera-shake (e.g. when cannons are fired) and neutral colour-pallettes also reinforce this nostalgic, glossy, surface-level feeling of 'historicity.' These arguments about nostalgia and the morality of WWII as compared to other, later wars, (arguments which can also be made about Spielberg's closely related but not 'made for television' project *Saving Private Ryan),* lend credibility to the claims of Derek Paget and Steven N. Lipkin, who study *Band of Brothers* as a unique specimen of what they term 'docudrama.'[43]

The salability and fascination for audiences of war, and WWII specifically, is attested by the fact that such monumental projects as HBO's *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* were even made. Paget and Lipkin point out that to the point of its production, *Band of Brothers* was the most expensive made-for-television docudrama ever made (it was later surpassed, but only by its companion project, *The Pacific*). Typically, they contend, docudramas tend to occupy a lower, 'B' level, category in the minds of viewers because of their lower budgets (and, I would add, their documentary qualities), potentially creating a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby because audiences think lowly of them, producers/broadcasters are unwilling to invest heavily in a product that is unlikely to deliver high returns. Paget and Lipkin suggest, logically, that the name Spielberg (104) (and, I would argue, Tom Hanks as well) and the very fact that the project was focused on war/combat are two reasons that *Band of Brothers* was made at all, let alone made at "the very top end of the 'high concept' budgetary scale" (94). Undoubtedly, the fact that it was being made by the ultra-prestigious HBO and equally renowned BBC (British Broadcast

Corporation) added to the project's ability to secure monetary support and to its eventual financial, critical, and popular success.

A crucial point about the cross-over (or convergence) between film and television and between documentary and fiction that Paget and Lipkin fail to make clear, however, is the fact that not only did the subgenre of docudrama benefit from this project through its elevation to a more 'A-list' status via association with big names Spielberg and Hanks, but that the project itself gained a great deal of historical legitimacy and therefore cultural cachet from its reliance on typical documentary techniques such as talking-head interviews with veterans, "a relatively new feature of television docudrama" according to Paget and Lipkin (103), and the use of seemingly archival footage. The series' strong and self-referential basis in reality is a large part of what made it so popular and financially successful. Paget and Lipkin also assert that the miniseries' success is due at least in part to its similarity to Spielberg's other (at the time recently released) highly successful war/combat project *Saving Private Ryan*, in that the focus in the miniseries, much like in *Ryan*, is on the need for strong leadership (97), and the morality/ethical 'rightness' of American participation in armed conflicts. Clearly a text with such an aim and message would lean towards emphasizing the personal, intimate, familial details of its characters' lives rather than the uglier details of war such as brutal death, killing, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) foregrounded in later films (to be discussed herein).

Perhaps the most important element of the series' production/distribution that Paget and Lipkin identify, though, is the fact that alongside promotion for *Band of Brothers* ran "public service announcements advocating support for creation of a Second World War veterans' memorial" (98), so that "*Band of Brothers* was promoted not simply as a television program, but as part of a necessary cultural event recognizing what was just and honourable in the USA's

involvement in the Second World War" (98). In such ways, this blending of film and television, documentary techniques and fictional ones, allows for a greater potential to influence and shape public thought, feeling and memory of war. The authors' linking of the series' post-9/11 release and its ideological messages suggests that this series' particular pattern/use of convergence might also have allegorized and/or translated the thoughts/feelings it generated about the "Good Old War," to the new war(s), using the goodwill and moral certainty of the surviving veterans' testimony to influence viewers' feelings about more contemporary conflicts. As Jenkins puts it, "convergence culture represents a shift in the ways we think about our relations to media, that we are making that shift first through our relations with popular culture, but that the skills that we acquire through play may have implications for how we learn, work, participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the world" (23). In other words, even the minimal levels of self-reflexivity (soldiers watching war movies within the miniseries), intertextuality (based on memoirs and showing propaganda films) and convergence (e.g. blending fiction/documentary techniques and cashing in on *Ryan*'s cultural cachet – Spielberg and Hanks – to sell *Band of Brothers*) evidenced in these early, WWII-themed projects, could have very palpable impacts on public thoughts/feelings about concurrent and subsequent international conflicts including those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In fact, these types of representations in and around WWII-era films and even WWI-era films (newsreel coverage shown ahead of features, preparedness films, and the presence of recruiting booths being right in the lobby of cinemas showing such war-related film material), like that in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* (intermixing factual techniques with fictional stories and the representation of other forms of media coverage of the conflict) had the ability to, and did, according to Lawrence Suid, affect men's perceptions of war and the military. Suid

writes that at a screening of *The Unbeliever* (1918)[44] in Denver, "a theatre manager reported that during the first week of its [the film's] engagement, more than two hundred men enlisted in the Marine Corps at the recruiting booth in the theatre lobby" (19). Further, Suid writes, after the success of *What Price Glory?* (1926),[45] "the director recalled that he always stood well with the service after … He said the Marines 'had more recruits after that picture than they'd had since World War I. It showed the boys [Marines] having fun, getting broads. Young fellers saw it, they said 'Jesus, the Army [sic] is great.'''" (32). While this might have just been a filmmaker's boasting, Suid also notes that the same director, years later, while filming another popular war film, *Battle Cry* (1955),[46] had a military General approach him and say "'Son of a bitch, you got me into this army [sic],' explaining that he had joined the Marines after seeing *What Price Glory?*" (Suid 32). While the use of the expression "son of a bitch" to address the director is ambiguous, it could suggest that the man who joined the military after seeing a war movie later regretted it. Clearly, then, the images that men see in war films can have a direct impact on their decision to join the military.

This type of decision-making based on movies calls to mind Debord's notion of spectacle[47] and Baudrillard's related concept of simulation[48] wherein images as representations of reality become spectacle/simulation, divorced (potentially irrevocably according to the more pessimistic Debord) from reality. For Debord, spectacle is "not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (2), "the heart of unrealism of the real society" (3), a process during which a "generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*, from which all actual 'having' must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function" (3). Under the spectacle, "the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behaviour" (Debord 6). Under this formulation, then, one of

the aforementioned scenes from Part 7 from *Band of Brothers* exemplifies this trend perfectly: Shamus has seen too many war movies where the commanding officer yells at his subordinates, and therefore does the same such that "his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him" (Debord 30). Similarly, a man who decides to join the army after seeing a bunch of soldiers "having fun, getting broads" (qtd in Suid 32) in a war movie is a prime example of "simple images becom[ing] real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behaviour" (Debord 6). This layering of images purportedly based on reality can impact not just the way people think about the subject (war/combat) but actually has the potential to affect their decision-making and their actions.

Baudrillard's concept of simulation is very similar to Debord's spectacle; it is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (*Simulations* 2). For Baudrillard, then, every representation contributes to the spectacle, from the newsreel footage, to films, to letters, to memoirs; the new convergence culture seen in later films discussed further below is just added accumulating layers, increasing complexity and distance from the real because they draw upon and layer over the pre-existing representations. In the case of these examples, then, each war film is a simulation of the reality of war, but in the way that genres and their inherent intertextuality work, each spectacle/simulation is built at least in part on the one that came before it, and therefore each becomes progressively further divorced from the real which it purports to represent. This increasing layering of spectacles/simulations contributes to what Baudrillard calls a 'hyperreality' that consists only of spectacles/simulations and that has no relation to the real. Arguably, this hyperreality which causes men to enlist can be and often is shattered in various ways by men's experiences once they get to the actual combat theatre.

Baudrillard's postmodern concept, conceived and debuted in the early 1980s, applies more readily to films from the later part of the period and films about Gulf War and post-Gulf conflicts such as *Jarhead* and *Three Kings*. But Baudrillard notes that the phenomenon has roots in much earlier periods (linking its beginnings to the industrial revolution), and thus this concept is not limited to post-1980s films; examples of films as spectacles producing what Debord terms 'hypnotic behaviour' can be found in earlier periods. For instance, Suid gives examples of testimony from Vietnam soldiers (including Ron Kovic, upon whose experiences Oliver Stone's popular Vietnam veteran film *Born on the Fourth of July* is based) who idolized John Wayne's portrayal of a Marine (Suid 130-2), and expected clean, sanitized battles and deaths because of their experiences of watching John Wayne films and were then shocked by the brutality of actual combat and "felt betrayed by these screen models" (Suid 134). While Baudrillard might disagree, I would ague that in the film *Jarhead*, the soldiers are lulled into the same sort of hypnotic, copy-cat behaviour exhibited by Shamus from *Band of Brothers*, but only until "the real" breaks through, and their actual experiences contradict the spectacles/simulations they're basing their expectations and their own behaviours on. Increasing convergence of media coverage in subsequent (and ongoing) wars only amplifies this phenomenon.

Earlier and Later Period Films: *Three Kings*, *Jarhead*, *Stop Loss*, and *Generation Kill*

In the case of *Jarhead*, for example, main character Anthony Swofford (a real life Marine upon whose memoir the film is based) seemingly expected something more like what he saw in *Apocalypse Now* (a film the men are shown watching before their deployment, the famous helicopter, "I love the smell of Napalm in the morning" scene), but becomes quickly disenchanted by the monotony of constant drilling and preparedness exercises he and his unit undertake in Operation Desert Shield. Swofford explicitly makes clear his frustration with his

lack of combat experience and lack of opportunity to fire his weapon even once the operation was officially upgraded from protective vigilance to deliberate action, from Operation Desert Shield to Operation Desert Storm; he literally enters the 'Desert of the Real'. But where for Baudrillard the desert of the real is, for those of us who "do not have practical intelligence of about the war (and none among us has)," (*Gulf War* 58) the simulation, the hyperreality that's left when the real has been completely eroded, in the case of *Jarhead*, Swofford's actual experiences in a literal desert have the opposite effect: the erosion of the simulation/spectacle upon which his expectations were based.

This application of the concept of spectacle/simulation is therefore not as pessimistic as Debord's or even Baudrillard's. Unlike Baudrillard, I argue that for these men and the civilians and opposing forces they encounter, the Gulf War did very much take place[49] and the experience of it shattered the hyperreality that the viewing of earlier combat films might've created for some of these men prior to their enlistment. No matter how much convergence occurs, and no matter how many 'smart weapons' are used, the experiences and the consequences of these conflicts are still very real,[50] and the effects of these representations on both soldier and non-soldier audiences are, too, very real and of significant import. Yet while *Jarhead* works at peeling back some of the layers of spectacle/simulation, laying bare the operation and effects that the repetition of war film tropes can have on future soldiers and those at home who are only privy to the highly-mediated and censored messages/images from the front, it at the same time continues to participate in these tropes, adding yet another layer of images to the existing cachet of combat cinema spectacle.

The intensified television, media, and internet coverage of contemporary wars, along with the type of participatory online and video gaming systems that Jenkins examines[51] only increase

the level of convergence seen with earlier wars and earlier films. The growing and at times overwhelming convergence of these more and different forms of media, is a relatively recent development in the history of conflicts in which the US has taken an active part, and one that has certainly not been ignored by films made since the Gulf War. In fact, films made since that time have increasingly included reflexive elements to incorporate this increasing level of convergence and media coverage of international conflicts. As the examples herein indicate and as Jenkins and Suid make clear, this increasing convergence has meant a blurring of the lines between political and popular culture (Jenkins 12).

Andrew Hoskins explores the consequences of the increasing level of television media coverage for the viewing public's memories of war in *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq*. Hoskins argues that the re-representation of conflicts on television can have a powerful re-shaping effect on our public consciousness and memories of an event. Quoting Barbie Zelizer's work on Holocaust images,[52] he makes the essential point that "'unlike personal memory, whose authority fades with time, the authority of collective memories increases as time passes, taking on new complications, nuances, and interests'" (Hoskins 2). Importantly then, the more layered the representations that add to collective memories (like the war/combat films examined herein) become, and the more times a similar story (whether verisimilitudinous or not) is added, the more entrenched in public memories and therefore the more authoritative that version of events becomes. This phenomenon calls to mind the phrase 'strength in numbers' both in the sense that the more virtually-identical versions of the stories are told, the more cemented they become in the public imagination, and the more people see these stories, the stronger and more reliable the public 'memory' of the event created by these stories (films) becomes. I'd add that the public 'memory' of the cultural mores in these films also grows by strength in numbers, therefore, as

examined at further length herein, the more times stories about white America men as the central

and leading figures both abroad and at home are told in these films, the more entrenched the

cultural 'memory' or norm (of the centrality of white American men) becomes. Hoskins goes on

to argue, like many scholars on Vietnam films such as Jeffords, that a "*new memory* of the

Vietnam war permeated military-media relations [on television] ever since" (14) and goes

further, contending that this television-created new memory of Vietnam is "being re-visioned by

and reflexively shaping the 1991 Gulf War, which, in turn, enabled a sequel of its own in the

2003 Iraq War" (Hoskins 14). In other words, the more convergent filmic and televisual

representations of these wars are layered upon one another, the greater impact they have upon

public/cultural memory of the events and other mores represented, and the more 'normal'

continued conflict seems.

These sentiments echo the arguments herein regarding the similar effects of films whose

re-visioning, or representations of these conflicts have the potential not only to alter public

memory about conflicts past, but also to structure the expectations of contemporary soldiers and

shape the representations of contemporary conflicts in which they participate. Indeed, Hoskins

notes the intensifying nature of this trend as well when he contends: "despite the videographic

excess and indulgent graphics that characterized TV's presentation of the Gulf War, some of the

most enduring and iconic images are photographic, if not cinematic, in nature, rather than

inherently televisual" (21). He continues: "The burning Kuwaiti oil wells and the oil-drenched

sea bird" (21-22) – like the ones in a scene from the film *Three Kings* (described further herein)

– "as much as the videographics [from television], function to symbolically represent the war"

(22). Hoskins argues that the Vietnam war, to a lesser extent the first Gulf War (because it was

over before much footage was captured) (24), and also the most recent War in Iraq are similar in

the ways in which they are televised. Quoting journalist Michael J. Arlen, Hoskins argues that that the television coverage of each was "'a crowded, overtalked, overfilmed, almost banal jumble, which was [/is] hugely difficult for people to relate to in any coherent fashion'" (Hoskins 58), asserting that "the increased number of sources, a saturation of news outlets, and the speed of communications reaching those outlets direct from the war zone" (58) in the more recent conflict "combined to effect a frenzy of so-called breaking news" (Hoskins 58). Hoskins argues that this unintelligible frenzy results in a live-stream type output that lacks context and coherence, simply layering on images without information that colour public perception of events. Further impacting public perception of the war is the fact that the embedded journalists develop close relationships with the soldiers with whom they are travelling, and may find it more difficult to remain objective and/or detached (Hoskins 61), an issue which arises in HBO's *Generation Kill*. Combined with the fact that "the nationality of the embeds tended to reflect the composition of the 'coalition' forces" (Hoskins 66) and the fact that the "reports filed from the embedded 'travellers' [sic] became excessively cinematic in their description, evoking Hollywood, [and] the Wild West" (64), Hoskins argues that "coverage of the Iraq War blurred travel writing and news reporting into what John Urry has called the 'tourist gaze'" (65). This argument applies very well to a miniseries like *Generation Kill* in which the embedded reporter's nationality and ethnicity matches the largely (though certainly not entirely) white American make-up of the team with whom he's embedded. During the first Gulf War, the very America-focused simulacrum was further deepened by converging televisual and print media reports that relied on language and images from Hollywood. In short, while the confused and constant televisual representations may not stick in viewers' minds as much as Hollywood-style-infused longer-form journalistic reportage does, the layering effect created by convergence culture

stratifies these multiple sources, reinforcing Hollywood narratives grounded in 'Wild West'
tropes, and cultural scripts drawn from decades of war-movies-past, resulting in combat-tourism-
type coverage.

An early example of this increasing coverage and convergence in the period of films
covered in this study occurs in the film *Three Kings*, an action-drama-adventure with
caper/comedic elements directed by David O. Russell, who, to that point was best known only
for his work on independent comedies.[53] The film, based on a fictional screenplay (unlike most
of the 'based-on-a-true-story' films in this chapter and in this dissertation as a whole), is set at
the tail end of the Gulf War, and centers on a small group of soldiers including Archie Gates
(played by George Clooney), Troy Barlow (played by Mark Wahlberg), Chief Elgin (played by
Ice Cube[54]), and Conrad Vig (played by Spike Jonze[55]), who discover a secret map to an
underground bunker full of Kuwaiti gold bars (stolen and hidden there by Saddam Hussein). The
men plan to find and steal the gold before being sent home to the US. They rely on the fact that,
in this war, as Baudrillard asserts, "everything is hidden: the planes are hidden, the tanks are
buried, … the images are censored and all information is blockaded in the desert" (*Gulf War* 63)
for the success of their plan, hoping to slip through the informational cracks, find what is buried
in the desert and take it without anyone knowing anything. They rely on the fact that while the
media is seemingly everywhere, it is also nowhere, because it is not reporting anything of
importance. Somewhat akin to Swofford's experiences in *Jarhead*, the soldiers' media-moulded
ideas of the conflict they are participating in are shattered by their actual experiences in the
desert; during their plot they are faced with brutal evidence of the real tolls that the war has taken
on the Iraqi civilian population[56] (imprisonment, torture, summary execution, deprivation of
food/water), particularly anti-Saddam dissidents whom they eventually take pity on and attempt

to help to a refugee camp across the Iranian border despite their orders not to intervene, violating the ceasefire agreement and getting themselves wounded (some fatally) in the process.

Media convergence is strongly evident in *Three Kings* in that there are several embedded-television-journalist characters vying for stories where the soldiers are stationed. In fact, one early scene reveals one of the two female journalists Cathy Daitch (played by Judy Greer) sleeping with one of the main characters, Archie Gates (played by George Clooney), and being accused by the other female journalist, Adriana Cruz (played by Nora Dunn), of doing so only to 'get a story'. Right from the outset the film uses the characters associated with the media coverage of the war to reveal how staged the footage of military action that made it back to stateside living-rooms often was; the first shots of the media crew show them trying to capture some of the scenes of celebration after the cease-fire has been announced, but newsperson Arianna has to do many 'takes,' growing increasingly frustrated with herself, before getting her sound-bite just right, finally settling on: "They say you exercised the ghost of Vietnam with a clear moral imperative" to which an over-exuberant soldier exclaims: "We liberated Kuwait!" This scene is followed by shots of several different units celebrating, singing a song about American freedom (mostly in a tent with American flags pinned to the ceiling), further underscoring the convergence and layering of sentiments across multiple American wars.

For the duration of the film, Cruz follows the three main male soldiers around. At first she is an annoyance, someone to be ditched, but eventually the men use her for her media connections to save themselves from military courts martial; her coverage of their refugee-rescue saves their military careers (and likely revives her own flagging journalistic career). In fact, the media coverage of the Gulf War, in which the film is set, is represented as so intense that at one point, after having been ditched by the soldiers she has been assigned to, Adrianna cries bitterly

because every story has already "been done" – the birds covered in Kuwaiti oil – and "it's all so fucking sad," echoing Hoskins' claims about the televisual coverage of this and other conflicts. Despite the reflexive fun being poked at the media coverage of this conflict in these scenes and throughout the film, the media is still eventually and ultimately redeemed because Adrianna and the soldiers are able to get around the system and uncover/reveal the human rights issues of the rebels/refugees, allowing the soldiers to safely escort them over the border (against military will) thereby sparing themselves from punishment for their military transgressions.

Another element of convergence culture occurs at the level of filming. The film's camera work is relatively unique to this early cycle of combat films in that handheld and steady-cam shots are used. These techniques lend the film a more realistic/journalistic feel. Like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, the colour-scheme/footage itself is manipulated at points to emulate the historic/geographic location of the film. In *Three Kings*, most of the outdoor, desert scenes also have a washed-out, over-exposed look, owing to Russell's choice of film stock, used in an attempt to reproduce the colour of the newspaper images of the Gulf War. In fact, there is a disclaimer-type disclosure title card at the beginning of the film to make viewers aware of the fact that the filmmakers used atypical techniques to enhance the emotional effects of the film: "The makers of '*Three Kings*' used visual distortions and unusual colors in some scenes of this film. They intentionally used these unconventional techniques to enhance the emotional intensity of the story line." Such a disclosure might have been necessary in light of the controversy that arose over some of the film's special effects (described below), but this disclosure also has the effect of drawing the viewers' attention to the film's very film-ness much like the scene from *Band of Brothers* in which Winters declares that one of his fellow soldiers' over-watching of war

movies has affected the way he functions as a soldier and *Jarhead*'s repeated use of scenes in which the soldiers watch other war movies (*Apocalypse Now* and *Deer Hunter*).

Another, more glaring example of film drawing attention to itself as film in *Three Kings* occurs towards the end of the film when Troy, Wahlberg's character, is shot. In two video/computer-game-esque special-effects sequences as Clooney's character, Gates, is describing the effects a gunshot wound such as the one Troy has sustained (sepsis), the camera seemingly enters the body, showing the bullet proceeding through Barlow's organs, triggering the release of neon green bile into his abdominal cavity. This same technique appears again but focuses on a deflated lung when Barlow's chest begins to fill with air as a result of his gunshot wound. These special effects techniques and the reflexive reference to the media-technology culture surrounding the Gulf War are relatively at home in a film whose content fairly explicitly critiques the capitalist/political motives of both sides of this conflict. Like *Band of Brother*'s reference to older technologies (sepia-toned photographs, black and white film) to build its historicity and reinforce the family-values morality characteristics of its cycle, *Three Kings* uses increasingly complex, futuristic-seeming special effects (internal body shots) to build its contemporary-ness, an effect that would be completely out of place and would shatter audience's nostalgia and suspension of disbelief in a production like *Band of Brothers* or *The Pacific*.

Sam Mendes' aforementioned 2005 film *Jarhead*, too is a clear example of this continuing/intensifying trend of reflexivity about film and media coverage of wars. Based on a memoir of the same name, the film also takes place during the Persian Gulf War, but follows real-life Marine recruit Anthony Swofford from his taxing basic training through his deployment as part of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, all the way to the end of the short-lived war and home. As already alluded to, in *Jarhead*, the reflexive reference to war films begins early in

the film when the soldiers are shown watching iconic scenes from other well-known war films before their deployment. Such a scene echoes earlier examples of such like the scenes from the first episode of *Band of Brothers* wherein the soldiers are shown watching war/propaganda films before their deployment. In *Jarhead* the soldiers delight in the "Ride of the Valkyries" helicopter scene from *Apocalypse Now* before they ship out to Iraq, Swofford yelling "shoot that motherfucker!" as everyone else shouts and pumps their fists at the civilians being shot. Later too, during their deployment, Swofford and his compatriots attempt to watch another Vietnam film, *Deer Hunter*, but are thwarted when they realize that the video has been taped-over by a cuckolding video sent purposefully by the wife of one of Swofford's fellow Marines in an attempt to publically humiliate her husband.[57] Again, these scenes serve to remind the viewer that these earlier, post-Vietnam representations of war and combat are what these Gulf War soldiers' ideas of soldierly masculinity and war are built on and that even these earlier combat films draw intertextual references with their choice of music,[58] building layer upon layer of simulacrum. These references might even serve to remind the viewer that *Jarhead* itself is another piece in the intertextual puzzle, drawing on and covering over or at least piling on top of these previous filmic layers. This layering is not restricted to films either; in another scene, a marine makes reference to a popular videogame, *Metroid*, rhetorically asking and answering: "What happens when you pass the 9th level? You just start all over again" as a way of allegorizing his Gulf War experience, which only furthers the nihilistic attitude prevalent throughout the film.[59] Such scenes emulate the film-within-film intertextuality seen within WWII-set films (e.g. aforementioned scenes from *Band of Brothers*), but take it a step further by indicating the ways in which the soldiers relate to and interact with these films and other cultural

forms, bringing these examples much closer to the type of participatory convergence that Jenkins discusses.[60]

Much like in *Three Kings*, further reflexivity with regard to the intense media coverage and the very-staged nature of this coverage occurs in a poignant and humorous *Jarhead* scene.[61] In it, the soldiers tire of demonstrating the effectiveness of their gear for the media (by playing football in anti-chemical weapons suits) as instructed by their commanding officer (C.O.), Staff Sergeant Sykes (played by Jaime Foxx), and instead decide to stage a 'field-fuck,' over-actively miming sexual acts on one another, much to Sykes' chagrin.[62] As soon as Sykes realizes what the men are doing, he quickly rushes the reporters and camera-operators away and the men collapse in laughter as Sykes tries to excuse and explain away the men's behaviour.

Significantly, the scene is set to "Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)," a very popular early 1990s dance song, further calling attention to the media/cultural convergence and playfulness of the scene. Particularly, in this more recent cycle of post-Gulf War combat films, there is a greater emphasis on popular music as compared to the middle-period nostalgia films, which tend to be more typically scored, using non-diegetic instrumental music which blends more seamlessly with the emotional tenor of the scenes rather than lyrical pop music self-reflexively calling attention to its presence.[63] In this scene, for example, the lyrics are tied to the scene on multiple levels: the men are literally sweating in their hot and heavy biohazard gear in the desert heat, and they retaliate against their commanding officer's orders by making him 'sweat' figuratively with their 'bad' behaviour in front of the media.

Jarhead also features self-reflexive reference to news media coverage of conflicts in the form of periodic talking-head interviews of the soldiers, presumably shot to be aired on North

American news channels. Unlike the segments in *Band of Brothers* which rely on interviews

with actual aging survivors to lend the series historical credence and a sense of verisimilitude,

the interviews of *Jarhead* characters are awkward, seeming almost like outtakes, and in their

artificiality, serve to distance the viewer from the 'truth' of the claims made in the interviews. As

with the demonstration of equipment for the journalists, C.O. Sgt. Sykes is supportive of these

media initiatives, but before the soldiers are allowed to speak to the media, Sykes sets out the

rules of what they can and cannot say and do:

> [Sykes:] Now, here are the rules: When you talk to these reporters, you
> do not get specific. Tell them that there's no better shooters in the world
> [pause] than Marine snipers. Tell them that you're happy to be here.
> You're proud of the mission. All right? And you can't wait to mash the
> fuck out of these Iraqis. Anything other than that comes out of your
> mouth [pause] I get fucked up. And if I get fucked up, I'm gonna fuck
> you up. Take your shirts off. Show your muscles. You've been working
> out.

These rules put words in the soldiers' mouths, and are aimed towards presenting a strong, brave,

qualified and competent, muscled military masculinity.

This speech seems to lend credence to Baudrillard's argument that in the Gulf War

"information has a profound function of deception" (*Gulf War* 68) that "It matters little what it

'informs' us about, its 'coverage' of events matters little since it is precisely no more than a

cover: its purpose is to produce consensus … to train everyone in the unconditional reception of

broadcast simulacra," to "abolish any intelligence of the event" (*Gulf War* 68). While the

interviews in *Band of Brothers* follow this formulation in that they serve the relatively simple

function of getting the audience to believe that the narrative they are about to watch is true and to

impress upon them its historical significance, in *Jarhead* the interviews are a more complexly

layered form of cover; purportedly filmed for another and different audience (the unwise

television news watching audience), the interviews in *Jarhead* serve to construct the *Jarhead* viewer as a knowing viewer, one who can and is getting the chance to 'see past' the artificiality or constructedness of television news interviews with troops. However, while *Jarhead*'s interviews are calling attention to the constructed nature of televised journalistic coverage of the conflict, one can argue that the film itself is still yet another layer of Baudrillardian 'cover' where viewers come away thinking that they have been informed about the falseness and artificiality of television news coverage of war, yet they haven't really learned anything more about the war because the film *Jarhead* itself is still a form of "cover."

Further contributing to and emphasizing the difference between the use of interviews in the two works is the fact that where the actual veterans interviewed for *Band Of Brothers* are filmed in a homey living-room setting and seem largely at ease despite the difficult nature of the interviews (at times being asked to recall real wartime traumas), the characters interviewed in *Jarhead* are shot against a generic backdrop (as at a red-carpet photo-shoot) on location in the conflict zone, and the soldier-subjects full of twitchy, nervous energy looking uncomfortable and out of place. The *Jarhead* soldier characters look awkwardly at or past the camera; some blink excessively and some explicitly remark on their feelings of discomfort and the fact that they don't know what to say. Others, equally awkwardly 'shout out' to their friends and families 'back home' as though this interview is their American-dream fifteen minutes of fame. Not all of the soldiers are excited to be interviewed, however, and not all of them accept Sykes' rules without question:

> [Marine Chris Kruger played by Lucas Black:] This is censorship.
> [Sykes:] This is what?
> [Marine:] Censorship. You're telling us what we can and can't say to the
> press. That's un-American.
> [Swofford:] Yeah, what about freedom of speech? The Constitution?

[Sykes:] No. You signed a contract. You don't have any rights. You got any complaints, you complain to Saddam Insane and you see if he gives a fuck.
[Kruger:] Well that's exactly what Saddam Hussein does. You're treating us the same way.
[Sykes:] You are a Marine. There's no such thing as speech that is free. You must pay for everything that you say.

Here soldiers are incredulous that their own leaders are hypocritical, censoring them in the same ways in which enemy leaders censor their people. Sykes' rigid response suggests that being in the military means that one has fewer rights than the average citizen, not more, that one must sacrifice some of one's 'less important' rights to protect the 'more important' rights of many. Picking up on the similarities between the US manipulation of media images and Saddam's censorship practices that this soldier points out to Sykes, Baudrillard writes: "Seeing how Saddam uses his cameras on the hostages, the caressed children, the (fake) strategic targets, on his own smiling face, on the ruins of the milk factory, one cannot help thinking that in the West we still have a hypocritical vision of television and information, to the extent that, despite all evidence, we hope for their proper use" (*Gulf War* 46), continuing, "we alone retain the illusion of information and of a right to information" (*Gulf War* 46-7). Again, in Baudrillard's formulation, the *Jarhead* viewer may come away thinking that they are better off now that they 'know' how television information about the war works, but still hold the illusion that the film (*Jarhead*) is telling them the 'real truth' about the conflict.

In the first scene of the soldiers' interviews in *Jarhead*, the questions are very repetitive, and all of the shots are the same. Several different takes of several different segments of interview with different soldiers are intercut and shown from the perspective of the news camera:

[Offscreen Voice:] We're rolling. Sound, speed.
[Offscreen Interviewer over image of Swofford:] You're a Marine here in Saudi Arabia. Are you glad to be here?

[Swofford:] Oh, yes, ma'am, I'm glad to be here. My uncle and my father served in Vietnam [pause] so I'm proud to serve my country here. I have supreme confidence in all my leaders. [pause] You know, from my team leader to my President. I'm very proud to serve my country, yep.
[Offscreen Interviewer:] So, who's waiting for you back home? [cut]
[Dave Fowler played by Evan Jones:] Can I give a message to my brother?

[Offscreen Interviewer:] Sure.
[Fowler:] Tim, hey. He's gonna get this?
[Offscreen Interviewer:] Uh-huh.
[Fowler:] Tim! What's up? I got your letter, man, and you are a maniac. You're crazy. [To interviewer:] He'll understand that.

In his response, Swofford, the first soldier to be interviewed, sticks to script, presenting the

image of the military that his commanding officers mandate and reinforcing the image of

military masculinity as rooted in family and brotherhood. The second soldier, however,

acknowledges, very reflexively the fact that audiences, including his family and people he

knows, will be watching this footage, and reacts almost as a wannabe celebrity, excited to have

his fifteen minutes of fame and be able to 'shout out' to his brother. Such a scene again adds an

element of reflexivity that would be completely out of place and almost indecorous in a piece

like *Band of Brothers* or *The Pacific* but also draws attention to what is not said (by Swofford

and Kruger in particular) and these silences come across as more telling than the pat answers

given by the soldiers who do speak. Similar questions are asked in subsequent interviews:

[Offscreen Interviewer:] You're a Marine here in Saudi Arabia. How do you hope the Kuwaitis will greet you?
[Kruger: silence, looks offscreen away from camera/interviewer]
[Offscreen Interviewer:] How do you feel about the Iraqis? They're the enemy. Do you, do you have nightmares about them?

[Kruger: silence, looking offscreen the other way, clearing throat]

[cut to Troy played by Peter Sarsgaard:] I love it out here. This is what I want because I count for something. Back home I'd be working some nowhere job, nobody'd even know I was alive.

Here the very repetitive and staged nature of the press coverage is foregrounded; the same

questions are repeated and when the desired answers are not received, the camera cuts to another

soldier or soldiers who did respond as directed. In the second scene of press interviews, the men

again refer and 'shout out' to their families, strengthening the implicit connection between the

American military man and the American family. Too, the soldiers are shown actively censoring

themselves, generally behaving and speaking much more formally than they do off-camera

(when not being recorded for television) and in the 'field fuck' scene:

> [Offscreen Interviewer to Swofford:] Are you scared?
> [cut]
> [PFC Fergus O'Donnell:] Yes, ma'am, I'm very happy to be here. I love
> my country. I miss my parents. Hey, Mom, hey, Dad. They're treating me
> all right here.
> [LCPL Ramón Escobar:] It was an opportunity for me to defend America
> [pause] the country which has given freedom to me and to my family.
> And it is an honor to fight for that freedom.
> [LCPL Juan Cortez:] To defend my country [pause] and to serve my
> country [pause] and to learn skills to eventually go into law enforcement.
> [Offscreen Interviewer to Swofford again:] Are you scared?

Interestingly, the soldiers of colour (and Troy, a white soldier whose dialogue throughout the

film suggests that he is from a lower socioeconomic bracket) are the ones who seem to stick

most closely to the official, patriotic line, to project the 'right' image of military masculinity to

the world, perhaps suggesting an enhanced desire to seem grateful for the financial and

sociocultural advantages the military provides, whereas the relatively more privileged white

Kruger (end scenes reveal he's become some sort of executive/business person after the war)

remains rebelliously silent and white protagonist, Swofford, is a little more candid:

> [Swofford] Look [pause – looks offscreen] I'm 20 years old [pause] and I
> was dumb enough to sign a contract. I can hear their fucking bombs
> already. I can hear their bombs. And I'm fucking scared, yeah. [long
> pause – looks offscreen again] Don't tell my Staff Sergeant, though, all
> right?

These television interview scenes, injected into the middle of the film, remind not just the viewer, but also the soldiers of the intense scrutiny of media coverage, and of the extent to which the footage would be seen "back home." The soldiers, as ordered, largely present a sanitized version of themselves for the news cameras, further underscoring the constructed nature of media coverage, echoing Baudrillard, when he argues: "the war, along with the fake and presumptive warriors, generals, experts and television presenters we see speculating about it all through the day, watches itself in a mirror: am I pretty enough, am I operational enough, am I spectacular enough, am I sophisticated enough to make an entry onto the world stage?" (*Gulf War* 32). The very self-conscious, at times almost embarrassed way in which many of the soldiers comport themselves in front of the television news cameras speaks to this awareness of self on a world stage. Within the film, this type of scene performs the significant function, then, of lending the non-news scenes more legitimacy, implying to the viewer that in contrast to their staged, awkward behaviour in front of the news cameras for their interviews, the men's behaviour in the rest of the film is more 'real' or authentic. In this sense, *Jarhead* remains yet another layer of war/combat film simulation/spectacle to be layered over and repeated.

Aptly, with respect to the ever-changing and developing technologies of war, Sarsgaard's character, Troy, makes the good point, echoing some of Baudrillard's arguments, that the war will move too fast for them (snipers and ground soldiers generally) because of newer technologies, planes that fly overhead while they dig archaic trenches. As Baudrillard puts it, the Gulf War "is a war of excesses (of means, of material, etc.), a war of … experimental deployment, of liquidation and firesale, along with the display of future ranges of weaponry" (*Gulf War* 33). Indeed, on their first and only sniper mission, the men's job of killing a target is usurped by an aerial bombardment team. Who needs the clean efficiency of a sniper hit when

one has at one's disposal the complete overkill method of blowing-up a whole building to ensure the death of one man? This scene visualizes Baudrillard's argument that in this war, "the two adversaries did not even confront each other face to face, the one lost in its virtual war won in advance, the other buried in its traditional war lost in advance. They never saw each other" (*Gulf War* 62). Indeed, while Troy and Swofford peer at their target through long-range sniper scopes and sights, they don't get to shoot him because they are bested by more advanced weapons technology; the target never even sees his enemy coming at all. During this obsolete mission, not only are Swofford and Troy's military skills rendered outmoded, they are then literally forgotten in the desert; their transportation pick-up never arrives, forcing them to return to their base camp on foot (for more on such military miscommunication see chapter six). Fittingly, upon their return, they discover that the war has literally ended while they, examples of 'old technology,' were out in the desert, forgotten: "4 days, 4 hours, 1 minute, that was my war," as Swofford puts it; "I never even got to fire a shot."

This incident, close to the conclusion of the film, reinforces the difference between middle period (WWII-nostalgia) films and the current cycle, upheld by the different levels of intertextuality/convergence culture, and the difference in emphasis on mediums (e.g. letters versus online/televised videos). The old war (WWII) was fought up close and personal, hand to hand, man-to-man, with a focus on the intimate and moral (e.g. letters from these warriors to families and sweethearts back home that they're protecting), while the recent and current wars were/are fought in a much more detached, impersonal manner, through smart bombs and unmanned drones, with a focus on the cold, technological aspects of war and representation (e.g. high-tech videos such as in *Stop Loss* and *Generation Kill* – to be discussed at greater length herein – edited and uploaded by bored soldiers to be viewed publically by millions of strangers).

As Baudrillard puts it, "we are a long way from annihilation, the holocaust and atomic apocalypse, the total war which functions as the archaic imaginary of media hysteria" (*Gulf War* 56), arguing that the US "allowed the war to endure as long as it takes, not to win but to persuade the whole world of the infallibility of their machine" (*Gulf War* 55). Shortly after this incident, in which Swofford and Troy have their mission-usurped by 'better, faster, more effective' (and more destructive) technology, they learn that the war is over and that they are to return home. Upon their return, a grizzled, haggard, seemingly troubled old marine vet (presumably from Vietnam, given his age and apparel) gets on their bus, uninvited, to welcome them home. Importantly, he philosophizes: "Every war is different. Every war is the same," a sentiment which further reinforces the idea that each war is like the war before it, but different because it involves another layer of technology and of convergence, an idea which will be explored in much more detail in the final chapter.

In perhaps a more explicit or clear example of convergence, there are a number of scenes in *Jarhead* that recall scenes from earlier, Vietnam and Gulf War combat films. The first is a scene, in which all of the Marines get drunk and jam to "O.P.P." (a popular single by rap group Naughty by Nature off of their eponymous album)[64] in a gently-lit tent, much like a scene from *Platoon* where Sergeant Elias' (Willem Dafoe) crew smokes dope and jams to Smokey Robinson[65] together in a red-lit tent. This scene also echoes an early scene in *Three Kings*, in which most of the main characters, among others, are introduced, dancing, drinking, and partying to loud rap music[66] in their lowly lit tent. Yet another similar scene occurs at the end of *Jarhead*, when the men dance around a campfire shirtless/semi-nude to the Public Enemy song "Fight the Power," firing their rifles into the air in celebration of the end of the war. In each of these scenes, the anti-establishment urban music and the men's partially-clothed and heavily-armed

celebrations not only link the films to one another, but link the wars to one another and the popular films to other forms of popular culture (popular music). All of these convergences and postmodern blending of periods combine to reinforce existing cultural scripts about war/combat and the norm that white American men are and should be at the centre of it all.

Another echo between films occurs when Swofford is being punished for his drunken, negligent behaviour (after the aforementioned tent-party scene) with latrine-cleaning duty, recalling a similar punishment scene from *Platoon* in which protagonist, Chris Taylor (played by Charlie Sheen), is also forced to clean outhouses as punishment for some sort of infraction. While it could be argued that such scenes appear in all of these films because such activities simply happen often in actual Marines' experiences, the similarity of these scenes means that they may act as intertextual references for viewers, each subsequent scene layering on the previous, informing the viewer's reading not just of each particular film, but of the genre as a whole. This process evokes Baudrillard's definition of the "collapse of reality into hyperrealism" (*Simulations* 141), which he argues happens "in the minute duplication of the real, preferably on the basis of another reproductive medium – advertising, photo, etc." (*Simulations* 141), locking "the real up in pure repetition" (*Simulations* 142). Each time the simulation is repeated, its chances of being repeated again grow stronger because it becomes more normalized, more 'real,' but at the same time it also gets further from the actual experiences of participants. The sense that these repeated representations present themselves or at least may appear to viewers as 'what Marines really do' is false; Marines in this cycle of films, do it because they saw it in the films of the previous generation, and even the men in those films weren't impervious as the example from *Band of Brothers* illustrates: a WWII soldier who has seen too many war movies thinks he has to shout all the time and so shouts all the time. The layering of simulations only becomes

increasingly complex; as Baudrillard puts it, "the tourniquet of representation tightens madly, but of an implosive madness, that, far from eccentric (marginal) inclines towards the center to its own infinite repetition" (*Simulations* 147) with each new addition to the genre and with each individual's viewing of a film from the genre. As Frederic Jameson puts it, "no doubt, the logic of the simulacrum, with its transformation of older realities into television" (46), and, I would add, film "images, does more than merely replicate the logic of late capitalism; it reinforces and intensifies it" (46). A film like *Jarhead*, then, temporally located between the nostalgic WII-focused films like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* and projects focused on the more recent Iraq War, like *Generation Kill*, reveals not only the increasingly complex and intertwining strata of convergence, and the soldiers' and audiences' growing awareness of, comfort with, and expectation of such convergence, but also the false expectations that such simulations can create and the potential for those expectations to be shattered by concrete and contradictory experiences.

While it doesn't contain exactly the same type of on-location partying scene as the aforementioned films, another one of the most recently released combat films of the current wave, Kimberley Pierce's *Stop Loss* (2008), presents a new development in these scenes of 'made-for-TV' self-referentiality in that the film is partly comprised of videos that the soldiers make of themselves and edit together with popular songs. Set in the more recent Iraq War ('on Terror'), the film deals with the combat and home-coming experiences of three friends who were deployed together in Iraq: Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe), Steve Shriver (Channing Tatum), and Tommy Burgess (Joseph Gordon Levitt). While the film mostly takes place once the men have returned home, its complex narrative structure involves a great deal of flashbacks to their combat experiences, and cuts to the grainy, shaky, YouTube-style music-type video that the men have

filmed and edited together with footage of their actual combat experiences, and hard rock music. One of the most poignant or explicit examples of convergence culture in this later period cycle of Hollywood combat films, the unsteady, low, 'helmet-cam' quality of these videos and the fact that they are edited together with pop music gestures towards increasingly common forms of new media such as YouTube and the presence on YouTube of similar videos created by actual American soldiers stationed in the Middle East with real footage of their actual experiences.[67] An additional layer of convergence culture here is the similar-style "music videos" created by fans who have cut together their favourite scenes from *Stop Loss* (and other, popular films, combat and otherwise) and set them to popular songs of various genres, creating new, user-generated content and posting these videos on YouTube and other, similar sites. Again, in contrast to the romance, intimacy and/or morality in writing letters home to parents and sweethearts portrayed in WWII-era texts like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, these types of convergence documents – YouTube/Home Movie/Music video-type clips – are more public product, making the war more accessible and normalized for a wider audience (at home) and potentially making the war seem more 'cool' or 'hip' and fun, by its association with popular music and cultural styles.[68]

A similar activity is undertaken in the most recent HBO miniseries to treat combat, *Generation Kill* (2008). Like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, this miniseries is more akin to a film than a television series in its conceptualization and follow-trough. It focuses on the experiences of a group of soldiers involved in the 2003 invasion of Iraq as witnessed and reported by an embedded journalist from *Rolling Stone*, Evan "Scribe" Wright[69] (played by Lee Tergesen). Much like *Band of Brothers*, the miniseries is based on the book that Wright wrote based on his experiences while embedded, and, in true convergence fashion, several of the actual soldiers who are represented in the series collaborated on its creation, some even playing

themselves onscreen (e.g. Sgt. Rudy Reyes). Within this series, whose conceit is already explicitly self-referential about the media coverage of recent international conflicts in which the US has been involved, there are explicit references to 'helmet cams' and soldiers frequently allude to other war films and popular Hollywood gangster films within the very first episode when a soldier declares: "I am a US marine who was born to kill." This *Full Metal Jacket* (*FMJ*) reference[70] is followed closely by an additional one when another soldier uses the phrase "Rottencrotch." Further, the men call their General 'The Godfather' because he talks in a gravelly whispered voice, like the title character from the eponymous film. With each of these intertextual references, these characters (who are based on actual people, doing and saying these things), wander further into Baudrillard's Desert of the Real, and so does the audience; we witness examples of films creating people who act like those films, about whom films are created, and who go about creating their own films about their wartime activities/experiences.

The soldiers are not only thinking about their own experiences in relation to popular culture, but it has become a normalized way of interacting with and describing their experiences to each other; they're not relating people (e.g. their General or themselves) to real historical figures (e.g. their grandfather who fought in WWII or their father or uncle who fought in Vietnam), but to fictional characters from movies. While this phenomenon might be tied to psychic distancing, the dangers less 'real' or consequential if one thinks of people as fictional characters – The Godfather, Captain America (the soldiers' nickname for another higher-ranking officer) – it also certainly has to do with the abundance of war and combat-centric popular culture, and specifically war and combat-centric popular cinema. These instances certainly aren't contained to the first episode, either; towards the middle of the series, in the fourth episode, when describing a particularly dangerous mission (setting up a roadblock), one of the

commanding officers, Lt. Fick, (played by Stark Sands) sympathizes yet simultaneously encourages the men by referring to another popular combat film of the period studied herein: "I know this seems like some *Black Hawk Down* shit." Popular culture, therefore, and specifically other popular combat films are clearly a part of these men's lives and their explicit referencing and self-referentially links this series to a history of growing convergence and intertextuality in the period of combat films examined herein.

The connections to popular music abounding in other films of the cycle are also apparent in *Generation Kill*; too, soldiers are clearly eager to keep up on their American celebrity gossip while deployed abroad as they engage in a prolonged and repeated dialogue surrounding a rumour that "JLo" (popular recording artist Jennifer Lopez) has died. While on patrol, moving from place to place throughout the series, the Marines also often sing pop songs (by Avril Lavigne, Nelly, Weezer, etc.). This repeated emphasis on popular culture serves to draw attention to the significant impact it has on these men's lives compared to WWII-nostalgia films like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, which, rather than drawing attention to the popular culture of which the filmic document itself is a part, avoids, for the most part, reflexivity and high levels of obvious convergence. While the men in the WWII-focused HBO miniseries sometimes sing songs, they are typically training songs as in the first episode of *Band of Brothers* where the men of the airborne division are forced to run up and down a hill needlessly and repeatedly as part of a training exercise designed to deplete their morale and self-confidence; their singing of a training song on the hill, then, serves as a rebuke to their sadistic, perfectionist, overcompensating C.O., evidencing their pride in their work, their competence and camaraderie, despite his best efforts to provoke the opposite feelings in them. Similarly, the news from home that the soldiers in the first two miniseries keep up with is not celebrity gossip but the deaths of

friends and loved ones, such as in a *Band of Brothers* episode where Joe (played by Kirk

Acevedo) discovers via a letter from his wife back home, who keeps up with the obituaries, that

William "Wild Bill" Guarnere's (Frank John Hughes) brother has died (stationed in Monte

Casino, Italy), and Bill doesn't know about it yet. Rather than pondering J-Lo's mortality, Joe

struggles with the decision of whether or not to tell Guarnere about his brother's death on the

night before their jump into Normandy. This type of 'keeping up with the news from home' in

Band of Brothers is a far cry from the light-hearted debates about J-Lo's death in *Generation

Kill*, where the information about a soldier's death would likely not take longer to reach the

soldier's brother in the service than a friend's wife at home via the newspapers. The shift from a

focus on familial deaths in *Band of Brothers* to celebrity/public figure deaths in *Generation Kill*

also supports the distinction between middle-period WWII-nostalgia films (with their focus on

traditional conservative values and morality) and the more recent cycle of combat films (with

their much less intimate and more global/public concerns) established herein.

The difference in emphasis of mediums in *Generation Kill*, in direct comparison/contrast

to its HBO counterparts *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, then serves to reinforce the notion

that WWII soldiers were more concerned with intimate, personal relationships than the soldiers

in *Generation Kill* who are depicted as having comparatively shallow, surface concerns, such as

the reported death of a cultural icon and the off-key singing of pithy pop songs. This

representation, however, also serves to underscore the increasing convergence of media/culture

in their time, and makes the soldiers seem hip, cool, and in-touch with the goings-on, even the

minutiae, of the Western world even as they are one of the first units spearheading the invasion

of relatively remote parts of Iraq. These details normalize war for spectators and even send the

message that war is 'cool' and fun. Such representations underscore rather than help dismantle

the images that Suid argues can influence men to join the service, only to be disillusioned later by their actual experiences (as Swofford's *Jarhead* is so explicit about).

More important than the men's affinity for pop music, however, is the fact that at the outset of the first episode of *Generation Kill* it is revealed that one of the soldiers is making a movie about the war (much like the soldiers from *Stop Loss*). He is shown repeatedly capturing home-video-type handheld footage of the unit's experiences throughout the invasion. The footage-gathering begins in the first episode's training sequences and continues as the unit enters Iraq, driving through their first live combat zone. In the second episode, he captures images of a dead girl whose legs have been completely severed from the rest of her body. In the final episode, after the unit has finished the invasion and settled into a town, the men gather around an indoor/sheltered picnic table to watch the amateur movie that the soldiers have put together from all of this footage; the main character, Colbert (played by Alexander Skarsgård) isn't watching, and a lot of the older, seemingly more mature soldiers quickly stop watching when shots of all of the violence begin to come onscreen. One of the most disturbed (and disturbing to watch) soldiers, Trombley (played by Billy Lush), however, says "that's fuckin' beautiful" about an onscreen explosion; eventually Colbert's right-hand man Ray (played by James Ransone) walks away followed by "Homeboy," until finally Trombley is left alone looking at a dead Iraqi civilian onscreen. He then picks up his gun and moves offscreen before the final credits roll, an ambiguous ending.

Clearly, then, popular and convergence culture are structuring elements not just of this film, but of the lives and war experiences of the men upon whom it is based. These men keep up with celebrity culture, singing pop songs and debating the validity of celebrity gossip, make sense of their situation and the people around them through references to popular Hollywood

combat films (and videogames), and even record and re-edit their own experiences to process them (and maybe remember or memorialize what's happening around them). This 'home-movie' re-fashioning of popular culture in order to bring popular culture and/or socio/political experiences closer to ones own life experiences and make them more intelligible to the self, is, in these more recent films like in *Stop Loss* and *Generation Kill* much closer to the type of convergence that Jenkins talks about in *Convergence Culture* than the more subtle instances of what appears more like intertextuality in the middle-period nostalgia films like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*.

What we see in these two most recent cycles of post-Gulf-War combat films, then, is an increased layering of intertextual referencing of pop culture figures and popular music, earlier combat films, and self-reflexive reference to wartime media coverage, which becomes more complex in the later period cycle, with more explicit reference to the process of documenting and re-editing footage of soldiers' experiences of war, including their experiences with embedded journalists. While soldiers from as far back as World War I and II might also have been influenced to join the armed forces by the onscreen images they encountered, less-flattering, less rose-tinted depictions of the armed forces and increasing convergence have not necessarily dampened this phenomenon. If anything, soldiers whose experiences shattered, or at least perhaps did not support, the hyperreal image of combat that they had previously been exposed to are now driven to participate in the creation and distribution of combat images in true, participatory convergence culture, potentially adding to and furthering the simulation rather than breaking it down. Whether or not the fruits of their labour (Anthony Swofford's memoir and its filmic version, *Jarhead*, and the HBO miniseries *Generation Kill*) actually achieve this aim and

disrupt the spectacle/simulation is debatable, and will be taken up in the final chapters of this dissertation.

While Jameson's contention that "no doubt the logic of the simulacrum, with its transformation of older realities into television images" (46) and, I would add here, films, "does more than merely replicate the logic of late capitalism; it reinforces and intensifies it" (46) is undoubtedly true, especially considering Hollywood's profit motive, and while Baudrillard's concept of simulations and theories about the Gulf War are more cynical then the arguments advanced here, his warning that "the day there is a real war you [sic] will not even be able to tell the difference. The real victory of the simulators of this war is to have drawn everyone into this rotten simulation" (*Gulf War* 59) is one that certainly warrants serious consideration given the steadily mounting convergence in films and coverage of continuing conflicts.

Chapter 3

Phantasms: Women as Wartime Metaphor in *Courage Under Fire*, *G.I. Jane*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Patriot*, *Pearl Harbor*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Jarhead*, *Stop Loss*, and *The Hurt Locker*

While the growing convergence of culture and intertextuality have moved forward in combat films as explored in the previous chapter (with much more convergence in later-period productions like *Jarhead* and *Generation Kill* than in middle-period WWII-nostalgic films like *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*), the historical gendered segregation of combat units still largely prevails throughout the war/combat genre. Despite the recent (2012-2013) lift of the ban on women in combat positions within the American military,[71] combat is still an almost exclusively male domain and, as such, it is understandable that scholars working on films from previous eras note a marked absence of women from combat films.[72] This chapter focuses on the idea that when women appear in combat films at all, they are not there as figures that are important in their own right; rather, they are there only there to represent masculine/public concerns about war and nation-building itself. Unlike some of the other trends identified and examined throughout this study which shift through the various cycles of the period previously identified (early, middle/nostalgic, and later period), the absent presence of women is one that persists throughout the entire period though presenting itself in slightly different ways according to a film's cycle within the period.

Women as representational objects vary in terms of what they are meant to represent or stand in for throughout the cycles of combat films. In the early Vietnam-era films, for example, women are present, but mostly as sexual objects for men. In *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*, Vietnamese women are raped by American soldiers with varying levels of participation and acceptance. In *Full Metal Jacket*, the only women pictured are licentious prostitutes uttering such

culturally resonant lines as "me so horny,"[73] furthering the convergent connections between combat war films and popular music elucidated in the previous chapter. Prostitutes in *Full Metal Jacket* declare to soldiers "me love you long time" and offer to "sucky sucky" and service the film's American soldiers in multiple scenes. As Susan Jeffords puts it in *The Remasculinization of America*:

> Although war might at first seem to be a 'man's world' and therefore of little relevance to a discussion of relations between women and men, the arena of warfare and the Vietnam War in particular are not just fields of battle but fields of gender, in which enemies are depicted as feminine, wives and mothers and girlfriends are justifications for fighting, and vocabularies are sexually motivated. But more than this, the relations of the Vietnam War are structurally written through relations of gender, relations designed primarily to reinforce the interests of masculinity and patriarchy. (xi)

Jeffords also rightly maintains of these Vietnam-era films, "In order to insure that the value of the masculine bond is maintained, women must be effectively and finally eliminated from the masculine realm" (xiii). These extremely negative – subjugated, violated and debased – visions of women reflect the largely negative attitude towards the Vietnam War held by many Americans and the representation of women onscreen therefore represents the public's and some soldiers' attitudes towards the war.

The role of women tends to be somewhat different in the newer generation of combat films made in the late 1990s and 2000s, the period studied herein; much like in the last chapter, this period is split into three discernable cycles, each with differing concerns: 1) the early period (roughly 1990-1997) concerned with whether women can and should fight on the front lines; 2) the middle, regressive/nostalgic period (roughly 1998-2004) concerned with women as keepers of the homefront, cogs in the wheel of the war machine, necessary for its smooth operation, and symbolic phantasms that give the men an ideal to fight for, motivating them to fight and survive;

3) the later period cycle (roughly 2005-2010) where women serve as representatives of public moral qualms about the war and confusion about 'the enemy' – who's a civilian, who's not, and who's loyal, who's not. In each case, questions and concerns are mapped onto women, who go from singular but questionable and quiet/secret heroes in the earliest part of the period studied herein, to symbols of stability and American family values in the middle of the period, to paranoia-inducing treacherous back-stabbers in the 2005-2010 part of the period.

In the earliest cycle of this period, from the early to mid-1990s, films such as *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane* deal explicitly, though not necessarily progressively or effectively, with the controversy surrounding women in active combat in the military. In the middle period of the cycle, from the late 1990s to the early/mid 2000s, many films just don't have any women in them at all (such as 2001's *Black Hawk Down*), but those that do, films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Patriot* (2000), *Pearl Harbor* (2001), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002), revert to a WWII-era nostalgic pattern,[74] having women 'present' more through their absence; in these films, women exist mainly as a reason to get home – they are nostalgic memories/phantasms, and their moral rectitude constructs them as interchangeable figures that stand-in for and symbolize the American values that the soldiers are purportedly fighting for. Yet another shift occurs in the representation/role of women in the later part of the period, from the mid-2000s to the present, such as *Jarhead* (2005), *Stop Loss* (2008), and *The Hurt Locker* (2008). In these films soldiers' relationships with women are extremely troubled; in *Jarhead*, women are represented as duplicitous cheaters who are committing acts of infidelity at home while their soldier boyfriends or husbands are away at war. Similarly, *Stop Loss* depicts women who, when their male partners return from the war struggling with depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), give up on the relationship, symbolizing disloyalty and instability. Finally, in *The Hurt Locker*, one

man's love of (bordering on obsession with) war trumps even his love for his wife and son, strongly suggesting that in contrast to WWII-films and films of the middle cycle of this period, women and children are no longer 'why we fight.' While the things that women represent may shift slightly from cycle to cycle within the period, the fact that women are merely representational sign-posts and rather than meaningful characters in their own right never really changes. (Mostly) white American men remain the narrative centre of the genre and the gendered, racialized, and middle-class ideological status quos undergirding the genre remain unchallenged and unchanged.

Early Period: *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane*

The longtime ban on women in active-duty combat (following a longer cultural stigma against women in the military at all) is obviously a major influence on the ways in which women are represented (and left out of) the combat film genre. This issue of women in combat takes centre-stage in the earlier films of the period. Yet while these films may seem to have fully fleshed-out female characters, a closer analysis reveals that women and their bodies are largely still symbols that stand-in for a larger cultural debate about the issue of women in combat, and that these films ultimately reinforce the primacy of men militarily and narratively.

In a 2009 article on the issue of women in combat in the *New York Times*, quoting the 1994 ban on women in active-duty combat, Op-Ed contributor Paula Broadwell, a former U.S. Army officer, research associate at The Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University, and board member of Women in International Security writes:

> The Defense Department's most recent version of the "ground combat exclusion policy," established in 1994, states: 'Service members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground.' The policy goes on to define 'direct combat' as 'engaging an

enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while
being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical
contact with hostile force's personnel,' continuing, 'Direct ground
combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and
closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, and shock
effect.'

As implied here, typically, the primary concerns around having women participate in combat

activities centre around the physicality of combat/contact with the enemy and women's bodies.

Helpfully, in an article on the topic, "Women and War: Women in combat and the internal

debate in the field of gender studies," Sumantra Maitra attempts to organize the typical elements

of the debate into three categories: physical, psychological, and tactical. First and foremost under

the physical category are characteristic arguments about women's average smaller size, lesser

upper-body strength, and lower aerobic and endurance capacities relative to men. Even some of

the 'psychological' concerns involve women's bodies: the argument that men's protective

instincts might cause them to disrupt their duties in order to protect or care for a wounded female

soldier, that sexual or romantic relationships might disrupt a unit's combat readiness, and that

women might deliberately become pregnant to avoid combat duty. Another major concern that

has also been floated in public discourse deals with women's bodies as well, and that is the idea

that women are at greater risk for sexual attacks if captured. Clearly, many, if not all, of the

concerns regarding women in the military, and in active combat specifically, relate to women's

(soft) bodies and their difference from men's (hard) bodies,[75] harkening back to and proving the

continuing relevance of early feminist theory concerning women's bodily difference.

From as early as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, whose first section is entitled

"Destiny," first chapter "The Data of Biology," and which begins: "Woman? Very simple, say

the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is female – this word is sufficient

to define her" (3), women's bodily difference is a central issue to feminist criticism. Unlike de

Beauvoir, who rallies against constructing women as the negative inverse of men, a typical self/Other relation, Luce Irigaray theorizes about how women are conceptualized as 'not one' at all.[76] Rather than being the Other or 'lack,' the negative inverse against which man defines himself positively, Irigaray sees women as outside of the masculine system of naming and understanding entirely.[77] As Judith Butler puts it in her groundbreaking *Gender Trouble*, "Irigaray would maintain … that the feminine 'sex' is a point of linguistic *absence*, the impossibility of a grammatically denoted substance, and, hence, the point of view that exposes that substance as an abiding foundational illusion of a masculinist discourse" (14). This chapter, particularly in its dealings with the middle, WWII-nostalgia cycle of combat films, takes up this issue of women as absence and as foundational illusion of masculinist discourse.

Other feminist theorists, too, have picked up on Freud's murky and racially loaded concept of the 'dark continent' of women's biological differences, and sexuality: "We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology" (Freud 212). Mary Ann Doane, for example, in her work on *Femme Fatales*, contends that with such a statement as Freud's, "a metonymic chain is constructed which links infantile sexuality, female sexuality, and racial otherness" because, she argues, "the adjective 'dark' in dark continent signifies not only unknowability but blackness in its racial connotations" (Doane 210). Julia Kristeva, too, builds her concepts of abjection and the maternal body around such distinctions or 'differences.' For Kristeva, the abject is "a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside," (229) something that "cannot be assimilated," (229) that "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects" (229). This description of the abject recalls many objections/fears about

women's bodies in the military – fears that they cannot be assimilated, that they will fascinate desire in military men's bodies, and therefore must be rejected. Yet, according to Kristeva, even "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (230), and the first two films studied in this chapter, *Courage Under Fire*, and *G.I. Jane* represent the challenge of abject (feminine female) bodies to their male military masters.

Like de Beauvoir, Kristeva continues that "what we designate as 'feminine,' far from being a primeval essence, will be seen as an 'other' without a name" (250). She specifies that the mother "being coded as 'abject' points to the considerable importance some societies attribute to women (matrilineal or related filiation, endogamy, decisive role of procreation for the survival of the social group, etc.)" (255) but notes that "the symbolic 'exclusory prohibition' that, as a matter of fact, constitutes collective existence does not seem to have … sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine" (255) so that the feminine, "precisely on account of its power, does not succeed in differentiating itself as *other* but threatens one's *own and clean self*, which is the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and hierarchies" (255); it is precisely this "logic of exclusion that causes the abject to exist" (255). So while women are 'special' and necessary to the project of nation-building (which is so central to war/combat films) because of their ability to bear children, to propagate the human race, this difference is also part of women's abjection; Kristeva ties this notion of rejection/exclusion and abjection to women specifically with her example of "menstrual blood … [which] stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate [e.g. the military] and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (260-1). For Kristeva it "goes without saying" that "menstrual blood signifies sexual difference" (261) and, therefore, of all the potential blood

spilled in combat, it is the most significant. The potential for women's bodies to produce

menstrual blood (which is necessarily fundamentally different from the blood spilled from

elsewhere in the body during combat) and to bear children therefore sets them apart both as

objects to be revered – literal and symbolic mothers of the nation – and to be distrusted/rejected

in the actual maintenance of the nation through war/combat. As Kelly Oliver puts it, Kristeva

"defines a notion of abjection with which she diagnoses separation and identification in both

individuals and nations or societies" (225). For Kristeva, Oliver asserts, "the abject is not, as we

might ordinarily think, what is grotesque or unclean; rather, it is what calls into question borders

and threatens identity. The abject is on the borderline, and as such it is both fascinating and

terrifying" (225). Ultimately for Kristeva, "the abject is identified with the maternal body since

the uncertain boundary between maternal body and infant provides the primary experience of

both horror and fascination" (225). Issues around the sexed/gendered abject and/or maternal

body arise in each of the films examined herein, wherein women's maternal (or potentially

maternal) bodies and/or their rejection of the maternal is a central focus. Yet, while women's

role in the creation and maintenance of the nation may be acknowledged in different ways

throughout the cycles of the period of the combat genre studied herein, women remain place-

holders for public feelings about war and nation-building; the primacy of men in the military and

as fathers[78] and active protectors of the nation remains firm.

Judith Butler, too, takes up and problematizes these issues, and while her project is more

concerned with calling essentialism and the category 'woman' altogether into question, she still

illuminates the social construction of gender roles and sexualities around biological differences

in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*. Her concept of performativity is essential to

understanding the performances of female masculinity within the early cycle in *Courage Under*

Fire and *G.I. Jane*, and the construction/performance of female identity and sexuality in the middle and later cycles. Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter* that "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (185-6). In this sense, all of the representations of women onscreen here are performative and their representations of the female gender and of female sexuality aim to reproduce the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality to which Butler refers.

Finally, the idea of women's 'leaky bodies' (in conjunction with Kristeva's notion of abjection) becomes important in the consideration of women in these films. The notion that women have 'leaky' bodies, representative of excess, and do not have control of their emotions or of their bodies is timeless in that it has long circulated whether explicitly or implicitly despite repeated debunking and continues to persist as a common representational stereotype. In *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women*, Anne Fausto-Sterling writes, "many people, scientists and non-scientists alike still believe that women function at the beck and call of their hormonal physiology" (89), continuing: "The idea that women's reproductive systems direct their lives is ancient" (91). Fausto-Sterling points out the contradictory nature of these beliefs by noting that while some argue that women's "dangerous, unpredictable furies warrant control by the medical profession … ironically, the same 'dangerous' female also needs protection because their reproductive systems, so necessary for the production of the race, are vulnerable to stress and hard work" (91-2). Fausto-Sterling's work, which she continues by drawing her line of argumentation through bio-socially constructed notions about women's sexuality in *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, reveals the many ways in which this

paradoxical view of women's leaky bodies constructs them as both threatening in terms of the unstable, unpredictable, out-of-control behaviour that their hormones are perceived to produce, and vulnerable in terms of their reproductive systems, which need to be protected for the continuation of the nation. I say nation and not species here because some women's reproductive systems are, and have been throughout history, much more highly valued than others' and because of the continued link explored herein between war and nation-building in combat films.

Concerns about the increased risk of sexual violence to women in the military have not always been overstated and an appalling number of instances of such have come to light over the period studied herein including the Tailhook scandal of 1991,[79] the events upon which the military film *The General's Daughter*[80] is based, and the more recent documentary on sexual assault in the military *Invisible War* (2012). Almost as egregious as these scandals themselves, however, is the longtime governmental/military ban on women in combat, which suggests a victim-blaming attitude to the problem, women being kept out of active combat duty 'for their own safety' and because men can't keep their hands (etc.) to themselves (among other excuses used for the ban). The successes of women in active combat in Afghanistan and Iraq (whether there accidentally or through regulation-loopholes due to troop-shortages), however, have proven many of the arguments against women in active combat fallacious, and likely influenced the 2012/2013 decision to start lifting the ban on women in such positions. So while recent combat films have yet to catch up with the loosening of such restrictions (no popular combat films depict female soldiers in active combat), this issue was a hot topic in the mid-1990s when the ban on women in combat was officially upheld by the Pentagon.[81] Likely in reaction to this 1994 U.S. Department of Defense ban, two films, *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane*, released in 1996 and

1997 respectively, focus on the issues presented by women serving in military positions that place them 'in the line of fire.'

Courage Under Fire recounts/reconstructs, Rashomon-style,[82] the story of the death of a female med-evac pilot, Karen Walden, played by Meg Ryan. Her death after her helicopter crashes on a rescue mission during Operation Desert Storm is being investigated by the troubled protagonist Nat Serling, played by Denzel Washington, who struggles with his own issues surrounding an accidental friendly-fire incident in which one of his close friends is accidentally killed by his orders. While still clearly on the subject of whether women can/should be involved in active combat duty, the film is the less explicit of the two compared to G.I. Jane because the focus is split between Walden's story and Serling's story. Given that Walden is dead, and Serling alive and actively involved in the investigation and revelation of Walden's story, however, his narrative ultimately takes precedence, underscoring the ultimate argument of this study that the combat genre ultimately portrays men as the strong, sturdy building-blocks of both the American military and the American nation as a whole, relegating women to the background as merely symbolic stand-ins for cultural concerns. While Walden's biological sex and her gender are clearly being made to stand as an example – White House representatives are eager to fast-track Serling's investigation and award the medal of Honor to Walden because she would be the first woman to receive the award, albeit posthumously – at the end of the day she's simply a medevac pilot that seems to have strayed into active combat more by accident, as part of a rescue mission, than on purpose, as a test of women's mettle (as in G.I. Jane). In both cases, these female protagonists, rather than being significant in and of themselves, represent others' fears and concerns over the inclusion/incursion of women's leaky, abject, dark-continent bodies in/to the traditionally masculine space of the military.

Walden is a phantasm; aside from her 'letter,'[83] which she reads in voiceover narration at the very end of the film, her story is entirely constructed by men. She is totally absent as a living presence in the film. The story of her death is told and retold in flashback from the perspective of each of the other – all male – soldiers in her unit who were in the air and on the ground with her before and at the time of her death. Two of these men, the primary architects of her story, we later find out, essentially kill her by leaving her for dead. One of the two, the hypermasculine Monfriez, played by Lou Diamond Phillips, tells the rescue crew (who has orders to napalm the crash site) that Walden is already dead in order to cover up his own friendly fire incident – accidentally/on purpose shooting Walden. The other soldier, Ilario, played by Matt Damon, because of shock, surprise, or uncertainty, contributes to her death simply by not contradicting Monfriez's account of the situation in time to stop the napalm. The final version of the story, the one presented to the viewer as 'true,' is the one that the main male character and principal investigator Nat Serling has decided is true. Ultimately, it is he, through the narratives of the other men in the unit, the testimony of Walden's parents, and the content of her letter, who decides whether she truly merits the Medal of Honor.[84] So while the narrative does revolve around getting to the 'truth' of her story, the film's emphasis is ultimately on Serling: his story, his ability to overcome his demons and to make peace with *his* own military and personal code of honor. In short, Walden is a surrogate, a ghost upon whom Serling projects his own concerns about right versus wrong and difficult combat decisions, and via whom Serling works out his own issues around military bravery and honor,[85] and finally, upon whom he paternalistically bestows his seal of approval at the close of the film. It is all of the military men in the film then, however disturbed and unstable they all might be, who are the true authors of this story and who

have the ability to decide this one woman's fate and the course of military history (whether or not she receives the Medal of Honor and all that might mean for other women in the military).

Despite its other foci, the film does implicitly engage with many of the reasons given in debates for the continued exclusion of women from active combat duty. There are explicit references to crying and child-birth, evocations of leakiness, softness, and women's maternally abject bodies. In fact, a repeated part of the debate about whether or not Walden deserves the Medal of Honor revolves around the issue of whether she cried under pressure. In the final, 'true' version of events, recounted by Damon's character, Ilario, Walden is ultimately revealed to have done so, excusing it by shouting: "It's just tension!" Her leaky body and emotional release of tension via tears is what loses her the respect of at least one of her male subordinates, Monfriez, who refuses to accept her authority, ultimately resulting in her death, and later, because of his guilt and cowardice (refusal to face the consequences of his actions), his death (by suicide) as well. Again, this series of events underlines and reinforces concerns that women shouldn't be in the military because of their perceived gendered differences: unstable emotions and lack of control over their bodies. The film ultimately suggests that even if women's leaks (in this case tears) don't really matter in and of themselves, they might cause trouble for the military men around them and therefore cannot be tolerated.

Kristeva's notion of the abject maternal body returns when Walden's maternal body and her ability to handle physical pain are referenced. In her retort to Monfriez's questioning of her ability to manage the pain of the abdominal gunshot wound he 'accidentally' inflicted on her she asserts: "I gave birth to a nine-pound baby, asshole. I think I can handle it." Here Walden's maternal/leaky body is both what caused the problem in the first place – Monfriez's lack of confidence in her leadership and her ability to perform her soldierly duties stems, at least in part,

from her crying: "Shit is she crying?!" – and part of the 'solution,' the retort she uses to put Monfriez back in his place; the maternal body is both a weakness/vulnerability because it does not inspire male confidence in her leadership and instead inspires male violence, and a strength, because the pain of childbirth has prepared her for the pain of battle (even if that battle is with one of her own rebelling soldiers). This duality links Walden's maternal/abject body expressly to Kristeva's notion of the abject as something that is rejected, but which, "from its place of banishment … does not cease challenging its master" (230). So while Monfriez rejects and injures Walden's maternal body because of its female 'leakiness,' her ability to handle the pain of the injury and maintain her leadership of the unit challenges Monfriez's rejection of that leadership. Both of these questions about Walden's ability to perform her military duty are exemplary of the perceived leakiness/abjection of women's bodies and both function as measures of her difference from men and mark her as variously less (crying) or more (I can handle it) 'honorable' in the eyes of the men around her who ultimately decide her fate.

Indeed, Walden's maternal body and role as single mother is a major focus of the film. Washington's character, Serling, doesn't find out that the medal is potentially being awarded to a woman until after he's listened to the testimony of all the men Walden saved and immediately after this revelation follows the revelation that not only was the heroic pilot a woman, but she was a single mother, too. The White House representative is quite excited about the fact that the medal is potentially going to a woman[86] because the White House is planning on making a press spectacle out of presenting the medal to Walden's daughter: "It's all set in the rose garden; the president's gonna lean down, he's gonna hang that pretty ribbon around that pretty face; there is not going to be a dry eye from Nashua to Sacramento." Again, here, the mother/child relationship is being exploited for and explicitly linked to leaky bodies (tears) and excess

emotion, but simply as a political ploy and not really in any way that might advance women's military standing; Walden's female-ness, maternity, and death in the line of duty are all more handy coincidence than anything else.

The viewer is yet again reminded of the centrality of family and motherhood to Walden's identity when one of the first and only things that Walden's father says about her is: "Karen was a real good mom ... You can't imagine how hard it was for her to leave that little girl to go off and fight in that war, but it was important to Karen to do her duty, so she went." Presumably her father is going on the offensive to counter arguments that she shouldn't have been on active duty because she was a single mother for exactly the reason that has now presented itself: she's left her child parentless, in the care of her parents, the child's grandparents. This tough choice between her military family and biological family is reinforced and justified again in the final voice-over reading of her letter to her family[87] in which she declares her love for them all, and speaks about how she doesn't want to let down her fellow soldiers, and that, though it was a difficult decision, she knows her daughter will be in good hands with her parents. Unlike the phantasmatic mothers and sweethearts to whom letter are written home by male soldiers in middle-cycle WWII-nostalgia films, however, Walden here is a phantastic mother who writes letters home to her parents and, more significantly, to her child. Notably, the first and last pieces of information the viewer learns and is left with about Walden both centre around her maternal body, her status as a single-mother, and the potential for this maternal body, even its phantasm, to inspire leakiness in others (indeed even Serling cries at her gravestone in the film's final scenes).

Yet her body is not just maternal and potentially leaky/leak-inspiring. Her sweet, WWII-nostalgia-esque letter to her family[88] and the focus on her role as mother belies the other

conversations that her fellow male soldiers have about her, which largely focus on her 'butchness' and/or her bravery, recalling Butler's notion of gender performativity.[89] One of the first soldiers that Serling speaks to is Walden's male copilot, Rady, played by Tim Guinee, who was knocked unconscious before the chopper hit the ground and remained in such a state throughout the events in question until after the team's rescue. His testimony, therefore, speaks more to her character generally, than to the events that Serling is investigating. In this early interview scene, Rady's wife blames Walden for the crash: "If she hadn't needed to be a hero so bad," but her husband corrects her: "No, that's not fair. It's not Karen's fault I got hit, and she sure as hell saved the lives of those guys on the Black Hawk." Rady's wife's reaction appears motivated by jealousy when she replies "You always defend her!", and her use of the word 'always' suggests that this is not only a sore spot between the couple, but also one that has been a repeated topic of discussion. The wife's bitterness here, again recalls the concept of leaky bodies, and women who can't control their excess emotions (in this case, jealousy). This insecurity also suggests another reason why an American public, majority female, might be uncomfortable with having women among the ranks of their soldier husbands and boyfriends: fear that men and women in combat together will have affairs with one another and/or that civilian wives cannot tolerate the potential for such.[90] These concerns, of course, are strongly based in gendered assumptions about women as sexual gate-keepers, men's inabilities to control their sexual urges, and women's inability to control their emotions (jealousy). So even while a film might appear to be making (gendered) progress by considering the possibility of women in active-duty combat situations, its underlying gendered ideologies can still counter its potentially progressive qualities.

As the scene under discussion continues, conversation circles back around to Walden's 'butchness'. Serling, interested in Rady's wife's response despite her husband's dismissal, asks her: "Why didn't you like her?" To which she replies disgustedly: "She was so butch." Rady, for the second time, shuts his wife down, telling her: "Honey, shut up," but then turns to Washington's character smiling conspiratorially, and says "she was, y'know, [butch]" to which Washington smiles knowingly. A great deal of the film's gendered ideology is revealed in this relatively short but extremely loaded scene. Rady's wife's disgusted tone and facial expression imply that, to her, Walden being 'butch' is a bad thing, suggesting that she, the woman at home to be fought for and to get home to,[91] aims to avoid butchness, preferring instead to be femme. A clear distinction is drawn here then between civilian women/wives (femme) and military women (butch). Rady's refusal to abide his wife insulting Walden and his subsequent repeated silencing when she utters the 'butch' remark reconfirms the implication that for a civilian wife, being butch is a bad thing. Yet Rady then turns, smiling, to Serling, shutting his wife out of the conversation both verbally and physically with his body language, and agrees that Walden was indeed butch. These actions suggest not only that his opinion (and, by extension, Serling's) is the only one that matters, but also that this 'butchness' is a good thing, something that only soldiers (not 'soft'/femme civilian wives) can understand. Despite being pushed out of the conversation repeatedly, Rady's wife tries again to explain: "I mean, those women who want to be officers [pause]" when she is interrupted by her husband who, again, says: "Shut up. [pause] She gave her life for those men. [turns back to Washington] She was a soldier." In this formulation then, being a 'butch' female soldier as assessed by a male soldier equates to being a good soldier (while homefront women see butchness as a bad thing). Here Rady is reading Walden as 'butch' through Butler's heteronormative matrix in order to maintain "the regulation of sexuality within

the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 186); being a good soldier is a masculine-gendered quality, therefore Walden's being a good soldier makes her 'butch' in the eyes of her fellow male soldier because one cannot be both feminine and a good soldier without breaking the bounds of the gender matrix.

Yet, significantly, the actions that make her a good/butch soldier according to Rady, giving her life for 'those men,' are visually coded as maternal in the flashbacks scenes of Rady's and Ilario's memories that follow. In these scenes, Walden cradles/covers Ilario's head protectively when the chopper is being fired upon, and attends to Rady's wounds tenderly, refusing to leave him behind when all of the other soldiers suggest doing so. Clearly then, for a woman, one's ability to be a good soldier is tied up in one's ability to be perceived as 'butch' by one's male companions, but this 'butchness' is constructed/earned by saving lives in a protective and maternalistic way, and, as Walden's final letter professes, by being unwilling to let your "guys" down, because they depend on you. So while Walden's maternal body is foregrounded in many ways, it is, somewhat paradoxically, her maternal behaviour towards the other (all male) soldiers in her unit that constructs her as butch (and unlike soft civilian wives), and therefore honorable in the eyes of her fellow soldiers. Significantly though, rather than having a voice or agency of her own, Walden is consistently overwritten in that the people who construct the audience's image of her are almost all men, and the only person who's opinion ultimately matters is also a man; Walden is simply a phantasm upon whom cultural concerns and fears about women in the military are played out. [92]

Ironically, despite her commitment to them and unwillingness to let them down, Walden is ultimately unable to depend on her men, least of all the 'butchest' of them, in the same way that they could depended on her. Notably, even though she is their superior officer, in narrating

their versions of the events, both male soldiers refer to Walden by her first name, Karen, while everyone else is referred to by their last name. This subtle verbal lack of respect for authority carries over into action when she is first 'accidentally' shot and then purposefully left for dead by a muscled, mutinous, and racially Othered Monfriez, who tries to cover up his treason because he fears the courts-martial consequences of his transgressions. The fact that Monfriez is very explicitly coded as the most stereotypically masculine of the other soldiers in the group is no accident. When the audience is first introduced to him, he is (ironically) working as a training drill sergeant, shouting orders about gun safety and the importance of not leaving a man behind.[93] In the following scenes, during which Serling interviews him, Monfriez is depicted doing physical training – boxing – and nearly nude in the locker room. While changing into his boxing shorts, Monfriez wears a jock-strap and nothing else, leaving little to the imagination; this is by far the most nudity in the film. His attitude is quite macho and aggressive as he uses weapons analogies to threaten Serling, suggesting that he leave the issue of what happened to Walden alone: "otherwise it blows up in your face. Leave this round in the chamber." In his recounting of the events, Monfriez accuses Walden of being the coward (when in reality it was him), takes credit for Walden's idea to drop the fuel cell that blows up the enemy tank, saving the men in the other downed chopper, accuses her of crying,[94] and finally, reverses blame, saying it was she who shot at him when he tried to get her to leave the wounded soldiers behind. As established within the film's framework, being a good/butch soldier is based more on behaviour and willingness to give one's life for others' than a hard or soft, leaky or not leaky body; Monfriez clearly does not pass the test, despite being the most stereotypically masculine (hard) in terms of his physical body as well as his macho attitude.

The film suggests then that Walden, despite her leaky (tearful) body and despite (maybe even partially because of) her maternal body was more 'butch' than Monfriez because of her dedication to duty and, more immediately, her dedication to her fellow soldiers. Despite his incredibly hard, non-leaky physical body, Monfriez is revealed to be a bad soldier who lets his fear and emotions get the better of him, accidentally shooting Walden, and one who wants only to preserve his own safety, showing no dedication to Walden or the other soldiers when he suggests to Ilario that they leave the injured parties behind so they can get themselves to safety. So while the film's assessment of what makes a good soldier still ties the qualities to gender under the label 'butch,' it finally comes down to honour and commitment to one's fellow soldier rather than physical prowess and/or aggressiveness. The fact that Walden is the better of the two soldiers despite Monfriez's hyper-masculine 'hardness' might serve to deconstruct Butler's heterosexual matrix except that her soldiering (which is actually depicted as quite stereotypically feminine and maternal) renders her "butch" in the eyes of the men who are in charge of authoring her story and determining her legacy.

Moreover, the film implies that 'butchness' is behavioural rather than simply bodily; while Meg Ryan does sport a relatively short haircut in the film, her overall physical appearance and her star persona hardly cast her as 'butch' in the traditional, physical sense. Like Demi Moore's star turn in *G.I. Jane* (discussed in greater detail below), much of the gender-transgressive quality that one might attribute to Meg Ryan's "butch" performance in *Courage Under Fire* is undone by the fact that her transformation is strongly and necessarily underpinned by a very attractive and unquestionably feminine star persona; in other words, Ryan's 'butchness' is only acceptable because even dirty and bleeding in the desert, she's still blonde and beautiful, and we all know she's still 'America's Sweetheart' underneath her baggy military

coveralls/fatigues. Ultimately the film suggests that whether one's body is leaky doesn't matter

so much as that one's actions are brave, and one is dedicated to one's fellow soldiers. After all,

Walden did cry (read: leak), but her smart choices, diligent performance of her duty, and

maternal instincts/feelings/actions towards her crew (sheltering Ilario's head, cradling the body

of an injured soldier, her refusal to leave anyone behind) also saved the lives of more than a

handful of men. On the other hand, however, it is Walden's leakiness that causes Monfriez to

lose it, shooting and eventually killing her, reinforcing the idea that (perhaps through no fault of

their own) women's leaky and maternally abject bodies are still a hindrance to their service in

active combat because the mere presence of women's bodies causes men to not be able to

perform their duties properly. This implication reinforces a persistent attitude in many world

cultures including the west that women must be responsible not only for their own

thoughts/actions/feelings but also for those that are supposedly provoked by them in men.[95]

Overall, while *Courage Under Fire* had the opportunity to intervene in and potentially begin to

dismantle long-standing gendered assumptions undergirding Butler's heterosexual matrix, its

treatment of Walden ultimately upholds rather than works against the grain of these gendered

assumptions and the policies (e.g. ban on women in active duty combat) which are based upon

them.

　　The connection between good soldiering and strong, hard bodies which arises in *Courage*

Under Fire is much more central in *G.I. Jane*. This film is also far more explicit about the

question of whether women can and should be involved in active combat duty than *Courage*

Under Fire in which Walden just happens to be a woman in the military who seemingly

accidentally finds herself in active combat – in the wrong place at the wrong time. On the other

hand, in *G.I. Jane*, Jordan O'Neill, famously played by Demi Moore, is a "test-case" for women

in the military when Senator Lillian DeHaven, played by Anne Bancroft, pressures the Navy to

fully gender-integrate. Now, nearly twenty years after the release of *G.I. Jane*, similar 'studies'

about women's ability to perform the physical duties required of infantry positions are reportedly

being undertaken as part of 'pilot programs' as the pentagon begins to lift the ban on women in

combat despite ongoing concerns.[96]

DeHaven, the pusher for military integration in the film, however, is arguably more

disgustingly sexist than any of the other military officials who resist allowing women into the

program. During the selection process to determine who the 'test-case' will be, DeHaven

mercilessly evaluates candidates on their looks and other stereotypically feminine qualities,

aiming to pick the most Public Relations-friendly candidate out of the pile. In this scene, when a

thin, not typically feminine track-runner is selected DeHaven comments sarcastically: "perfect –

only do a chromosome check," implying that the candidate is too masculine or might not actually

be biologically female. Again, while looking at the file of another non-stereotypically-feminine

candidate, DeHaven reads: "Holder of several records for [pause] female power-lifting" to the

laughter of her team, adding, while looking at the photo of another very muscular and not

typically attractive-looking woman, "Is this the face you want to see on the cover of Newsweek?

She looks like the wife of a Russian beet-farmer!" DeHaven's 'humorous' remarks fetch riotous

laughter from her subordinates; the unquestioning acceptance of DeHaven's flippant remarks by

her staff strengthen rather than poke fun at gender norms and the heterosexual matrix of which

they are a part, reinforcing a status quo in which in order for women to be successful (in any

arena), they must be stereotypically feminine and attractive.

Butler's heterosexual matrix is further reinforced when the beautiful and buxom O'Neil

(Demi Moore) is selected from the group of candidates and DeHaven goes to great lengths to

make sure that her 'G.I. Jane' is not a lesbian. The implication here is that if she were a lesbian she would somehow be less of a woman and therefore less of a true test case for women in the military (and that this would therefore somehow be bad publicity). Here again are echoes of Butler's sentiment that gendered/sexual roles as enacted on and through the body serve to support and reinforce the politics of the heterosexual matrix. Indeed, when someone captures photos of O'Neil associating with other women, she is publically accused of being a lesbian and is removed from the program despite U.S. President Clinton's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy which was in still in full effect at the time of the film's release; the implication that one must be heterosexual and attractive in order to be a 'real' test case for women in the military couldn't be clearer here.

In the crucial conflict scenes of the film, DeHaven reveals, not surprisingly after her initial misogynist displays, that she doesn't really even care about the issue of women in the military; she tells O'Neil: "Truthfully, I never expected you to do so damn well! I figured you'd ring out in two weeks, bing bang it's over, and we're popular." The senator reveals that she was simply using this issue for her own political ends, declaring that she doesn't even believe in women in the military because: "No politician can afford to let women come home in body bags. Especially me." Her statements raise more questions than they answer, begging the question: Why? Because she's a woman too? Because she's a woman in a position until recently held solely by and still largely by men and letting other women 'come home in body bags' would make her less politically 'popular?' DeHaven finishes her crushing speech to O'Neil by forcefully and finally declaring: "It was never gonna happen anyway." While O'Neil does eventually succeed, earning her Navy Seals qualifications, by the end of the film it seems as though it's more important to O'Neil to earn the respect of her attractive male

commanding/training officer, Master Chief John Urgayle, played by Viggo Mortensen, than to

successfully complete the training (though she does both). Again, much like in *Courage Under*

Fire, earning the respect of male soldiers, even those of inferior ranks whose respect for

authority should be automatic,[97] is a challenge and is of primary importance for military women.

Further, Senator DeHaven's final comments suggest that women still don't and won't ever

belong in the military, a fact reinforced and reflected in reality by the continuation of the ban on

women in combat positions for over fifteen years after the film's release.

As in *Courage Under Fire*, there are several references to O'Neil's bodily differences

once she is in the (training) field with her male peers. Concerns about her physical abilities and

the issue of men being driven to protect women to the detriment of their duty are dealt with in a

conversation between 'Jane' and her commanding/training officer:

> Lt. Jordan O'Neil: You were given the Navy Cross right? May I ask what
> you got it for?
> Master Chief John Urgayle: Since it bears on this conversation, I got it
> for pulling a 250-pound man out of a burning tank.
> Lt. Jordan O'Neil: So stopping to save a man makes you a hero, but if a
> man stops to help a woman, he's gone soft?
> Master Chief John Urgayle: Could you have pulled that man clear?
> Lieutenant, you couldn't even haul your own body weight out of the
> water today.

In addition to denigration of her physical abilities (or lack thereof), repeated and derogatory

reference to O'Neil's menstrually leaky body are made with jokes about tampons and sharing

bathrooms when O'Neil refuses to live in her own quarters and moves in with the men.

Ironically, O'Neil ceases requiring tampons when she begins to experience amenorrhea as a

result of her arduous physical training. The supposed increased risk of sexual violation of women

is also raised during one of the most iconic scenes from the film, a training exercise where

Mortensen's character simulates sexual assault by bending the 'captured' O'Neil over and

cutting/ripping her pants in front of the other (all male) soldiers before getting into a violently bloody fist-fight with her, culminating in her defiantly shouting "Suck my dick!" at him, to the delight of her fellow soldiers. Indeed, it is this symbolic adoption of the phallus, the male body as weapon,[98] that eventually wins her the respect and support of her fellow trainees; only after this event do they largely stop subverting her attempts to succeed and begin including her in social events, etc. Much like in *Courage Under Fire*, here, as a woman, one's actions must be 'butch' (rescuing men and symbolically and rhetorically adopting the phallus) for one to gain the respect of male soldiers/colleagues, yet in both cases, these 'butch' women are and must be stereotypically feminine and beautiful, too, to be acceptable to their male counterparts, love-interests, and to the press/public (for the medal of honour celebration in *Courage*, and to be the test-case for women in active-duty military service in *Jane*).

The irony of the message about women in the military in *G.I. Jane* is that, despite being selected specifically for her feminine qualities (read: beauty and body shape), in order to succeed, Demi Moore's character essentially has to become a man. First, she shaves her head because her thick mane of long shiny hair is getting in the way of her training exercises. Second, she becomes very muscular – a well-known montage from the film (and trailer) shows her doing extra chin-ups and one-armed push-ups alone, on her own time. Finally, she stops menstruating altogether, and makes reference to her symbolic 'dick' to win the respect of the male soldiers. Much like, but more intensely than in *Courage Under Fire*, where Meg Ryan's character has to be "butch" to be a good soldier, Demi Moore's character in *Jane* must almost literally become a man to achieve the same end; she almost completely disavows her femininity and, perhaps more importantly, her potentially maternal body, getting all of her leaks under control in order to complete her training and win the approval of the other men in her unit, if not the general public.

Paradoxically, however, in the final scene, after O'Neil has undertaken her physical transformation and symbolic adoption of the phallus and won the tacit approval of her male commanding officer, her leakiness returns when, after he gives her his Navy Cross, she cries! Her leaky body's resurfacing at this crucial final moment, in tandem with the overly emotional song 'Goodbye' by The Pretenders certainly undermines her performance of female masculinity[99] by suggesting that it was a front or a mask put on to get through training, but she's still a leaky femme body underneath it all; such an ending undermines any transgressive potential of her transformation throughout the film.

In each film, then, the ultimate goal or outcome is more about men's approval than it is about the issue at hand: in *Courage Under Fire*, it's about whether or not Walden was as brave as the other men who had historically been awarded the medal of honour, whether Denzel Washington's Serling thinks she deserves to be in their company; in *G.I. Jane* it's about O'Neil being 'tough' (read: masculine) enough to win the approval of the men in her training unit, most importantly her commanding officer, Urgayle. The importance of his approval/respect is reinforced in the climactic sequence wherein O'Neil saves Urgayle's life and he gifts her his Navy Cross,[100] suggesting that he thinks she deserves it but knows she will never officially receive one of her own. Significantly, too, neither film deals with the future of women in the military – in each case these women's military careers are convenient exceptions to the culturally accepted rule that women can't or shouldn't hack it in the military. Each case is an accident or a one-off and each portends that while on an individual level, on a case-by-case basis, military men (and by extension, the films imply, the general public) *might* accept women in active duty combat positions (or might not a-la-Monfriez in *Courage*), the public is still not ready for fully gender-integrated combat units.[101] Significantly, the women in these films themselves have little

to no agency in terms of their careers; the military men with whom they interact are the ones who have authority and authorship over their careers, deciding whether or not they merit medals. Essentially then, in both cases women are symbols, stand-ins or representatives of something else, some masculine or nationalistic ideal, value, problem, or issue, rather than being important in and of themselves. In this case, the issue is whether the public is ready to let women into the military, and given the ten-plus year gap between these films and the decision to repeal the ban, the answer to that question, at least at the time, was still, 'no.'

Yvonne Tasker, in writing about these two films[102] agrees that while they aren't strictly speaking 'transgressive,' "the central female characters are tough and masculine-coded, [and] they are both normalized and revered. To the extent that such images are transgressive at all then," (209) Tasker argues, their transgression "lies not only in the act of proposing a viable female masculinity, but in their construction of heroic female protagonists whose very desire to be part of a masculine conformity trouble both the cinematic world in which they operate and many assumptions that have come to be conventional within feminist film criticism" (209). Tasker also makes the valuable point that these films are typical war films in that they "both offer powerful fantasies of incorporation, fantasies central to the war movie at least since films about WWII, with their emphasis on the development of allegiances across differences of race, religion, ethnicity, and class" (210). Importantly, Tasker, too, discusses the star power of Meg Ryan and Demi Moore: "*G.I. Jane* was widely discussed in terms of Demi Moore's physical transformation and commitment to her performance as aspiring Navy SEAL (her shorn head, her muscles)" and "As one review had it *Courage Under Fire* asks … 'Can America's sweetheart, Meg Ryan, yell *motherfucker* with conviction?'" (215). The essential quality to note about these stars' power, however, in the context of discussing representations of gender, is their

attractiveness. Tasker argues that the transgressiveness of these images lies in the fact that they are "cinematic images of women which are codified as 'masculine' but are not rendered perverse" (215). I argue, however, that these images of female masculinity would in fact have been rendered perverse had not the female stars been so normatively and femininely attractive to begin with; in each case, the performance of female masculinity requires a strong, unquestionable and conventional femininity of its performer. As the DeHaven character clearly states in *G.I. Jane*, no one wants to see the face and figure of an unattractive "Russian beet farmer's wife" (significantly a farmer's *wife*, not just a farmer) on the cover of *Newsweek*. This sentiment speaks equally to the Hollywood movie machine of which this film is a part: no one wants to or is willing pay to see the face (and body) of a Russian beet farmer's wife in the starring role of a blockbuster, especially not when the main female character is going to 'go butch;'[103] audiences demand conventionally beautiful women like Meg Ryan and Demi Moore. In fact, Moore's character faces a Catch-22: she has to be stereotypically feminine and attractive to become the test case, but that very attractiveness is what is perceived as a danger to herself (threat of sexual violation), to her fellow soldiers (who will be driven to distraction by her feminine body), and to her nation (when she fails to adequately perform her duty or disrupts the men's ability to do theirs). While Tasker's point about the transgressiveness of normalized female masculinity is well taken, and while she may disagree with my somewhat more pessimistic reading of the female masculinity in each film, her point that both films "end with an indicative contrast between a public ceremony in which gallantry is rewarded and a private one in which a courageous man passes his own medal to a woman who has proved herself in combat" (218) is in line with my claim that, in the end, each film requires its female protagonist to become stereotypically hard-bodied and/or tactically or bravely masculine in some way in order

to win the respect and approval of a male superior. This type of male-driven narrative, particularly the endings of each film, in which a man paternalistically bestows a medal upon a military woman who is 'butch' enough to have earned his respect, only reinforces the traditional gender roles and patrilineal military hierarchy upon which the genre is based. Both characters simply remain phantasms through which military men and (by extension, the viewing public) can complete a thought experiment about what it would be like to have women in active-duty combat. The fact that each film pays no regards to the future of women in the military (leaving it at a one-off situation) and that the combat ban continued in full-force after they were released reveals the result of the thought experiment and suggests that neither film really made a strong intervention into public thinking about these policies or the conservative values upon which they're based, dooming a debate based on outdated gender moulds and a heterosexual matrix to continue.

Middle Period: *Saving Private Ryan, The Patriot, Pearl Harbor, We Were Soldiers*

In fact, a mere two to three years after the release of *Courage* and *Jane*, combat films transitioned into what I'm terming the wistful, WWII-nostalgia period. As discussed throughout this project, this middle cycle of the period sees films that are, with few exceptions, much more traditional and conservative and morally righteous in their values. Their representation of women is equally traditional and conservative; in films like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Patriot* (2000), *Pearl Harbor* (2001), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002), women are an absent presence, existing only on the homefront, pictured in scenes set before the soldiers are deployed, in nostalgic flashbacks, and when the men return home (on leave or permanently). Again, De Beauvoir comes to mind: "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is female – this word is sufficient to define her" (3). In these films, women

are still symbolic phantasms, but rather than standing in for debates about whether women should be 'in the line of fire,' as they do in the earlier films, in the middle period films there is no question: women should and do stay home because they represent the traditional (gendered and heteronormative) family values of the homefront, the 'why we fight.' For Jacques Lacan, as explained by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, fantasies have much to do with origin and with sexual difference; they are not so much fantasies that one 'has,' like a daydream, but, rather, are more like structures that one exists and operates within.[104] For Roland Barthes, the photograph (and, by extension, film) itself is a type of absent presence because of its link to some supposed truth (the 'reality' that was in front of the camera as the film was being exposed to the light); in this formulation, the subject is present in representation (she/he/it appears in the image), but not present in the sense of literally being in the same place at the same time as the viewer of the photograph/film and thus a kind of 'falseness' is always created by photographic (and filmic) representations.[105] I argue here that women operate in much the same way in these WWII-nostalgia films. At the most immediate level, women are phantasms that male soldiers conjure in their mind's eye (or by literally looking at photographs) in order to motivate themselves to keep fighting and stay alive. These female phantasms, while they might look and sound like the 'real' women in the men's lives, are ideals, *things* worth fighting and dying for, rather than material human beings. At a deeper level, even while they may seem to be materially present for the viewer (e.g. in homefront scenes rather than in men's imaginations), they are still phantasms for the audience, more so present in terms of the values and ideals they represent, rather than as material actors; they are simply convenient archetypes constructed for an imagined audience.

For Žižek, like for Lacan, fantasies are like a structure within which humans are immersed at all times.[106] Žižek takes the example of a person wearing ideology-revealing sunglasses to explain that these fantasies are all around us all the time (xiii). Not coincidentally, many of Žižek's examples of fantasy centre around war and the military; using the example of the sunglasses, he writes: "we can thus imagine the kind of inverted ideological spectacles that would spell out this implicit obscene message: for example, a nationalist-populist party electoral poster which asks you to sacrifice yourself for your country, but which, when viewed through the glasses shows you how you will profit from it, the spoils of your sacrifice – being allowed to humiliate foreigners, and so on, as part of your patriotic duty" (xiii). Žižek's point about the function of fantasy within the ideological frame of popular cinema is also well taken:

> Think for example of the 'production of a couple' motif that frames a Hollywood narrative about a big historical event like a war or a natural catastrophe: this motif is, quite literally, the film's ideological surplus-enjoyment. Although we directly enjoy the spectacular shots of the disaster (battles, [etc.]), the surplus-enjoyment is provided by the sub-narrative of the couple which forms a 'frame' for the spectacular event … It is this frame (through which we perceive the spectacular event), with its surplus enjoyment, that 'bribes' us libidinally into accepting the ideology of the story." (xvii)

In this formulation, phantasies are deeply rooted in ideological functioning, and serve as part of a mask or 'bribe' to seduce audiences into 'buying' the ideology that films (and/or other cultural forms) are selling. Indeed, as Žižek puts it, "ideology has to rely on some phantasmic background" (xxiii-xxiv) in order to function successfully. Žižek argues that "fantasy mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality – that is to say, it provides a schema according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire" (7); so again, in terms of women in this middle, WWII-nostalgia cycle, while the men's phantasies and the women as they appear to the audience are based on (or

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at least seem plausible as) women from 'real' life, they are phantasies nonetheless –

images/representations of our desires (both the audience's and the male characters').

Importantly, Žižek articulates how these operations can serve to limit people's thinking. A clear

example he gives that can help conceptualize the ways in which ideology and phantasm work in

the combat film is that of media reports of Mother Teresa's charitable works, "which clearly rely

on the phantasmatic screen of the Third World. Calcutta is regularly presented as a Hell on Earth,

the exemplary case of the decaying Third World" (23) and while these images are not necessarily

entirely representative of the actuality of Calcutta,

> into this picture of utter gloom, Mother Teresa brings a ray of hope to the
> dejected with the message that poverty is to be accepted as a way to
> redemption, since the poor, in enduring their sad fate with silent dignity and
> faith, repeat Christ's Way of the cross … [ellipsis in original] The
> ideological benefit of this operation is double: in so far as she suggests to the
> poor and terminally ill that they should seek salvation in their very suffering,
> Mother Teresa deters them from probing into the causes of their predicament
> – from *politicizing* their situation." (23-4)

The phantasmatic screen of women in the nostalgic war films operates in much the same way; by

having the soldiers idealize 'their' women back home and the values that these women represent,

the men, and by extension the viewers,[107] are deterred or even prevented from questioning or

politicizing the reason that they are fighting for these women and/or the values they represent;

soldier characters and viewers are thereby discouraged from questioning the war itself. This

operation is all part of Deleuze and Guttari's 'war machine,' something that is separate from the

state, but then appropriated by the state and involves a number of different assemblages working

together to create total war.[108] In this scenario, the women on the home-front and in this

discussion the phantasms of the women on the home front, are an essential part of the war

machine, motivating, as they do, the men to keep fighting until the war is over and they can

return home to these women.

Indeed, *Saving Private Ryan*'s entire narrative conflict and story arc, loosely based on true events, revolves around getting a woman's sole surviving son home to her because she has lost all of her other sons in the war. This woman, Ryan's mother, is seen only very briefly, however, and only from behind as she is notified of the death of her sons and sags to the floor in grief. Her maternal body, in a way, disrupts the war assemblage; several men are lost on a mission to bring her one remaining son home to her because her grief is expected to become uncontrolled, creating a leaky body in terms of hysterical emotion and tears. At the same time, however, her maternal body is essential to the war effort because it produced all of the faithful sons who gave their lives in defense of their nation. In this formulation women's bodies are firmly rooted at home and stand in for the traditional family values of that home/nation.

The only other women actually pictured in the film are the wife and daughter/in-law of the aged Ryan who are included in the final shots of the film and who do not speak, except for Ryan's wife, who quickly reassures him (when asked to) that he has led a good life; this good life, as evidenced by his many surrounding family members, has involved the creation of a large, traditional American family. A young, innocent girl also appears in the film, but again, exists only as a symbol of the suffering that war inflicts on civilians; as the soldiers set out to look for Ryan, they come across a family of civilians in the rubble of a bombed-out square, and Private Adrian Caparzo, played by Vin Diesel, begs to take the young girl, who reminds him of his niece back home, to safety. This child, a phantasm embodied, represents the innocence of women and children at home who must be protected at all costs. Ironically Caparzo is killed in his attempt to save the young girl, reinforcing that his overly emotional reaction to her, his softness, has gotten him killed and, simultaneously, that the duty to protect innocent women and children at home requires the sacrifice of able-bodied men on the front lines of war.

Aside from these few minor characters, having only moments each onscreen and almost no speaking parts, women exist only as memories in this film. Ryan's character relates a story about one of his brothers, Daniel, who was about to have sex with his "very ugly" girlfriend, Alice Jardine, in the hayloft of their family barn before enlisting; at the last minute, however, his brothers, including Ryan, bust in and shout: "Don't do it – you're a young man!" Here again, a young man was going to consummate his sexual relationship with a young woman from his hometown, to give him something to fight for, something to come back to. Perhaps not understanding this social rite, his brothers disrupt the ritual, causing him to miss out; as Damon's character sadly reveals, "He shipped out the next day." In another, more important example of women as phantasms, at a crucial moment in the mission, when the men's morale is low and their willingness or ability to follow his orders seems at its lowest, the commander, Captain John H. Miller (Tom Hanks), keeps the men together by admitting that the reason he follows orders from his superiors is simply so that he can expedite his return home to his wife, noting that every death of a soldier under his command makes that goal seem more and more distant. In each case here, rather than being real flesh-and-bone, embodied beings, or even fully fleshed-out characters, women are phantasms, nostalgic memories from home, morally sound reasons to fight this morally sound war so that the men can get back home and get back to their good American family lives. In this way, the middle-period films nostalgically reinforce the heteronormative gender roles on which such traditional familial structures are based, implying that while war does involve death, these deaths are part of the circle of life (Ryan's brothers – both literal and figurative – die so that he can go back home and create the large heteronuclear family with whom he is seen in the film's opening/closing frames), and that war is righteous and even necessary in that it protects this traditional way of life.

Even when women have a more physical presence onscreen as in *The Patriot*, and *Pearl Harbor*, their representation is no less problematic; in both films, women are basically interchangeable wife/mother units. In every case, women exist only in their roles as girlfriend/wife/mother, to the point that it is their most salient characteristic. In line with Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of the war machine, these female phantasms that the soldiers focus on are an important assemblage, a working unit in the war machine: women must exist in this idealized state, as placeholders, to give the men a reason to fight, something to get home to. Like the idealized mythical figure of the war wife Penelope from the Iliad, women in these middle-cycle films will stand by their man, waiting patiently forever; family relationships are the most central relationships in each film and while war might take life away from some family members, it can also be the founder of new familial relationships, and it is always something from which the American family can bounce back with resilience and hard work, furthering the traditional capitalist American 'bootstrap' mentality.

In *The Patriot*, Mel Gibson's widowed veteran character, Benjamin Martin, refuses to go to war because he is a self-declared family man, and he doesn't "have the luxury" of fighting in a war because he is a single father and must take care of his children. After one of his sons is shot by an evil British Redcoat, however, and his family is threatened, he decides he must join the war effort. In order to do so he leaves his young children in the care of his late wife's sister, Charlotte Selton, played by Joely Richardson (with whom he later becomes romantically involved). At the point where they become intimately involved, this woman, who barely speaks through the rest of the film, staunchly declares, "I'm not my sister," to which Martin unconvincingly replies, "I know, I know." Yet despite this strong claim of independence, of being her own woman, viewers have no evidence to the contrary. Certainly, since the viewer

knows nothing about either woman, the difference between the two remains unclear despite Charlotte's statement to the contrary, and, in fact, from the way the Martin children react to her, her effortless transition into the maternal and marital role, and from her lack of any discernable characteristics or personality, it seems like she might have more in common with her late sister than she thinks. Under this new marriage arrangement, Charlotte, who barely speaks, stays home to take care of the many younger Martin children, stepping effortlessly into her deceased sister's role, freeing Martin Sr. up to fight in the war, knowing that his kids are safe and cared for by a maternal relative. Rather than functioning as a full, rounded character with her own wants and needs, Charlotte is completely flat; her only notable features are that she's beautiful, wealthy, and maternally caring. She simply steps in to fulfill the requisite Hollywood love-interest-role, and complete the traditional nuclear family that the protagonist, Martin Sr., fights to protect, representing the stability and idyllic nature of home.

Similarly, in *Pearl Harbor*, one woman, Nurse Lt. Evelyn Johnson, played by Kate Beckinsale, is sexually/romantically exchanged between two friends, and exists as more of a symbol of their friendship and brotherly bond than an entity of her own. In this film, boyhood friends Rafe McCawley, played by Ben Affleck, and Danny Walker, played by Josh Hartnett, sign up for the military together, becoming Captains in the Army Air Corps. At first it is Rafe who begins a love-affair with Nurse Evelyn but when Rafe's plane is shot down and he is presumed dead, Evelyn and Danny have a sexual encounter and begin a romantic relationship. Clearly, Evelyn is the passive sexual object of both men's desire, and she seems willing to go along with being with either man. In contrast to women's sexuality in the earlier films, *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane*, where women's sexuality is a threat to themselves and others, here it is almost completely inert – women may have joined the Navy nurses team to meet men (as

some of Evelyn's friends declare they have), but they go about their interactions with them in a very passive way. Indeed, Evelyn's lack of choice is underscored when one of Danny's friends tells him: "Danny – she's gotta be with somebody – it may as well be you"! Eventually Rafe returns, having not died in his plane crash after-all and is understandably upset that Danny and Evelyn have started a relationship while he's been gone. The subsequent attack on Pearl Harbor, however, is enough to help Rafe and Danny re-bond, banding together and forgetting their fight over Evelyn so they can do their duty and fight for the good of their country. Again, their male bond and sense of duty to their country is stronger and more important than their feelings for/about Evelyn.

The importance of nuclear families to the war machine is also underscored, though, when the two men agree to fly in Doolittle's raid and Danny is seriously injured; cradling a dying Danny in his arms, Rafe tells Danny "You can't die – you're going to be a father" – Evelyn is pregnant with his child. The entire point of fighting this war, then, or at least the more important duty, is fatherhood; fighting the war is a means to the end of getting home and continuing to proliferate the American nuclear family and carry out ones paternal duties. Staying alive to take care of one's family is part of the war machine. Indeed, before the two men leave for the raid, Evelyn tells Rafe, not Danny, that she is pregnant: "I don't want Danny to know. All he needs to worry about is coming home alive." Rafe reveals the pregnancy news to Danny in the crucial moments after Danny is injured in the hopes that this news and his paternal responsibilities will help him survive. The centrality of fatherhood and paternal relationships to the genre is explored in greater detail in chapter seven but here serves to reinforce women's role as procreators sustaining the nation-building project within which war is so deeply imbricated.

So again, in *Pearl Harbor* women and family exist as idealized phantasms, shimmering chimeras that keep men alive and fighting to get home, as Evelyn's image/memory did for Rafe after his plane crash. Shifting the love triangle back to its original formulation in the final moments before his death, Danny replies to the news that he's going to be a father by telling Rafe, "No, you are," giving Rafe permission to rekindle his relationship with Evelyn and act as a parent to the as-yet-unborn child, before dying in Rafe's arms. These scenes reveal that it is one's dedication to one's brotherhood (both in the military sense and in the fraternal friendship between men) and country that is of paramount importance. Either man can be a romantic partner to Evelyn and father to her child, and in saying "No, you are," Danny gives no consideration to what Evelyn might want, simply presuming (bordering on asserting) that she will go back to Rafe after his death.

Of course his prediction is confirmed when, in the film's closing sequence, a now-married Rafe and Evelyn visit Danny's grave with their son, whom they have named Danny after the child's biological father. This girlfriend/wife-swapping comes across as the only logical, right thing to do for the unwed and pregnant Evelyn, but literally no screen time is spent on her thoughts or feelings about the second mate-switch between Danny and Rafe; her wishes aren't even mentioned in passing. While Evelyn does work as a nurse at Pearl Harbor, demonstrating some of the ways in which women did make vast contributions to the war effort during WWII, her being passed relatively silently and unquestioningly back and forth between Rafe and Danny drains most, if not all, of the agency otherwise attributed to her character, suggesting that as far as she matters at all, it is as the love object of these two men whose relationship with each other and dedication to their country far supersedes any feelings they might have towards her. Her relative unimportance is demonstrated in the film's closing scenes when Rafe takes his/Danny's

son flying alone in the red plane from Rafe/Danny Sr.'s childhood while she looks on lovingly and silently. Much like in *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane*, even when women appear to be central and important characters in war/combat films, men are still the architects of the narratives, and women are largely silent and passive, merely symbolic representations of cultural concerns/questions/values.

In each cycle of the period, then, women are simply easy symbols for other issues; in the case of these WWII-nostalgia films, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Patriot*, and *Pearl Harbor*, women simply represent the homefront, standing in for the American family values that were supposedly threatened by and fought for during WWII. They, like the soldiers, are cogs in the war machine, necessarily symbolic of national values, idealizations, flattened reminders of what is at stake (innocence, families), but unlike the soldiers, who are actors in and of themselves and have individual and differing wants and desires (glory, heroism, skills), all of the women are basically the same, undifferentiated passive receptacles onto which the soldiers can project their hopes, dreams, desires and, to a certain extent, they therefore reflect the intended impression of the morality of the war for the audience.

Perhaps even more so than in the aforementioned films, which, except for *The Patriot* (which is set during the American Revolution), actually represent the WWII that this middle-period cycle of films is so nostalgic about, the pattern perseveres and is possibly even stronger in *We Were Soldiers*, another Mel Gibson-led drama set during the much-less clear-cut Vietnam War. In this film, women are wives and mothers that the men grudgingly leave behind to serve their country and protect their traditional family values. In this film, Mel Gibson's character Lt. Col. Hal Moore is both a literal father of many children with his wife Julie Moore, played by Madeleine Stowe, and a symbolic father figure to the men under his command in his unit,

especially 2nd Lt. Jack Geoghegan, played by Chris Klein (whose own wife is pregnant, meaning he, too, is about to become a father). More on the representations of American families, values, and fatherhood in this film and others follows in chapter seven. For now, sufficed to say the film takes place at the beginning of the American engagement in Vietnam, and perhaps it is because it aims to represent this early period of the conflict, before the American public became so largely disillusioned about the war and antiwar protests became so common, that the film is able to remain so optimistic about protecting American values such as the 'leave no man behind' policy, and protecting the freedom of wives and children left at home. In fact, the film opens with a quote from J.F.K.'s 1961 inaugural address: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." These nostalgic messages about the defense of liberty are matched by simple, nostalgic WWII-era representations of women at home; these films idealize a time when soldierly and gendered/familial relationships along with the reasons for 'why we fight' were simple, and clear-cut and morally uncomplicated.

When we're first introduced to Moore's wife, the main female character in the homefront scenes, she has organized and is hosting a meeting of the army wives in her home: "I know some of you are new to the army, and all of us are new to this base, so I thought we could pool our resources and cover whatever questions we might have." The items on her agenda, in order, are: 1) where's the best place to shop for food and 2) laundry "the base washers don't work – they're full of sand from a swamp mission;" here, the issue of race comes up briefly when one of the white women doesn't realize that the sign for the Laundromat in town that says "whites only" means white people only (not white clothes only), and the one black woman in the group says: "I

know what my husband's fighting for … and anyone who don't respect my husband can keep his washing machine 'cause my baby's clothes is gonna be clean anyway." This scene reinforces the aforementioned idea that war/combat films concern themselves with overcoming American in-group tension (like racism) for the purpose of Othering outgroups (enemy Others); this scene also reinforces the idea that all American families have the same values – black military wives and white military wives are equally devoted to cleaning their husbands' clothes. Finally, Barbara Geoghegan (Jack's – Chris Klein – wife) goes into labour, bringing the domestic meeting to a close. This early scene reinforces the women's positions as firmly entrenched in the home, dealing with cooking, cleaning, and having babies/children. Each of the women, none more so than Moore's wife, Julie, is uprightly Christian, proper, morally righteous, and decorous (well dressed and coiffed at all times); each is a wife and many are mothers. Unlike in the previous cycle of films where women serve as a screen upon which anxiety over mixed-gender combat is paramount and plays out, here the roles are simple and clearly divided: men go off to war, women stay home and look after the home, and therein lies the nostalgia – these films look back fondly and idealistically upon times when these gendered divisions were simpler.

Moore's wife, here, like her husband who is the father-figure to the unit, is the mother-figure to all of the other women in the 'unit;'[109] she is the one with experience, who has done this before and knows how it goes, and therefore takes it upon herself to lead the others through the experience: as the wives sit around the TV when the announcement is made that their husbands will ship out, Moore's wife says: "Get out your best dresses ladies; they're going to want to celebrate." She takes the lead again when the army sends a cab driver with telegrams informing some of the women of their husbands' deaths, telling him to bring all future notices to her, that she will take care of it. She then personally delivers all of the death notices, with the help of Jack

Geoghegan's wife (until the day that the telegram is for Geoghegan's wife, now a new mother and widow). While Moore's wife, Julie, does display strong leadership qualities, like her husband, the idea of any of these women going to war is made ridiculous by their ignorance of social/political issues (e.g. the racism of "whites only" laundromats), and their panic when Geoghegan's wife goes into labour; these are leaky, maternal bodies that cry, gasp, scream, and give birth to babies, much more suited to the vacuuming, sewing, and washing that they are depicted doing than anything else. Indeed, in the closing scenes, like the archetypical Penelope waiting patiently for her partner's home-coming, Moore's wife is shown sewing alone in her home on the evening of her husband's eventual return, reinforcing her ultimately domestic role despite her leadership qualities among the other women. She is so domestic, in fact, that she is almost solely depicted inside the family home, and not once off the base/military compound where the family lives.[110] Essentially, then, Moore's wife is the embodiment of the American homefront; a representation of all that is at stake in the fighting of war. Her experience and preparedness too, ties in to the overall argument of this study that combat films depict war as inevitable and ongoing – her knowing reaction to the news that the men are shipping out says 'here we go again'.

Much like in *Saving Private Ryan*, then, women exist here simply as anchors on the home front, as things/ideals to get back to. In fact, while this scene does not appear in the film itself, in the trailer, Moore's wife says: "Do you know what the most common thing an American soldier says when he's dying on the Battlefield? 'Tell my wife I love her.'" And no less than three dying soldiers utter these very words in the course of the film. Even in their dying moments, the men stay true to the script, remaining committed to the narrative of the war machine: men who love their wives and families go off to war to fight (and possibly die) for them and the values that they

represent. The primacy of the goal of getting home to one's family is reinforced in these men's

repeated final words; it is as though they are equally concerned about their duty to their families

and to their military/country.[111] While both male soldiers and their wives at home are

assemblages in the war machine, unlike their male counterparts, women in films of this WWII-

nostalgic period are not important in their own right, but function (willingly or unwittingly) only

as symbolic representations of the moral American values that the soldiers are fighting for:

freedom, but more importantly, these films suggest, tradition and nuclear families. This

traditional nuclear family of which the white American military man is the head is represented as

being at the centre of the war machine and at the centre of the American nation which that war

machine is purportedly designed to protect; female characters are simply symbols within the

system rather than possessing agency within it.

Later period Cycle, Mid-2000s to 2010: *Jarhead*, *Stop Loss*, and *The Hurt Locker*

While in the middle-period WWII-nostalgic period films discussed above women are

simply phantastic representations of an idyllic homefront, in the wave of combat films from the

mid-2000s to the present, women have not enjoyed such a rosy, if stereotypical, depiction.

Rather than existing as symbolic of the wholesome American values men are fighting for,

women in the later period cycle of films (similar to the first cycle of the period including

Courage Under Fire and *G.I. Jane*) exist as projections of masculine and/or national problems,

issues, or insecurities. Instead of representing the issue of women in the military as in the first

cycle, however, the women in the films from the later part of the period stand-in for the moral

and literal ambiguities of the war, and the resultant problems faced by returning soldiers. In

Jarhead, women are mostly terrible cheaters who torment, intentionally or not, their men while

they're away and in *Stop Loss* and *The Hurt Locker*, no one can keep their hetero-romance together; women leave their men because of PTSD, alcoholism, etc. and men leave their women and children because they love war more. Unlike middle-period WWII-nostalgia films, where getting home to one's wife and family is the only thing that's important, and the issues that soldiers might experience on their return are ignored or seemingly non-existent; women here stand in as symbols for both the political/public ambiguity and private troubles (unfaithfulness in *Jarhead*, erectile dysfunction and domestic abuse in *Stop Loss* as representative of larger issues) associated with these more recent wars rather than being depicted as important in their own right.

Anthony Swofford's paranoia about his girlfriend cheating on him is an ongoing concern right from the outset of the film *Jarhead*, a film based on his memoir of his experiences in the U.S. Marine Corps during the first Gulf War. Right away, the drill sergeant/training officer tells Swofford that his girlfriend is "getting fucked by Jody."[112] This paranoia is reinforced by his fellow soldiers when they're deployed and they reinforce their own heterosexuality (and therefore the heterosexual matrix) by passing around pictures of their wives/girlfriends from back home. Again, of Swofford's girlfriend, someone makes the comment that "'Jody' is going to be all over her." When one of the Latino soldiers, Cortez, played by Jacob Vargas, attempts to express positive affect about women and families by showing a picture of his pregnant wife saying her pregnancy is the reason "she's so beautiful, this is what it's all about", he is shut down and laughed at by the other soldiers. Further, when he later gets a letter from home with pictures of his newborn son, someone tells him he'd "better check the mailman" because "it's a gringo baby!" implying that his wife has cheated on him with the mailman and the baby isn't his. Repeated comments such as these reinforce the idea that all women are duplicitous cheaters (or at least that the men think they are), which only heightens Swofford's concerns about his own

girlfriend. These negative attitudes towards women are explicitly linked to the Vietnam-era when, in a previously-alluded-to *Jarhead* scene, a woman sends a video purportedly containing the film *The Deer Hunter* to her husband, but it turns out, he discovers while watching the video with most of the men in the unit, to have a cuckolding video of her having sex with their neighbour taped over the middle; this is no accidental tape-over as the segment ends with her putting her face in extreme close-up, spitting angrily into the camera: "Who's fuckin' around now Brian?" Clearly, women in the later period cycle of the period are no longer idealized phantasms representing the innocence of the homefront but are instead screens upon which men are projecting their own insecurities and anxieties.

Unlike in the earliest cycle (1990-1997) of films from this period where women's sexuality is a potential problem for them (in terms of sexual assault e.g. *G.I. Jane*'s simulated rape scene) and for the men around them (in terms of a distraction that will prevent them from properly carrying out their duties e.g. *Courage Under Fire*'s mutinous Monfriez), women's sexuality here is coded as a problem in terms of its ability to hurt and/or destabilize men even from far away. In this case, a soldier's wife is depicted as taking explicit control over her body and using it as a sexual weapon against her absent husband, who is helpless to do anything about it while deployed thousands of miles away; similarly Swofford's paranoia about his girlfriend's fidelity plagues him throughout the film.[113] The attitude toward women here is also clearly much more negative than in WWII-nostalgia films, yet the representation of women still revolves around their sexual/bodily difference. This time, however, women are (or are erroneously perceived to be) wielding their sexual bodies as weapons to deliberately hurt male soldiers. Again though, while the woman in this cuckolding is very active (in the use of her body as weapon), she still requires other men (including the neighbour with whom she has sex and the

audience of soldiers in front of whom the video is displayed) to inflict the intended injury on her husband. Additionally, we never see or hear from this woman again, so within the context of the film, she is still simply a phantasm, yet in this case, rather than existing as a positive, WWII-nostalgic phantasm that motivates a man to fight, she is more like a nightmarish phantasm, representing all of the men's fears about their wives'/girlfriends' fidelity while they are away and their inability (helplessness) to do anything about it.

Indeed, after seeing the video, a clearly disturbed but posturing Swofford yells "Fucking faggot – let's watch it again!" after the cuckolded soldier leaves, grief-stricken. But Swofford's friend Alan Troy, played by Peter Sarsgaard, says no, "That's his wife, man. That's his wife," refusing to give in to Swofford's sadomasochistic drive to compulsively re-watch the video that both emotionally eviscerates his peer and literalizes his own fears about his girlfriend's potential infidelities. Swofford's other major anxiety throughout the film is his existential anxiety about what he is doing in the Marines (telling his drill sergeant "I got lost on the way to college") which seems to be linked to his existential concerns about what the American military is doing in the Middle East. While his fears about his girlfriend's faithfulness and his military-existential crisis are never explicitly linked, they are implicitly tied together in their constantly recurring nature and in the way in which Swofford tries to alleviate his boredom/frustration at not doing anything (militarily) by masturbating; he then becomes increasingly aggravated/disturbed by his inability to ejaculate while masturbating, which ties back to his disappointment at the close of the war about not being able to fire his weapon. Such a scene conflates his general anxieties about life and his role in the military/conflict in the Middle East to his more specific anxieties about his girlfriend's fidelity; his girlfriend (who has extremely minimal screen/speech time) therefore stands in for, or at least becomes intimately tied to, his overall concerns about life, rather than

existing as a character in her own right. In fact, at one point, when Swofford attempts to speak with her on the phone, their connection is so terrible that she speaks but Swofford cannot hear her (raising the postcolonial notion of the subaltern to be explored in greater detail in chapter four). Despite her protestations, Swofford has made up his mind that she's cheating on him, and when, in the closing scenes of film, a man appears in her doorway when Swofford visits, his worst fears appear to have come true (like a self-fulfilling prophecy). Christina does have a name, but doesn't have a voice, nor does she have an active role in Swofford's story, let alone her own.

Not even local women are safe from the misogynistic attitudes of these men who see women as simply blank slates upon whom they can work out their own issues; while the men are driving through the desert on patrol, a veiled woman in the back-seat of a passing car is subject to lewd pelvic thrusts and simulated male on female oral sex from a "squishy-faced" white soldier (Dave Fowler, played by Kevin Jones), who pretends to speak Arabic to her (actually just shouting gibberish) and then says to his soldier buddies: "She'll never forget me. That bitch wanted me." At each mention and depiction of a woman, then, she is either denigrated as duplicitous, promiscuous, and disloyal, and/or the target of vicious and disgusting unwanted sexual gesticulations and expressions. This is a fairly far cry from the idealized phantasms from middle-period WWII-nostalgia films from a mere three years earlier, but women here are still simply symbolic of or an object for men's (mostly sexual) anxieties and frustrations.

While slightly less damning, the representations of women in other films from the later cycle of the period such as *Stop Loss* and *The Hurt Locker* are no less fraught and problematic. While again the only women to appear in each film are, girlfriends, fiancées, wives and mothers, these are not the ideal, stable, dependable women from the WWII-nostalgia cycle; on the

contrary, they are sexual objects, and/or duplicitous cheaters, or at least questionable love objects. In each case, they don't get much of a chance to express themselves, again existing only in relation to (usually the negative inverse of) men, weakening the war machine and reflecting the growing concerns/uncertainties about the Gulf War/War on Terror.

One of the first scenes involving a woman in *Stop Loss*, a film about three male friends' experiences during and after active duty in Iraq, occurs when, much like in *Jarhead*, the men are looking at pictures of Steve Shriver's (played by Channing Tatum) fiancé on his phone/camera; one of the (presumably from his comment) Mexican soldiers, 'Eyeball,' tells him: "She and I would make some cute Tex-Mex babies," echoing the suggestion in many of the other combat films studied herein (including *Pearl Harbor* and *Jarhead*) that women are interchangeable and will simply have sex with (willingly or not) whatever man is around, simply existing as objects for men's lust.

Similarly, the dos and don'ts handed out by the men's commanding officers also involve the soldiers' conduct around women; the list of things not to do while on leave is as follows: "You will not drink and drive – you pick up a young lady, let her drive, let her get the DUI; do not fight with civilians; do not fuck anyone underage. I say again, you will not fuck anyone underage; you will not beat your wife; you will not beat your kids; you will not kick your dog." All of these commandments involve men's behaviour in their assumed heterosexual relationships,[114] but they also presume that the men are predisposed or likely to commit these infractions (beating their wives, kids, and dogs, all on the same list following a possessive pronoun); otherwise they wouldn't need to be warned against it. Along with the prohibitions, the C.O. also suggests letting a woman drive drunk instead of oneself to avoid getting a DUI and instead have it pinned on the woman because, presumably, she's not in the military, so it won't

negatively affect her career and make the military look bad. The transgression that seems most likely from this list, however, is engaging in sexual relations with people who are not of legal age to consent, since it is the only statement repeated. In this formulation, then, a far cry from the WWII-nostalgic depictions of the middle-period cycle, women here are people who become useful in the shirking of criminal responsibility, people too young to have sex with (no matter how much soldiers must want to if the prohibition must be repeated), and wives to be beaten – an unappealing collection of options.

Other than these hypothetical women, there are a few actual women (again, all wives/girlfriends and one mother) in *Stop Loss*. As soon as then men are back from their tour of duty, their real-life relationships with these women begin to fall apart. Steve Shriver (Channing Tatum) exhibits symptoms of PTSD, hitting his fiancée, Michelle (played by Abbie Cornish) in the face, digging a trench on her front lawn and waving his gun around, scaring her to the point that she has to call his best friend, Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe) over to calm him down; similarly, Tommy Burgess (Joseph Gordon Levitt), who also appears to have PTSD-related alcoholism/depression, gets into a fight with a civilian (who asks his wife, Jeanie, to dance), repeatedly drives drunk, getting multiple DUIs (so much for letting a lady take the fall!) and commits several acts of violence and vandalism while intoxicated (despite the express prohibition of such behaviour). As a result, his wife leaves him until he can get his "shit together" (presumably this means getting his seemingly-PTSD-related drinking/violence problem under control). After this loss of and perceived betrayal by his wife, Tommy's behaviour only worsens and he receives a BCD (Bad Conduct Discharge) from the military, committing suicide shortly thereafter. This chain of events suggests that his wife and the military were the most important things in his life and implies that their lack of support was a major contributing factor

in his fatal downward spiral. The fact that Tommy is rejected by both his wife and the military links the two, making his wife, whom we barely see and know basically nothing about, merely symbolic for the betrayals that returning soldiers face. This message is underscored when Shriver's fiancée, Michelle, also leaves Shriver because of his PTSD-related violence and drinking (and his re-enlistment). In a further betrayal, she partners with Shriver's best friend, King, (going on the run and staying in the same hotel room with him), to help him fight the stop-loss policy that is forcing his unwanted return to Iraq. In each case, the women that these men come home to represent the lack of support and even betrayal felt by these men who are given no tools with which to deal with their PTSD-like experiences and are even 'betrayed' by the military either giving them bad conduct discharges or forcing them to redeploy whether they're fit and willing or not.

So in addition to the generally negative attitude towards women suggested by the rules for soldiers on leave, the portrayal of the actual women in the soldiers' lives is also unflattering; they are shown to be unreliable, leaving at the first sign of trouble and maybe even capable of betraying their exes by getting together with former partners' best friends. In a film where characters express concern and uncertainty about who is a civilian and who is an enemy and who have flashbacks about situations in which they are helpless to defend themselves, the 'betrayals' of these women at home are deeply linked to the men's feelings of helplessness and confusion in their military experiences. Unlike the mythical Penelope and the women of the WWII-nostalgia cycle of films from the middle of the period who will stand by their man, no matter what, women here are representative of the instability and uncertainty associated with the most recent wars in Iraq/Afghanistan (e.g. civilian versus enemy combatant), and the problems faced by the men who return home from these conflicts; women are still phantasms, representatives of men's issues, not

agents in their own right. Men are still the main architects of the narratives, the decision-makers, and the ones whose actions have resonance on a national and international level; women simply get in the way.

Comparatively, while not quite as aggressively negative as in the other recent combat films examined herein, the portrayals of women (or woman, since there's only one who speaks) in *The Hurt Locker* are still deeply ambivalent. In a film about a man who seems to be 'addicted' to combat duty, protagonist Sergeant First Class William James (played by Jeremy Renner) reveals during a conversation with fellow soldier JT Sanborn (played by Anthony Mackie) that he married his girlfriend because she got pregnant and that even though they're divorced, they still live in the same house; Sanborn says she's dumb for still being with James and James replies that she's not dumb, just loyal (like a more complicated version of the aforementioned mythical Penelope). It's hard for the viewer to make an assessment for themselves because there is never any time devoted to develop her as a character. The only scenes in which she appears and/or speaks are in the brief scenes in which James returns home before reenlisting and even then she only ever appears briefly with him, never on her own.

While she may be 'loyal,' James, the soldier/warrior who journeys forth is not loyal – at least not to her; he is, however, very loyal to the military. During the scenes in which he returns briefly to the U.S., James has a cynical 'conversation' with his infant son about how his one love is not his ex-wife or son, but his job in the military: "As you get older, some of the things you love might not seem so special anymore … The older you get, the fewer things you really love, and by the time you get to my age maybe it's only one or two things. With me I think it's one." This scene immediately cuts to James getting off a helicopter and starting a new rotation with Delta Company, walking down a seemingly endless dusty desert street in bomb-gear with the

text: "Days Left in Delta Company's Rotation: 365" at the top of the screen, echoing the film's opening sequence and underscoring the fact that it's his military job he loves, not his ex-wife/girlfriend or son; his one love is military combat. Unlike in the WWII-nostalgia films where women and families are a reason to keep fighting and get home, here women are not even reasons enough to stay home. Instead, there is something about war that is ultimately more appealing than the banal-in-contrast 'real world' of supermarkets, house-cleaning, and dirty diapers. While women and families are no longer symbols of motivation, they are still just symbols; they represent the disturbance and dysfunction faced by returning soldiers, even those who have a relatively stable home-life and do not face the prospect of being 'stop-lossed' yet voluntarily re-enlist anyway. Rather than face whatever problems they may have at home (as represented by their romantic interests), men either lament their inability to carry-out their military duties (e.g. Troy from *Jarhead*), or re-deploy to perpetual conflict elsewhere (e.g. *Stop Loss* and the *Hurt Locker*). In a time where international conflict seems to be spreading or at least constant and ongoing, this ever-present conflict has seeped over into the representation of women in combat films.

In each of the films from the later cycle of Hollywood combat films, then, from the mid-2000s to 2010, representations of women are largely negative, ranging from ambivalent to downright disrespectful. In all cases, rather than existing as significant agents, women are instead simply a representation of the values of/attitude towards the given war: in WWII-nostalgia period they are virtuous moral centres, good wives and mothers, but in the more recent cycle of films, framed by the Iraq war, women are less clear-cut good-guys; they are potential cheaters, just as, if not *more* likely to be screwing the neighbor (or best friend) than they are to be waiting patiently at home (*a-la*-Penelope) to lovingly embrace their returning boyfriends/husbands, no

matter what. The idea that women exist as largely symbolic within Western culture and beyond is not a new one. As suggested from early critical theory, such as Freud, and as traced through this chapter, women's bodies have long existed as a 'dark continent' onto which national, and therefore masculine fears, anxieties, and desires have been projected. With her now famous phrase "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 284), post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak extends this concept, suggesting that women generally, and women's bodies specifically, are often taken up as metaphors for colonialism and other nationalizing projects. While Spivak is speaking of the British rule over India and the ban of the traditional practice of sati, her idea certainly also applies to American military projects – as Kelly Oliver puts it in *Women as Weapons of War*, "the American occupation of Iraq follows in a long line of colonial and imperialist ventures executed by the 'West' in the 'East'" (2) – which are almost always framed as America stepping in/up to protect not only its own values (freedom, family, etc.), but also to protect "those who cannot protect themselves." This message is particularly strong in the early period (*Courage Under Fire*, *G.I. Jane*) where one of the arguments against women in the military is that they can't defend themselves (e.g. against unwanted sexual attacks) let alone defend their male counterparts, and in middle-period WWII-nostalgia films such as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *The Patriot*, and *We Were Soldiers*, where every single woman is a girlfriend/wife/mother, and represents the wholesome values which mostly white soldiers are fighting to defend. In the later cycle of combat films, mid-2000s-2010, however, this metaphor is troubled by the fact that sometimes American military personnel need to protect themselves *against* brown women who not only do not need or want saving, but are actively threatening (still largely white and male) American military units.

Kelly Oliver takes up the particularity of women as weapons of war in this most recent conflict in her book *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media*, noting that "because this war [the War on Terror in Iraq] is unlike others in that there is no front line, women are engaged in combat along with men. Women soldiers, not technically allowed on the front lines, continue to see action, to kill and be killed" (1). These issues explain films such as *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane*, where women are representatives of public anxieties around such active participation by women in combat. More than that, however, and more central to her work and to this later cycle of films, Oliver also explores the ways in which women's presence as active participants in war via suicide bombings and torture at Abu Ghraib have changed our ways of looking at war, and at women. Women in the later cycle of films, therefore, represent the moral and literal ambiguity of the most recent wars in Iraq. In *Jarhead,* about the First Gulf War, these anxieties are feelings of helplessness and ineffectuality, a lackluster welcome home, and in *Stop Loss*, about the more recent War on Terror, as confusion over who is a civilian, and who is not, women and children with guns, and "shooting Hajji's in their bedrooms" as character Steve Shriver puts it. When asked by some Texans back home are "We winning this thing?" *Stop Loss*' Shriver replies: "Look. What we need to do is just drop a 10,000-pound bomb on one of their cities every time they hit us. No more of this urban combat bullshit. I'm tired of going and killing a Hajji in his kitchen and his bedroom" with women and children present. When asked when, not *if* he's going back, Steve reinforces his anxiety over telling the enemy apart from civilians when replies: "You know, but if I had to do it again, I'd be a fucking sniper: one shot, one kill. Let *me* be the faceless enemy" (emphasis added). In a later scene, King seconds this sentiment, revealing how his decision to enter the military might have been motivated by WWII-nostalgic ideologies:[115] "I signed up thinking I would go over there and protect my country, my family.

We wanted payback for 9/11 but then you get there and you realize that the war's not even about that ... everybody's got a weapon – everybody – and nobody knows who's who. The only thing you can believe in is survival – protecting the guy to your left and the guy to your right." It comes as no surprise then that it is in these films that the representations of women has become more troubled than in previous cycles. As the values/reasons for fighting become less clear-cut, so too does their symbol: women. Not only are women no longer the idealized phantasm waiting at home as part of the war machine whose honour/freedom one (male soldier) is fighting to protect, they might even be the "faceless enemy" that gets a soldier killed and the anxiety over this development in international armed conflict is reflected in the female characters from the later cycle of films who act as screens for these projected (male) anxieties; homefront women's loyalties are uncertain and women's betrayal (either of their perceived gender roles by taking part in active combat – as enemies – or of their perceived heterosexual responsibilities as wives and girlfriends 'back home') is likely.

Chapter 4

The Self-Consolidating Enemy Other: *Three Kings*, *Black Hawk Down*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Flags of Our Fathers/Letters From Iwo Jima*, *Band of Brothers/The Pacific*, *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *Generation Kill*

Besides the lack of women discussed in the previous chapter, another of the characteristic elements of a combat film that helps to set it apart from other types of films is its explicit definition of 'the enemy.' Representations of all types of enemies in combat films are therefore a significant and necessary site of inquiry and observation. Over the course of history and of the genre, the enemy has shifted from a closer, more alike enemy, to a more distant and different enemy – from Americans vs. Americans in the Civil War through American/British vs. German & German/Japanese in WWI & WWII, to Americans vs. Koreans and then Vietnamese in each respective war, to Americans vs. "Arabs"/"Terrorists" in the War on Terror. In other words, enemies have seemingly become more and more racially and culturally 'Other.' Yet at the same time, as alluded to at the end of the previous chapter, who or what the enemy is has shifted as well, becoming less and less clear-cut, with the amorphous War on Terror being fought against a concept ('terrorism') rather than a nation; enemies have become nationless. Too, the gender of combatants has broadened, with women and children depicted as taking up arms in the later period cycle of combat films. Indeed, as explored in the fifth chapter, enemies are not necessarily the opposing force; they can come from within in the form of feminized, infantilized or homosexualized 'soft-bodies' that need to be integrated or eliminated. While the amount and type (gender, age, nationality) of possible combatants is growing with the broadening scope of war, reinforcing the argument of this study that war/combat is increasingly being depicted as all-encompassing, inevitable and unending, the group still most 'Othered' in combat films throughout the period studied herein is the "outside" or "foreign" enemy – another nation's

people, army, military force, or militant group. These representations, much like those of women explored in the previous chapter, serve to uphold the conservative gendered and racialized status quos that help uphold the chauvinist, jingoistic ideologies that pervade and undergird the convergent culture of militarism worldwide.

The overwhelming focus on white American men's narratives in the combat genre is not lost on critic Roger Ebert, who aptly connects the films *Glory* and *Windtalkers* (two less popular examples of the genre) in his review of the latter, writing:

> "Windtalkers" comes advertised as the saga of how Navajo Indians used their language to create an unbreakable code that helped win World War II in the Pacific. That's a fascinating, little-known story and might have made a good movie. Alas, the filmmakers have buried it beneath battlefield clichés, while centering the story on a white character ... I was reminded of "Glory," the story of heroic African-American troops in the Civil War, which was seen through the eyes of their white commanding officer. Why does Hollywood find it impossible to trust minority groups with their own stories? (Ebert)

With the exception of *Glory* and *Windtalkers*, which do actually feature nonwhite soldiers in active duty, almost all filmic representations of WWII, "the good war," represent it as fought by all white though "ethnically mixed" including Irish, Italian, Jewish soldiers.[116] Largely, only war films past WWII begin to include representations of racialized Others on "both sides" of the conflicts. Examining the representation of race in films post-Vietnam is therefore essential because it was the first American-fought, heavily Hollywood-rendered war where the enemy was exclusively non-white. A great deal of this type of work has been done on the racial implications of Hollywood's Vietnam-centred films; scholars like David Desser have noted a significant pattern in Vietnam combat films whereby Vietnamese soldiers are portrayed as weak and small but simultaneously as duplicitous and sneaky 'super-soldiers' capable of doing major damage.[117]

The depiction of African American soldiers (who were disproportionately drafted during Vietnam), has also been widely discussed.[118]

Again here Hollywood combat output can be roughly grouped into three cycles in terms of the representation of Others in popular combat war films: The early period, to the mid-late 1990s, the middle or regressive period in the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s, and finally, the later part of the period, from the mid-2000s to 2010. As in previous chapters, the early and later parts of the period have much more in common with one another and are generally much more ambivalent in their representation of 'good' Americans and 'bad' Others than the middle period films (which are the most regressively stereotypical in their representations of women, people of colour, and heteronormative American family values). The later generation of combat films within the period, though, is particularly significant in terms of its attempts to deal with the representations of 'enemy Others' and 'civilian Others,' with the distinction between these two frequently blurring, buttressing the argument that contemporary combat films are increasingly sending the message that war is everywhere, all the time.

Many middle-period films pay more attention to enemy Others than, for example, the WWII combat films studied by Basinger, recognizing that the enemy forces are not just a faceless enemy, but are too comprised of individuals with real lives and connections outside their military careers. For example, in an unprecedented cinematic move, Clint Eastwood created companion films, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, which present the same WWII battle from an American perspective and Japanese perspective respectively, giving rise to some complex ethnic and racial dynamics. Similarly, but with quite different results, the HBO mini-series *Band of Brothers*, which focuses on the European warfront during WWII, was followed almost ten years later by *The Pacific*, a miniseries focusing on the allies' WWII

campaign in the Pacific. Finally, and perhaps most noteworthy are the other films that deal with wars whose enemy Others are exclusively of a different race and nationality, specifically the group of films dealing with the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose representations of 'Arab Others' are particularly significant in today's sociopolitical climate. While films from the later part of the period make many strides towards evening out previously polarized representations of 'us versus them' binaries, both the language and the visual cues used to represent racial Others onscreen can still be incredibly problematic and therefore need special and close attention especially in light of ongoing racism towards Arab and Muslim people in North America and Europe.

Spivak, the Subaltern, and the Self-Consolidating Other

Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are two theorists whose work is of crucial importance when it comes to understanding representations of Others generally, and of postcolonial others, and subalterns specifically. Spivak's work on the subaltern and her concept of the self-consolidating Other are indispensible here. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak writes that there are "two different senses of representation…: representation as "speaking for," as in politics, and representation as "re-presentation," as in art or philosophy" (272), arguing that both of these types of representation are at play in the types of colonial/postcolonial relationships she investigates.[119] Spivak argues that when faced with the difficulty of representing difference, rather than refraining from representation altogether, dominant Western discourses attempt to "speak for" Others (272) and often end up, at the least doing a disservice, and at the worst committing an act of violence. For Spivak then, subalterns are those who "cannot speak" because they are outside of dominant structures of power and knowledge (that already construct them as always abject and Other). So while subalterns may

attempt to utter, speak, or communicate, these attempts fail because subalterns are outside the dominant ideological structures of power, knowledge, subject formation, etc. within which discourse circulates; within these frameworks, subaltern voices cannot and will not register, cannot and will not be heard. Equally important and perhaps more significant to the discussion of combat films within this study at hand is the concept of the self-consolidating Other who is described and depicted by the dominant Western subject as its own negative inverse; where the Other is represented in dominant Western discourse as lesser, weaker, more insignificant, the Western subject constructs itself in opposition as more meaningful, powerful, important, the ideal subject against which the opposed Other will always fail in comparison. Much as early feminist theorists like de Beauvoir saw women as defined as the negative inverse of men, Spivak contends that Others are often defined as a "deviation … from the ideal" (271). In these instances of the West representing the rest, the party doing the representing ends up constructing the party being represented as the negative inverse of itself. Writing of the self-consolidating Other in colonial India she finds that: "the colonizer constructs himself as he constructs the colony" (203), and argues that that the human sciences (and, I would add, the combat films examined herein) have established and continue to represent "The 'native' as self-consolidating Other," thereby re-emphasizing "the heterogeneity of the 'Colonial Powers'" (205). In combat films, from the WWII genre that Basinger studies through the period studied herein, the heterogeneity of the American in-group is increasingly reemphasized in opposition to the racialized enemy Other; troops appear increasingly able to overcome their internal racism by directing their racism outward at the racialized enemy Other. This strategy becomes increasingly problematic as the enemy Other shifts from being clearly bordered by a nation (e.g. the Vietnamese during Vietnam War or the Koreans during the Korean war – though this distinction was complicated by the

North vs. South divides in each conflict) to being unmoored – 'terrorists' that could be anyone anywhere, but are still largely assumed to be Arab and/or Muslim.

In examining the practice of sati (widow self-immolation) in colonial India, Spivak argues that the Indian women are constructed by the British colonial government as victims of a "barbaric" or "backwards" culture from which they must be gallantly saved by the "civilized" British: "I will suggest that the British ignore the space of *Sati* as an ideological battleground, and construct the woman as an *object* of slaughter, the saving of which can mark the moment when not only a civil but a good society is born out of domestic chaos" (emphasis in original 235). She asserts that the practice of Sati "has been generally understood as" a case of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (287), writing: "whether this observation is correct or not, what interests me is that the protection of woman (today the "third world woman") becomes a signifier for the establishment of a *good* society (now a good planet)" (288). In other words, "Imperialism's (or globalization's) image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind" (Spivak 291). These images of Western forces, particularly American military forces, "saving" "third world women" and people more generally pervade the combat genre generally but also particularly the most recent cycles.

As her references to globalization and the planet make clear, Spivak doesn't see this phenomenon as limited to the place and time period about which she was originally researching and writing (colonial India), but as persisting into the time during which she revisited her work in 1999: "This benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other is the founding characteristic of much thirdworldism in the U.S. human sciences today" (278). I argue here that in fact this trend continues to persist; in its contemporary formulation, as

represented onscreen and implied in many of the films examined herein, America is still (or still thinking it is) saving brown women from brown men (e.g. by dismantling the Taliban under the guise of more equality for women), brown people from themselves, and the world from Arab terrorists; all of this "saving," according to Spivak's words, functions as a signifier of a "good planet," with American intervention bringing the world "civilization," "peace" and "safety."

Spivak argues that this Othering process of which she writes is "part of the same formation that constructs [theorist Chandra Mohanty's] the monolithic 'third world woman'" (284); I extend this idea here by suggesting that this type of film works to produce a "monolithic third world Other," flattened, stereotyped, and undifferentiable, one to be represented because it's not capable of representing itself or at least not capable of being recognized or understood as doing so (representing itself). In line with Spivak's charge and Ebert's review, rather than refraining from representing the incredibly different experience of armed conflict that other nations and peoples have, Hollywood continues to make representations of its own story that can't help but construct the Other as negative inverse of the self (America) being represented.

The collected volume *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris, includes several essays which further explore and expand upon Spivak's key work. Morris, in the introduction, dispenses with some common and "categorically untenable misreadings" of Spivak including, importantly, the idea that "the silence of the subaltern [is] a simple absence in the record – to be supplemented and transcended by the work of information retrieval (Spivak endorses such retrieval, but she understands it to be a matter distinct from the question of theorizing the impossibility of subaltern speech as audible and legible predication)" (Morris 2). Of Spivak's work generally Morris clarifies:

> For Spivak the same ideological formation informs the desire to give a voice to the hysteric as that which would speak for the subaltern. The one produces the narrative of the "daughter's seduction" to explain a certain silence or muteness of the pathological woman, the other offers the "monolithic 'third world woman'" as the tautological name of *a need to be spoken for*. In both cases the "masculine imperialist" ideology can be said to produce the *need for a masculine-imperialist rescue mission*. This circuitry obstructs the alternative histories that might have been written – not as the disclosures of a final truth, but as the assemblages of utterances and interpretations that might have emerged from a different location, namely, the place of the subaltern woman. These utterances would not, as she herself remarks, have escaped ideology; they would not have been the truth of the women who uttered them. But they would have made visible the unstable claims on truth that the ideology of masculine imperialism offered in its place. [emphasis added] (Morris 3)

The films studied herein certainly attempt, in some cases, to speak for the subaltern, and certainly all take as their focus, by the very nature of the sample, a "masculine imperialist rescue mission." The important point that Morris reinforces here is that the problem with these types of representations of the Other is not simply to be chalked up to an absence of subalterns in the historical record which can just be corrected by simply 'adding and stirring,' by including representations of 'Others,' but that the overwhelming predominance of the same repeated narratives that speak for and about subalterns precludes the creation/publication (in the most literal meaning of the word) of the "alternative histories" that might otherwise have emerged, the other stories that could have been told and reinforces the stories that have been told and retold, the dominant discourse.

Said's Orientalism

Spivak's concepts, particularly the self-consolidating Other, are clearly linked to the influential work of Edward Said, whose books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1991) are sociocultural historical studies and explore specific examples of Spivak's notion of 'Othering.' In fact, the inscription of *Orientalism* is a quote from Karl Marx that Spivak also

works from which reads: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." In this work, Said traces a history of the representation of Middle Eastern peoples by "the West," a process he terms Orientalism.

Generally, Said identifies Orientalism as an overall "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological opposition between the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident,'" which has led many writers including "poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators [to] accept the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, political accounts, etc." (2). For his purposes, however, Said defines Orientalism slightly more specifically as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (3). This institution exists, he argues, because 'the Orient' is "one of its [the West's] deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1-2). In addition, and clearly in line with Spivak's work, he writes, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1-2), noting that "European culture gained strength by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3), a statement which clearly underlines the connection between his work here and Spivak's formulation of the Self-Consolidating Other.

Much like Spivak, Said's observations are not limited to the time in which he initially wrote them; in the final chapter of *Orientalism*, Said's words are eerily applicable to the present situation: "since World War II, and more noticeably after each of the Arab-Israeli wars, the Arab Muslim has become a figure in American popular culture" (284) and, more significantly, he writes that after 1973 "the Arab appeared everywhere as something more menacing" (285). One could easily substitute the words 'after 9/11' here and Said's words would still be apt and

perhaps even more fitting. He argues that in "films and television the Arab is associated with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty" (286), that "the Arab is always shown in large numbers [with] no individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences" (287) and that "lurking behind all of these images is the menace of jihad" (287). The consequence of these images, he argues, is fear and the upholding of old Orientalist binaries such as the idea of "the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior" (300). While Said wrote and published *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam* in the late 1970s/early 1980s, and contemporary examples are perhaps (though not necessarily) less extreme, contemporary Hollywood combat films do still fit largely within this paradigm. For example, one of the most recent Hollywood combat films, Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker*, portrays Arab men as all types of bombers: stealthy bombers, lurking in the shadows timing detonation for maximum American casualties; unwilling bombers, strapped into suicide vests and weepingly pleading to be saved by the American hero; and psychotic bombers, killing and covertly planting a bomb inside the body of a dead child whom the American hero has befriended. By virtue of a lack of many other Hollywood representations of Arabs, particularly within the combat genre, viewers are left only to identify Arabs as the threatening and duplicitous 'bad guy,' therefore implicitly associating American military men with 'good guy' heroism and war as a necessary evil.

Cinema: Bernstein and Studlar, Shohat, Khatib, Richardson

Although Said's emphasis is mostly on early literary, government, academic, and written journalistic representations, his ideas are easily applied to other mediums including film. Arguably the audio/visual and indexical power of film makes this medium an even more

powerful element of the institution of Orientalism and the process of representation of the self-consolidating Other. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar commit themselves to the project of taking Said's conception of Orientalism even further by extending it beyond "writing, travel literature and novels" (3) to film in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. They collect essays from various scholars whose work applies Said's (and therefore Spivak's) notions to films, noting the various ways in which "Western narrative and ethnographic cinemas of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries inherited the narrative and visual traditions, as well as the cultural assumptions, on which Orientalism was based" (3) and also how "filmmakers discovered how popular [and therefore profitable] Orientalism could be" (3). Of particular import to the project of bridging the gap between Spivak and Said is Ella Shohat's chapter in the Bernstein/Studlar volume, "Gender and Culture of Empire."

Within this chapter, Shohat brings together post-colonial ideas of racial-national us/them binaries and gendered man/woman binaries in the context of cinema, proving that "(post)colonial discourse has impinged differently on the representation of men and women" (19). For example in a previously mentioned example from *Jarhead* (see chapter three), a veiled woman riding in the back of a car being passed by the soldiers' vehicle is subject to both racial and sexual slurs while Arab men in the film are more explicitly targeted for physical violence. On the other hand as noted by Spivak, postcolonial discourse often constructs "third world women" as objects to be saved and 'third world men' as those from whom they must be saved; examples range from public proclamations about 'liberating' veiled women during the initial phases of the War on Terror to a soldier in *Black Hawk Down* trying to verbally warn/protect a veiled woman running into an active combat zone and then, upon realizing that she might be an enemy, hesitating to shoot her saying "Don't you do it. Don't you damn do it." when she picks up and aims a gun in

his direction. Importantly, Shohat is cognizant of and brings to bear the importance of the West's worldwide domination of the cinematic industry. She notes that "Western cinema not only inherited and disseminated colonial discourse, but also created a system of domination through monopolistic control of film distribution and exhibition in much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (19), meaning that film always has been, and continues to be an integral part of the system of Orientalism that props up the binaries through which the Self-Consolidating Other functions. Shohat examines how these Self/Other dichotomies are played out on both the narrative and formal level, arguing that often "the camera relays the hero's dynamic movement across a passive, static space" (27) and that "often the spectator, identified with the gaze of the West, … comes to [feel as though they've] master[ed]" (32) the Other that they are watching onscreen. These general observations are certainly fitting if applied to the combat films from the period studied herein which follow mostly white American male soldiers operating and travelling across a space which may not be entirely passive but is generally put into place with superior force. In watching these films, therefore, and identifying with the mostly white American male heroes – for with whom else can the audience identify?[121] – the viewer comes to feel as though they too have gained some sort of power over or at least an understanding of, and therefore mastery over this racialized Other; the viewer can feel this mastery over both enemy/soldier Other and civilian Other alike since one has been physically and forcefully dominated and the Other has been put in the subordinate position of being 'saved' by the actions of American military forces (and spoken for by Hollywood).

Indeed one can easily find examples in contemporary Hollywood combat films of the sorts of gendered processes that Shohat discusses. For example, when Shohat writes: "It is this process of exposing the female Other, of literally denuding her, which comes to allegorize the

Western masculinist power of possession, that she, as a metaphor for her land, becomes available for Western penetration and knowledge" (33), the image of the raped and beaten Vietnamese woman kidnapped in Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War* comes readily to mind; her violated and brutalized body comes to stand in for the pillaged and napalmed Vietnamese countryside. Similarly, when Shohat writes: "the voyage into the origins of the Orient becomes a voyage into the interior colonies of the 'self'" (34), one cannot help but think of the narrative of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) in which Willard's journey into 'foreign, uncivilized territory' up a "Vietnamese" river allegorizes his journey into Kurtz's (and his own) madness. Of course this madness is very closely associated with the Vietnamese "natives" among whom Kurtz has installed himself as a God. Shohat concludes that "despite some differences, having to do with the periods in which the films [that she analyses] were produced, hegemonic Western representation has been locked into a series of Eurocentric articulations of power" (57). Arguably, given how effectively her arguments map onto more contemporary Hollywood combat cinema, the industry has not yet managed to escape these binary representational strategies of which she originally wrote.

Furthering Shohat's, Said's, and Spivak's work, Lina Khatib's book *Filming the Modern Middle East* also illustrates how the 'self-consolidating Other' functions in several Hollywood war films from the early part of the period studied herein including *Courage Under Fire*, *Rules of Engagement*, and *Three Kings*, yet does not touch on the most recent cycles of Hollywood combat films that are central to the work at hand. A critical element of her argument focuses on the ways in which Hollywood war cinema portrays and constructs the American nation and American masculinity as an active representation of that nation. From a more formally oriented perspective, she examines how the us/them and male/female binaries function in these films.

Further articulating and extending the other side of the self-consolidating argument that Shohat puts forth about penetrable 'Other' spaces and 'foreign' lands being assailed by America, Khatib finds in inverse that Hollywood films portray an "American landscape that is (cinematically), traditionally non-penetrable" (30). Significantly in most of the films about the post-9/11 War on Terror, little verbal reference and virtually no visual reference is made to the attack on American soil which purportedly instigated the ensuing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rather, more often in these films, "the masculine American nation can be seen as raping the feminized, weak landscape" (26) as Khatib argues and as illustrated by the analysis herein of films such as *Three Kings, We Were Soldiers*, *The Pacific*, *Jarhead*, and *Generation Kill*, in which predominantly white American soldiers steal and take 'trophies' or souvenirs (ranging from gold bars and material goods to pictures, weapons, and even human teeth) from the people and places whom they see themselves as having conquered or dominated. In fact, Khatib argues that in every case, "the United States remains the stronger side. It is not marginalized, it marginalizes others" (Khatib 32). This dynamic is particularly visible in almost all contemporary Hollywood combat films in that most of these films focus on American soldiers deployed in 'foreign' lands. Even some of the more recent films about World War II from the period have begun to focus on the more 'foreign' Pacific front; films such as Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, and the HBO miniseries *The Pacific* are exemplary of this trend, clearly illustrating that the binaries upon which the works of all of these theorists focus are still very much at work in contemporary Hollywood combat cinema.

In his text *Otherness in Hollywood Cinema*, Michael Richardson examines many kinds of 'otherness,' including racial Others. He traces the pattern of Hollywood representing the Other in different forms through the myth of the American frontier, representations of "Yellow Peril," and

"The Exotic as Spectacle," in which chapter he notes the way in which films can allow audiences

who are after "spectacle and excitement" (73) "to find a momentary escape in the far away,

projecting themselves as adventurers penetrating into strange and perhaps dangerous situations"

(68). These types of arguments piggy-back on those from the previous paragraph in the sense

that viewers watching combat films can identify with active military male protagonists engaging

in domination of racialized Others (individuals, groups, and lands).

Like many other scholars, Richardson examines the films of the post-Vietnam era,

writing:

> It is perhaps not surprising … that almost all of the films centred upon the
> Vietnam War have been concerned not so much with the war itself but with
> its impact upon American consciousness, both as an event and as an
> aftermath. From this perspective, the fact that virtually no fictional film has
> confronted or raised the issue of American/Vietnamese relations, or shown
> the slightest interest in the impact the war made upon the Vietnamese should
> really not surprise us." (137)

Richardson's charge applies as well to all of the combat films from the period studied herein, and

particularly the most recent cycles of the period; the emphasis is always on the physical and

psychological well-being of male American military characters both during and after the conflict

– there are rarely any fully fleshed out non-American characters during the conflicts and

certainly none whose post-conflict lives are revealed (e.g. in closing title screens which often

reveal what the main American military characters did or are doing with their post-war lives). Of

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, more specifically, Richardson argues

> this is especially the case. … There is virtually no Vietnamese presence in
> it. It is not so much that no recognition is given to a Vietnamese perspective
> as the fact that the Vietnamese are virtually invisible, even as adversaries,
> that gives pause for reflection. … Is there not a certain truth to this
> exclusion? Does it not reflect the way the Americans approached not only
> this war but all wars; indeed does not the psychological determinant that
> lies at the heart of US enthusiasm for imperialist intervention represent an

inability to think about the consequences for those on the receiving end of these [neo-colonial/imperialist] adventures?" (137)

Richardson rightly asserts that the film "Subsumes 'Vietnam' totally into American experience" (138), and while some of the more contemporary films examined herein are undoubtedly aimed as correctives to this problem, much is still left to be desired.

Richardson reads *Apocalypse Now* as ridiculously fantastical: "The image of the white man as God to the natives is something that – as historically inaccurate and mystificatory as it is – ought to have vanished as an idea with ending of colonialism; that it hasn't is [for Richardson] the most troubling aspect of the film" (141). He further argues that the fact that this element doesn't break the suspension of disbelief "bears upon the psychological will of the audience to believe in its own superiority over the 'Other'" (141). While Richardson does note that the film is based upon Josef Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, set in Africa, not Vietnam, he doesn't explicitly acknowledge that this film's "fictional genesis"[122] suggests that all Others are interchangeable, further reinforcing the idea of a "monolithic third world Other." This dominant Western Self in opposition to "monolithic third world Other" is further reinforced in the period of combat films central to this study in many ways including the interchangeable slurs for enemy Others and civilians alike who are all grouped under the terms: "rag-heads," "towel jockeys," "dune coons," "skinnys," "hajjis," etc. as discussed in greater detail within this chapter.

When Richardson writes that *Apocalypse Now* "is often viewed as a film about how thin the veneer of civilization is and how easily a civilized man can return to savagery when civilized constraints no longer apply," (150) one might be tempted to agree, but it's important to recognize that this narrative instead reinforces what 'civilization' is and looks like, and re-establishes its desirability and dominance; Kurtz is regarded as losing his civilization because he chooses to abandon his American military status/responsibilities and live with Vietnamese people in the

jungle, reinforcing the idea that America = civilized and Vietnam = savage. This distinction is so important that Kurtz's 'loss of civilization' results in "civilization" (the American military) sending Willard, among others, to kill him. While the military's brutal reaction to Kurtz's "turning" or "going native" (secretively and almost hysterically trying to stamp him out and erase him from the record as though he never existed) might serve to undermine the image of "civilized" America, the grotesque level of macabre violence tolerated (if not carried out) by the Vietnamese living in Kurtz's compound marks them as always already more brutal and less civilized.

As if this juxtaposition wasn't enough, Richardson significantly points out that all of the black characters in the film die (155) because, as Richardson puts it, "Otherness must be overcome at all costs" (155). In other words, the film's ending reinforces the 'rightness' of civilization over savagery, light over darkness – the 'good (white American) guy' always wins and the non-white people die. While the period of films studied herein might not be so literally black and white[123] as in *Apocalypse Now*, the juxtaposition between a "civilized," organized and militarily superior America and an undifferentiated "uncivilized" enemy/non-combatant Other, and the dominance of and focus on white American military personnel perseveres throughout the most contemporary iterations of the genre; these types of problematically gendered and racialized representations support the contention of this study that by sustaining status quo ideologies in the social milieu, the genre perpetuates an unchanging culture of militarism in which the white American military men who feature so prominently in the genre are always (for better or worse) at the centre.

Richardson's work is not contained to Vietnam films; he also devotes significant attention to Steven Spielberg's directorial work; while not focused on any of Spielberg's combat

war films, Richardson's comments are quite applicable to those works as well. Richardson notes: "because he is adept at utilizing the film conventions with which the audience is familiar they can be so absorbed by the story that their resistance to questioning what they are seeing is less than it might be with other filmmakers. In this way, however, 'reality' is always kept at bay, even when he is striving to address a topic as serious as the Holocaust" (175) or, I'd add, international armed conflict as in *Saving Private Ryan* or the two HBO miniseries about WWII (*Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*). Like other critics and theorists, Richardson points out that almost always in these types of films (Spielberg's), "our point of identification as an audience lies with the 'enlightened' white men who act on behalf of the oppressed against their own historical class … allowing us to imagine ourselves in the place of the enlightened whites" (184). Under Spivak's and Said's formulations, this dynamic is already built-in to the representational relationship inherent in Hollywood films about Others and this is certainly no more true than in the war/combat genre.

Perhaps pessimistically, in his conclusions, Richardson posits that "in many ways modern audiences appear quite as naïve in the way they receive images as those in the past, especially when extravagant special effects and dazzling action sequences can cause any critical judgment to be suspended for the course of the film" (226), a sentiment which undoubtedly applies to combat films whose action/special effects sequences are a hallmark of the genre, and certainly a major audience-draw. Regardless of whether audiences are able to view such films critically or not, the representations available to viewers in the combat film genre are still almost entirely from, by, and for a white American audience. Many other scholars of race in cinema make similar arguments; for example, in his introduction to the third volume on whiteness in cinema that he's edited, *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*,

Daniel Bernardi posits that all three of his texts on the subject, which were published decades apart, "share an overarching point: 'US cinema has consistently constructed whiteness, the representation and narrative form of Eurocentrism, as the norm by which all 'Others' fail by comparison'" (xv). In other words, in the same vein as Spivak's work on the self-consolidating Other and Said's on Orientalism, with little deviation throughout its history, Hollywood's output has been and continues to be structured by an us/them binary in which white America is the 'us,' and everyone else is the 'them' that will always fail to match up because 'they' are always, already the negative inverse. In this way, the combat film genre supports the type of racial ideologies that lead to, perpetuate, and normalize ongoing global conflict.

Early Period: *Three Kings*

In early iterations of films from this period, the enemy Other is, almost without exception, depicted as quite different and remote from the American soldier. Epitomizing this trend are the verbal and visual cues in films such as *Three Kings* (1999) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001), where enemy Others are referred to with many racist terms including: "rag-head" as in the opening scenes of *Three Kings* when Conrad Vig (played by Spike Jones) says to his hero, Troy Barlow (played by Mark Wahlberg), "congratulations, man. You shot yourself a rag-head." While main characters in these films – Barlow in the *Three Kings* and Josh Hartnett's character Sgt. Eversmann in *Black Hawk Down* – do pay antiracism lip service by attempting to get others to stop using these racist terms (or at least to use "less racist" slurs instead), the perhaps more insidious Othering happens at the visual level. As a film from the first cycle and early part of the period, *Three Kings* is much less negative, aiming for balance in its depiction of Others than *Black Hawk Down*, which is from the regressive middle period, yet both films ultimately do little to challenge the racist ideologies that pervade this genre and perpetuate ongoing global conflict.

In the opening scenes of *Three Kings*, Mark Wahlberg's character, Sgt. Troy Barlow, is literally squared off against a distant enemy Other perched atop a sand bunker far enough away that he must be peered at through the sight/scope of Barlow's rifle. This scene clearly establishes a visual hierarchy; although the Arab man is physically higher in space than Barlow, the viewer is aligned with Barlow's point of view, and Barlow is the one in control of the gaze, especially with the aid of his technology (scope). After Barlow shoots the man for raising and aiming a weapon, he runs over, quickly mounts the hill and looks down at the Arab man's dying body. Again, the camera shares his perspective, providing the viewer with a top-down image of the fatally wounded man from above, so that the viewer, too, can watch him die. This type of visual rhetoric falls in line with Said's arguments about Orientalism, and the work of film scholars who have applied this concept to film.[124] Similarly, in the next scene in which the Americans encounter enemy Others (surrendering Iraqi soldiers being taken prisoner), the Iraqi soldiers are on their knees, being disrobed and searched (sometimes violently), and taken prisoner by the Americans. Again, the viewer's perspective is most closely aligned with the Americans who are all standing while the Iraqi soldiers kneel, crouch, or lay on the ground. Because of the language barrier and the fact that the prisoners do not understand the Americans, they are mistreated, shouted at, and shoved around. While Wahlberg's character, Barlow, appears to be more culturally/racially sensitive here, telling Conrad not to yell, and to act in a more professional manner because "you're making *them* [the Arab prisoners] crazy" (emphasis added), he then turns around and homogenizes *them* by using slurs like "towel-head," and speaking in a slow and patronizing manner to the prisoners as if they are ignorant or stupid because they do not understand English.

Similarly, in a later scene, one of the black characters, Chief Elgin (played by Ice Cube),

protests the use of racist terms like "dune coon" or "sand nigger" by Conrad "or anybody else."

When Troy seconds his opinion, adding: "towel-head" and "camel jockey" are "perfectly good

substitutes," Elgin agrees: "Exactly," illustrating that it's not *all* racism that Elgin has a problem

with, it's only racism that's built on historical white on black racism; racism directed solely at

Arabs is fine with him. This type of in-group, out-group differentiation, the redirection of racism

outwards rather than inwards (slurs that harken back to America's own history of white on black

racism need to be stamped out in a racially-integrated American military – still largely only

black and white in this early period film – in favour of externally directed slurs at the 'new'

enemy Other, Arabs) recalls the same type of overcoming of internal ethnic differences (Italian

vs. Irish etc.) that Basinger identified in WWII combat films.[125]

Racist ideology cloaked in humor continues to prevail in *Three Kings* when the soldiers,

on the secret mission that is the focus of the film, gain entry to the secret bunker by simply

repeating: "We are the army of the United States of America," stating that their orders are from

the President, and telling the civilians watching the scene unfold and the soldiers guarding the

bunker: "We are here for your protection and safety" (which is really quite the opposite of their

selfish purposes). The fact that civilians and soldiers alike are duped by these lines suggests that

they are not very intelligent or too apathetic or frightened to act. In addition, the Iraqi soldiers

here are very easily disarmed – it's harder for the rogue Americans to knock down a door within

the bunker than it is to take the weapons from these enemy soldiers. The compliance and

subservience of the enemy Other and complete dominating power of the U.S. is reinforced when

an Iraqi soldier in the bunker nervously, almost hysterically, tells the raiding Americans: "I am

love United States of Freedom!" The Iraqi civilians, too, are depicted as weak and ineffectual

and therefore in need of American protection; they throw rocks at Iraqi soldiers and form a mob, crowding around the American jeep/hummer, begging desperately for food, water, medicine, and to be taken away with the Americans (who ignorantly mistake them for Palestinians). So despite their lies, untrustworthy behaviour, and general ignorance, the American soldiers are still the ones in an unquestionable position of power, directing and determining the fate of all Others (both civilian and military) within the film which firmly establishes them at the top of the film's racial and national hierarchy.

While in one sense (as in the above examples) Others in the film *Three Kings* are depicted as weak and ineffectual, in other ways enemy Others are often also cast as duplicitous and barbarically cruel. In the case of the Iraqi soldiers, after the American group leaves the town, the politics are explained when Troy wonders aloud why the soldiers and civilians were fighting "like we [the Americans] weren't even there" – presuming, of course, that everything revolves around the Americans' presence; the senior officer present, Clooney's character, Archie Gates, explains to the others that since Iraq's soldiers have already surrendered to the U.S. they are now going after the civilians, and Elgin further explains to Vig that the Iraqi soldiers blew up the milk truck because they're trying to starve the civilians. The deceitful cruelty of these enemy Other soldiers is further renewed in later scenes when the Iraqi forces release their civilian prisoners at the request/command of the Americans, but then one soldier tells another in subtitled Arabic that they'll get the prisoners back later, when the Americans are gone. The treachery and brutality of the enemy Other is further reinforced when Iraqi soldiers agree to help the Americans steal the gold, so that they can more quickly get back to torturing civilians after the Americans leave; the Americans, at first, seem content to be willfully ignorant about such abuses as long as they get the gold they came to steal.

A turning point in the film occurs, however, when a child resistance fighter shoots at the Iraqi soldiers to help the Americans get away with the prisoners/resistance fighters, and Barlow is captured while sacrificing gold to save Iraqi children from stepping on landmines. In subsequent scenes, the leader of the civilian resistance force (fighting against the Iraqi army's abuses of the civilian population), Amir (played by Cliff Curtis), who has just saved the American thieves, calls the Americans out in an impassioned and articulate conversation (in English). In this fervent tongue-lashing he argues that American president Bush Sr. made them (the Iraqi civilians/resistance fighters for whom he speaks) think that they could beat the Iraqi soldiers, but then left them vulnerable by pulling out; he further chastises the group by drawing their attention to the fact that he and the rest of the resistance fighters are out there fighting Iraqi soldiers and dying while the Americans are simply out stealing gold for their own benefit. Yes, the Americans saved them, he concedes, and lost a man in the process (literally lost, Barlow is kidnapped by Iraqi soldiers during the sand storm scuffle while trying to save Iraqi children from landmines), but Amir concludes that these actions make no difference if the Americans are just going to leave the freed prisoners/resistance fighters out in the desert to be slaughtered instead of taking them to the Iranian border. It is only at this point, when they are forced to confront the issue by an articulate, English-speaking, relatively Americanized Other, that the American soldiers seem to have a change of heart. This sequence of events reinforces the cultural dominance of the English language without knowledge of which Amir would not be able to ask the Americans for help, and the general power, authority and control of the American soldiers who have saved the resistance fighters once already (by commanding the Iraqi soldiers to release them) and are now being asked to do it again.[126] While the representation of Amir as an educated, articulate, and brave fighter and dedicated widowed father to a young daughter begins

to dismantle the representation of Arabs as "monolithic third world Other," so pervasive in this genre, he is one of few characters in such a position and his existence is necessary to advance the plot of the film, rendering him more of an 'exception that proves the rule' rather than an exception that really begins to dismantle the 'rule' altogether. Amir's character must exist to speak for the quite literally 'huddled masses' of fellow civilians/resistance fighters/refugees requiring American assistance grouped behind him who remain undifferentiated, recalling the 'monolithic third world Other.'

In parallel scenes, Troy is being tortured by an Iraqi soldier, and this interaction, too, like that of Amir with Barlow's comrades, while still problematic, works to complicate the hitherto relatively flat, racist representation of Others. In this scene, while inflicting electric shocks on Troy and forcing him to drink motor oil, an articulate and seemingly intelligent Iraqi soldier, Captain Saïd (played by Saïd Taghmaoui), explains that he learned interrogation techniques from the Americans. During this torture scene, he and Troy have an almost incongruously inconsequential but not insignificant argument about Michael Jackson's racial eccentricities – whether he did it to himself, or was driven to it by American culture and values. The self-reflexive nature of this conversation about the political ironies of the situation (Saïd having been taught the interrogation techniques he is currently using on American soldier Barlow by Americans) and the racism of American culture are part of the reason that this film can be grouped into the early cycle of films which are slightly more open about their ambivalence about (or at least their willingness to question) American politics and culture than the more regressive WWII-nostalgia films from the middle-period cycle that follows. Further, during the scene in which Saïd tortures Barlow, a nearby Iraqi soldier witnessing the encounter covers his face in shame and disgusted terror, a humanizing device which ensures that not all Iraqi soldiers come

across as totally barbarous. Saïd also berates Barlow about the hypocrisy of American involvement in the region (much as Amir is doing with Barlow's comrades in the parallel sequence), and shares a moving, traumatic story about his son's death during the American bombing of Baghdad, serving to explain, if not excuse, his anger towards Americans and his torture of Barlow. The intelligence and small back-story of characters like Amir and Saïd as well as the empathy of Saïd's comrade all make small inroads towards humanizing the enemy Other, and critiquing the U.S., striving towards more of a middle ground between "us" and "them" than represented in the middle-period films discussed at greater length herein.

This drive continues in yet later scenes when other Iraqi soldiers are depicted as not so subordinate as the first the bunker-group encountered (who gibbered "I am love United States of Freedom!" in fear of the American posse): when the American group tries to snow-job the soldiers in the second bunker into giving over some cars for free, it doesn't work; the men know the value of the cars and refuse to be taken advantage of. Yet while they are depicted as less subordinate, this scene doesn't represent them as any more moral in that they are protecting treasure that Saddam has stolen. In terms of brutality, too, the film is ambivalent in its depiction of the American soldiers: while Barlow demonstrates moral fortitude and perhaps superiority by refusing to kill the man who tortured him (Saïd) when given the opportunity, the other American soldiers later engage in complete vengeful overkill when an Iraqi soldier hiding in the grass shoots Barlow in the gut and fatally wounds Conrad. Similarly, while Saddam is portrayed as so brutal that his own soldiers desert when the Americans trick them into thinking that he's coming to punish/kill them, the American military is also portrayed as brutal when a suffocating Barlow is roughly shoved to the ground, handcuffed, and not permitted to vent his collapsed lung (almost killing him). Perhaps most disturbing, though, is the equivalence or superiority of this moment in

terms of significance compared to the simultaneous plight of the refugees who, at the exact same time, are being denied passage across the border and into a refugee camp (equating one American soldier's life to the lives of dozens of resistance fighters/refugees). In the end the American military only allows the prisoners to cross so that the Captain, the men's superior officer, can "get that star" – advance his rank in the military by returning the gold, saving some refugees and getting good press. Once again, as in Spivak's formulation of colonizer/colonized, this film ultimately has (mostly) "white men saving brown [people, mostly] women [and children,] from brown men," Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army. This ending maintains status quo racial depictions of the binary of ('us') American military men as heroes – even though they stole some gold (it's depicted almost as their "reward" for doing good/right in the world by "saving" the refugees) – and ('them') Iraqi freedom/resistance fighters as victims, refugees in desperate need of the Americans' help to get across the border.

The internal (inter-U.S.-military) racial dynamics of *Three Kings* are also quite significant. Chief Elgin, one of two black characters in positions of authority in the film, is introduced as "on a four month paid vacation from Detroit," suggesting that he is from a rough area where he doesn't want to live – if war is a vacation from it, it must be pretty bad – and that he's lazy or doesn't care about his military position – if it's described as a paid vacation rather than a job. He repeatedly clashes with the group's "redneck" character, Conrad Vig, an archetypal stupid Southern soldier. While on their treasure-hunt, Elgin and Vig use Nerf footballs for target practice off the back of their military vehicle and get in an explicitly racialized argument about colour-based stereotyping, whether black men make better quarterbacks or receivers in football; the discussion ends with Elgin telling Conrad that he is a "sorry-ass cracker" who isn't going to be able to hit any Iraqis because of his bad aim, only

further reinforcing rather than disrupting the link between race and athletic ability. So while such

an overt discussion of racial stereotypes might bring the issues to the fore and self-reflexively

poke fun at the stereotypes, the characters' behaviour and actions largely continue to reinforce

many of these stereotypes. For example, in a later scene involving both Elgin and Vig, the Iraqi

resistance fighters ask if the U.S. soldiers want to kill all Arabs, and when Conrad responds

affirmatively that that's what they were trained to do, Elgin interjects: "No! That was not our

training," dismissing Conrad to the resistance fighters in an aside as someone who's just had "no

high-school;" Elgin's comments and knowledgeability throughout the film imply that he is not

only a higher ranking soldier than Vig, but also more intelligent and politically.

This complication of racial roles continues when, towards the film's close, Elgin engages

in ambiguous racial signification by donning a Keffiyeh (traditional middle eastern

scarf/headdress) without any explanation, and is seemingly deeply spiritually invested in the

traditional Arab funeral rites performed for the fallen Vig, who himself seemed to embrace the

idea before his death despite his earlier racial ignorance (use of slurs, etc.). In all, a generous

reading would see the film's initial racism as somewhat knowing, a sort of straw-man which the

film's midway shift works to knock down for or with the viewer through the use of intelligent,

articulate, and humanized (albeit somewhat Americanized) Arab characters and also through an

explicit critique of American politics, policy, and military actions in the Gulf. The film's ending,

however, as analyzed above in Spivak's framework of colonizer (American military) 'saving'

colonized (Iraqi citizens) definitely undermines whatever other work the film might be doing

towards questioning racial stereotypes. Despite its flaws, *Three Kings*, like its fellow early-

period films like *The Thin Red Line* and *Courage Under Fire* (which stars a black military man

in the leading role rather than a white one), is, if not transgressive, at lest much less regressive in

terms of its racial politics than many other films immediately preceding and following it.

<u>Middle/Regressive Period: *Black Hawk Down*, *We Were Soldiers*</u>

While in *Three Kings* the enemy Other is portrayed ambivalently (as both cartoonishly

one-dimensional and with more depth, as both ignorant and intelligent, and as both brutal and

humane), the enemy Other fares significantly poorer in Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down*, one of

the only popular Hollywood films to deal with the U.S. intervention in Somalia, and which,

based on actual events, focuses on the actions surrounding the fall of two American Black Hawk

helicopters in the streets of Mogadishu in 1993. Much like in *Three Kings*, the soldiers use racial

slurs for both civilian and enemy 'others,' referring to Somalis as "skinnys." When main

character Sgt. Eversmann (played by Josh Hartnett) protests the use of these terms among his

men, he explains: "It's not that I like them or I don't like them. I respect them." Yet he later

persists in calling them "skinnys" himself, regardless of this supposed respect. Again though, the

much more insidious racism in the film occurs at the visual level, and the film slips into

dangerously racist depictions of enemy Others and civilians alike, blurring the distinction, and

creating a "monolithic third world Other."

Interestingly, the film opens with shots of Others, but rather than enemy Others, they're

the African civilians whom the Americans have charged themselves with protecting and

providing humanitarian aid (again this recalls Spivak's formulation of the relationship between

colonizer/colonized: white people saving brown/black people from themselves/each other).[127]

Once again, in the film (and arguably in the political arena at the time), America casts itself as

the heroic and superior nation capable of and willing to give aid. This framing speaks to the

Marx quote that both Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak use, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented," the idea being that 'they,' in this case Somalis, are not capable of representing themselves and must, therefore, be represented by the dominant Americans who literally speak for them in terms of providing their food (American soldiers pass out bags of rice in early scenes), but also in terms of this filmic representation (made in Hollywood). Already within this opening scene, a dichotomous good Other vs. bad Other, noble savage vs. plain old savage depiction – seen to a lesser extent in the depiction of Arabs in *Three Kings* – is exaggerated to the extreme here. On one hand the "good" Africans appear as vulnerable, almost child-like creatures, because they are thin, small, and weak, shot from above (from the perspective of the Americans unloading food from an aid truck); [128] and on the other hand, the "bad" Africans appear as violent dictatorial gangsters with guns who are starving their fellow citizens.[129] While there are two different extremes in representations of racialized Other here, both conform to standard stereotype.

Ironically, both the "good" and "bad" African Others in this opening scene are not depicted much differently than the enemy Others later in the film; in this opening scene, they mix in with one another, appearing as one large, uncontrollable mob, "good" civilians jostling and vying with one another, desperate for the food the Americans are distributing, and "bad" militants trying to wrestle the food away. This sequence echoes a later shot in which another uncontrollable mob of Somalis is shot from high above (the rooftops of neighbouring buildings and/or from other helicopters) descending on the downed helicopter, picking it apart piece by piece, stripping the Americans bodies and parading them around, pulling out the wounded American soldier and dragging his body through the streets, all the while shooting wildly, yelling, and waving their arms. In the confused scene, it is unclear who in this mob is a militia

member, and who is not (in subsequent ground-level shots some simply appear to be curious civilians or people trying to salvage scrap material). This blurring of the line between soldier and civilian Others is a theme which persists throughout this film (and recurs as a much stronger component in more recent combat films), particularly when civilians are depicted selling guns and ammo in a Somali marketplace. Even the Somali women and children are shown to be duplicitous: a boy/young man uses a cell phone to alert the militia when the American choppers take off from their base near the beginning of the film, and, towards the film's end, a woman picks up a machine gun and fires at the Americans as they're retreating. The Somali citizens are also shown collaborating with the militia in several other instances, burning tires to alert the militia to the fact that the Americans are coming, and cheering when an American soldier's body is being carried/dragged through the streets. The polarized depiction of the enemy Other continues as Somalis are represented as being at once weak and not respectable, and on the other hand dangerously effective; American soldiers in the film characterize their enemy with phrases like: "Generally speaking the Somalis can't shoot for shit" and "Just watch out for the Sammies [Somalis] throwing rocks and you'll be fine," in contrast to their talk about themselves: "we're rangers; we're elite." Yet, to the contrary, others warn: "Don't underestimate *their* [the Somalis'] capabilities" (emphasis added). Here, unlike in *Three Kings*, no racialized Others, whether enemy or civilian, come across as good or intelligent or even really human. The depiction of "us" vs. "them" is a lot more black and white (pardon the pun) in the middle/regressive cycle of the combat films of the period. Where the Americans cast themselves as the strong active heroes, trying to provide humanitarian aid, feeding Somalis and ridding them of an evil dictator, the Somalis are cast in contrast as (either/or, both/and) weak/needy (civilians scrambling for rice

being thrown down from above by the American military) or cruelly evil super-villains (snatching the rice away from starving people and torturing downed Americans).

In terms of actions and behaviour, the mixed-message about Somalis is the same; Somalis appear weak and ineffective in some scenes, but also tricky, sneaky, and therefore potentially very dangerous in others. In one scene, a Somali informant appears cowardly: he lies about the place where a meeting is supposed to take place, admitting when confronted that he doesn't want to get any closer because there are too many militia and he's afraid of getting shot. The same applies to actual combatants; while the American forces are not immune to mistakes – one of the issues that causes the American group to get pinned down in the first place is a soldier falling from the chopper, and in another scene a flummoxed American soldier cries: "They're shooting at us" to which a more experienced one frustratedly replies: "Well, shoot back!" – the Somali militia is framed as much less disciplined than the American troops – with no linear formations, militiamen simply appear to jump around and raise their guns in the air etc. On the other hand, however, the Somali forces do manage to wreak havoc on the American forces despite the American forces' (portrayed) superior training, numbers, and an extensive technological/equipment advantage. In short, while the Somali militia does inflict some serious damage on the American forces, this outcome is represented as the result of a series of small bits of 'bad luck' rather than any fault of the American soldiers or any skill on the part of the Somalis. Both the verbal evidence and the visual evidence then suggests that the Americans making the film and the American military characters within it firmly believe that the American military forces are vastly superior (both militarily and morally) to the Somali militia with whom they fight, reinforcing self-consolidating us/them binaries which perpetuate racially motivated (or at least racially divided) armed conflict on a global scale. This ideological message is

perpetuated not just on a verbal and narrative level as examined above, but is reinforced on a visual/formal level as well.

While the premise of the film perhaps explains the fact that some of the scenes are shot from directly above (the idea being that the perspective is that of American helicopters), there are a disproportionate number of shots from above given that the narrative largely follows the story of the men on the ground, not the characters who later flew in helicopters to survey the situation from above (none of whom has any back-story). These aerial shots serve to dehumanize the Somalis captured onscreen (causing both the Somali civilians and militia to appear as ants or some other type of insect), and literally put the American perspective physically above the enemy Other, giving the viewers an omnipotent perspective through they eyes of the American characters. These aerial shots are not matched by aerial shots of the American forces; in contrast to the shots of Somalis from above, the American soldiers are largely shot from the average height of the soldiers in the scene in shot/reverse-shot form, creating a much more intimate feeling, as though the viewer is on the same level as the soldiers in the scene rather than above them. Virtually no Somalis are filmed in this closer, more intimate proximity except captured 'warlord' Osman Ali Atto (or Ato), a faction leader selling weapons to Mohamed Farrah Aidid's militia who is interrogated by American military personnel in closed quarters. This way of representing Americans (at eye level) and Somalis (from above) only further reinforces the hierarchical us/them binary established verbally and narratively throughout the film.

The final, and perhaps most telling element of the us vs. them treatment of Americans and Somalis is in the film's death scenes. There are no Somali characters with any depth,[130] which perhaps explains why there are no up-close Somali death scenes; all Somali deaths are part of quick-paced violent spectacle (e.g. exploding rooftops or a spray of bullets). On the other

hand, audience members are encouraged visually and narratively to mourn the American losses; for instance, the prolonged and intimate death scene of Jamie Smith, whose femoral artery has been severed and who cannot be saved despite the medic's best efforts, shot in low-lit close-up, creating a sense of intimacy. After all efforts to save Smith have failed, the dying Smith asks Eversmann to tell his (Smith's) parents that he "fought well today, that [he] fought hard" while soft, melancholy non-diegetic piano music plays and his distraught fellow soldiers look on. The final moments of the film, too, reinforce the film's intended sympathies, noting that 1000+ Somalis were killed where only 19 Americans died; significantly, each of the dead American's names is listed while not one Somali name appears onscreen. These closing title screens only reinforce the ideological message pervading the film as a whole – the lives of strong, brave American soldiers are valuable and should be mourned while Somalis are largely an undifferentiable mass upon whom the viewer is invited to literally look down from above.

Similar representational strategies abound in 2002's *We Were Soldiers*. Like many films of the genre from the period studied herein (1990-2015), *We Were Soldiers* is a film about the real happenings in Ia Drang Valley in Vietnam over a few days in 1965, based on a 1992 written account by Retired Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore and war journalist Joseph L. Galloway.[131] This 'based on a true story' element of many of these combat films[132] is what gives them their cultural weight and allows them great power to influence public thought and feeling about armed conflict and war. The film takes a somewhat similar approach to depicting the enemy as fellow middle-period/regressive cycle film *Black Hawk Down* in that the overwhelming emphasis and sympathy is reserved for American characters, but *We Were Soldiers* also overlaps somewhat with *Letters from Iwo Jima*'s approach in that there are scenes which focus solely on the Vietnamese soldiers, a rarity for Hollywood combat films. Like in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, though, these scenes

sometimes reinforce racial stereotypes, such as the film's first, in which a Vietnamese soldier asks, after they've attacked a French group, "Do we take prisoners?" and his commanding officer replies: "No. Kill all they send, and they'll stop coming," a scene which, without much context, causes the Vietnamese to appear overly brutal. In the end, the overwhelming focus and site for identification in *We Were Soldiers* remains the (mostly white) American soldiers who have much more depth and substance as characters than anyone Vietnamese, maintaining rather than making significant inroads into breaking down the binary racial status quo common to this genre.

We Were Soldiers both begins and ends with the voiceover narration of one of these white American soldiers, Joe Galloway, a (theoretically) non-combatant embedded journalist, whose authorial statements lend weight and credence to the events of the film and place its narrative entirely within the control of the American participants, even if 'paying tribute' to the Vietnamese enemy Other: "These are the true events of November 1965, the Ia Drang Valley of Vietnam, a place our country does not remember and a war it does not understand. This story is a testament to the young Americans who died in the Valley of Death and a tribute to the young men of the People's Army of Vietnam who died by our hand in that place." From the outset then, there is a great deal of emphasis on historical racial tension (French colonization) and its relationship to war throughout the film, with Moore studying Shin Tzu's *The Art of War* and the past strategies of the General who engineered the French massacre in Japan, trying deeply to understand the strategies of the Vietnamese commander against whom he's squared off in this film. In fact, Moore is so wrapped up in military history and battles past that he becomes quite distressed when he's given General Custer's regiment number; he can't sleep and stays up late looking at photographs of Custer's (fatal) Last Stand, harkening back to another war between colonizing whites and darker skinned "natives."

Moore seems determined to carry his racial tolerance, or at least interest in, Other cultures' war-making to his own military practice; before he and his men deploy, he gives a speech about the supposed non-issue of the ethnic diversity of their group:

> Look around you. In the 7th cavalry [his unit] we've got a captain from the Ukraine, another from Puerto Rico. We've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Latinos, Cherokee Indians, Jews and Gentiles, all Americans. Now here in the States, some men might experience discrimination because of race, or creed [close up on a black soldier], but for you and me now, all that is gone. We are moving into the valley of the shadow of death, where you will watch the back of the man next to you because he will watch yours. And you won't care what color he is or by what name he calls God …

but of course, the American soldier must believe in some God, the speech and film imply (and the speech's reference to The Lord's Prayer implies preference for a Christian God). The insinuation here is that American soldiers, and indeed, Americans must overcome their own racial differences in order to band together against the racialized enemy Other. This is the same type of 'ethnic integration' that Basinger identified in her study of WWII combat films[133] but on a slightly larger, more racially diverse scale. So whatever Moore's personal feelings might be about the military venerability of the enemy Other, the ideological impact of his speech suggests that what colour one is becomes less important than what nationality one is, whose 'side' one is on; it only matters that one is American, and willing to fight America's enemies, whoever they are. In a statement that has come to exist as a synecdoche for polarizing rhetoric, as George W. Bush put it in an address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[134] While Moore's message might not be quite so explicit, the ideological underpinnings are the same.

The depiction of this enemy Other then, much like in *Flags of Our Fathers*, is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, the many parallels between American soldiers, specifically Moore

and the Vietnamese military leader, humanize the enemy Other (also recalling aforementioned and analyzed scenes from *Three Kings*), and depict the Vietnamese army as a venerable foe. These American/Vietnamese parallels are numerous, including a straight cut from Moore's talk with Galloway to the Vietnamese leader in a similar conversation with his officers. The Vietnamese leader also prays, like Moore, and seems to care deeply for his men, as Moore does. He (the Vietnamese commander) is depicted as savvy and intelligent, knowing how and where to attack to "overwhelm the landing zone … to choke off their route of supply" and that "we must attack them now while they are at their weakest;" yet, Gibson's character, Moore, is more so (savvy and intelligent), accurately anticipating *all* of the Vietnamese leader's moves, such as predicting that he'll "nibble at us all night and then come at us with everything they got in the morning," as established with an immediate cut from Moore saying that to the Vietnamese general relaying these orders to his officer. Moore is always one step ahead of his foe and therefore able to ultimately prevail, defeating the enemy Other despite the overwhelming odds. While this film is based on historical events, making the film more believable and 'real' for the audience and trying to 'get it right this time' (because author Moore is frustrated by previous Hollywood films that he sees as getting it wrong),[135] the book, the DVD commentary with director Randall Wallace, and the title cards all allude to the fact that, in reality, this ending, which gives an impression of a sweeping American victory led by Moore in the Ia Drang valley, is not really very historically accurate, but is instead adjusted ('dramatic license') to suit the sociopolitical climate of 2002 America's post-9/11 jingoistic fervor.

While the parallels between Moore and the opposing Vietnamese General work to humanize the enemy Other, constructing the Vietnamese army as well-organized and well-led, other more subtle elements of the film's representation suggest that the Vietnamese army is

"primitive" and under-prepared compared to the Americans; rather than having sophisticated

topographical maps like the Americans, the Vietnamese are depicted as having blank pieces of

paper with confusing and badly hand-drawn lines and arrows. Similarly, while the film

humanizes the individual Vietnamese soldiers in some scenes, it dehumanizes them in others; in

one shot a Vietnamese officer writes in what appears to be a diary/notebook with a picture of a

woman (presumably his wife) in it – humanizing the Vietnamese soldiers by suggesting that

they, too, like the Americans whose families we've been introduced to, are family men, with

something to lose and someone at home who will be devastated by their loss, but later shots of

these same Vietnamese soldiers running out of the underground tunnels in masses undo this

humanizing work because they have an almost animalistic quality, causing the Vietnamese

soldiers to appear as though they are insects emerging from the earth (in an echo of the effect of

aforementioned aerial shots of Somalis streaming into the streets from *Black Hawk Down*). In

each case, whatever strides *We Were Soldiers* makes towards humanizing the enemy Other, these

steps are largely undone or at least undermined by the film's overall visual rhetoric which

conforms to a tried and tired combat (and other genre) film stereotype where racialized enemy

Others are depicted both as venerable foes, and as primitive/uncivilized (hand-drawn maps and

ruthlessly violent) and animalistic (streaming out of underground tunnels).

Significantly, towards the end of the film, unlike most other combat films, the

Vietnamese perspective is featured even after the Americans leave the landing zone, and the

viewer finds out what the Vietnamese commander has to say as he ponders his loss; however, the

Americans still have the final word, and sympathy is reserved for the enumerated American dead

not for the nameless Vietnamese soldiers lost in the battle (again, this recalls the final title

screens in *Black Hawk Down* in which the names of each of the American dead are listed, and

none of the Somalis killed are specifically mentioned). In *We Were Soldiers*, however, at least one Vietnamese soldier is mourned; towards the end of the film, as Jack's widow reads a letter from Moore about her husband's death, Moore's voiceover reading of the letter continues as the scene is intercut with scenes of a Vietnamese woman reading, presumably, a similar letter from the Vietnamese General about her husband's death. This scene again serves to parallel the Americans and the Vietnamese and sends the message that both lost lives matter; however, there is no voiceover in the case of the Vietnamese woman's letter, so the viewer can only infer the connection and the primary emphasis is on Barbara Geoghegan, Jack's widow, whom we know more about (e.g. that she is a new mother) and the content of whose letter we are privy to. The Vietnamese woman still remains nameless and silent in the end. So while this film isn't quite relying on the formulation of the self-consolidating Other in the same strong binary ways as many other combat films (it does gesture towards a more inclusive or slightly more well-rounded representation of enemy Others), echoes of such an ideology still exist in the ways in which the Americans still remain the narrative architects, the heroes of the film (even against historical verisimilitude), and the ones whose lives matter *more* than the Vietnamese soldiers' lives (which viewers know comparatively much less about).

This emphasis on the American point of view is solidified in one of the film's final scenes when the Vietnamese commander plucks a tiny, dirty, battered tooth-pick-sized American flag out of the tree stump in which it was planted as his soldiers collect the bodies of their dead. His next-in-command declares: "What a tragedy" to which the General replies: "They will think this was their victory [pause] so this will become an American war [pause] and the end will be the same [pause] except for the numbers who will die before we get there." As if to confirm his suspicion that the Americans perceive this as "their victory" and "their war," American

journalists are then depicted taking copious photos of this flag in the tree. As their conversation ends, the General replaces the American flag in the tree stump as if to reinforce America's claim to dominion or somehow tacitly admit defeat. Had the film ended here, this dialogue might be interpreted as a critical statement about the overwhelmingly American representational control over this conflict.

In the end, however, any critical work accomplished by this scene is undercut by the fact that again the focus and sympathy remains firmly on the American perspective with the final scenes devoted to Hal Moore and his family, and Moore's and Galloway's voices; in the final scene, Moore visits the Vietnam War memorial while the overlaid title screens give the location of the names of the men who fought in the 7th Air Cavalry on the memorial, adding: "to their left and right are the names of 58,000 of their brothers-in-arms," and finally listing the names and birthplaces of all those soldiers who died at landing-zone X-ray (the site of the battle depicted in the film) before the film credits roll. Of course, as mentioned, while the film pays lip service to being a "tribute" to the NVA soldiers who died in the battle depicted, it doesn't actually pay named tribute to them as it does to the American soldiers who died, reinforcing the superior importance of American lives within the film's framework. The support of status quo racialized hierarchies within the film and the repeated references to previous conflicts (French/Vietnamese, American/'Indian') only serve to relay the message that, while Americans might respect and even try to understand their racially-Othered military foes, they will always be one step ahead, heroically dominating them in battle, or at least re-narrating/re-presenting history so it seems that way.

Recent Cycle: *Jarhead, Flags of Our Fathers & Letters from Iwo Jima*

Films from the more recent period, perhaps because of their shared focus on the Gulf conflicts, tend to be much more similar in their approach to race to a film like *Three Kings* from the earliest part of the period, than to middle-period films like *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers*. Very much like *Three Kings*, the characters here too use racial slurs in statements like "The whole fucking desert is shitting dead rag-heads," and the ignorant racism is not limited to white American soldiers in *Jarhead*; Escobar, a Latino soldier, wonders if "they," some unidentified Arab figures the Marines encounter in the desert, have anthrax (much like black Chief Elgin from *Three Kings* who objects to the use of the terms "dune coon" and "sand nigger" but agrees that "rag-head" and "towel jockey" are acceptable substitutes). The degree of internal racism also aligns *Jarhead* more with earlier films than films from the middle period of the early 2000s where race is largely glossed-over. While in *We Were Soldiers* a sort of colour-blind ideology is declared by Moore in his deployment speech, none of the soldiers themselves actually negotiate any racial tension (probably because all of the main characters are, significantly, white). There is some, but minimal racial tension within the American military forces depicted in *Jarhead* when one of the white soldiers, Fowler (played by Evan Jones) calls Juan Cortez (played by Jacob Vargas) a "midget" and Cortez retorts by calling him a "squishy faced retard." So while the film does imply racial tension between soldiers, it also trades in (both dismantling and reinforcing) some other racial stereotypes.

The dumb hillbilly white-boy stereotype epitomized by the character Conrad Vig in *Three Kings* is at least partially combated in *Jarhead* because the seemingly redneck soldier with the southern accent, Chris Kruger (played by Lucas Black), is actually quite intelligent and articulate; he knows and cares more about the politics of the conflict than almost all of the other

soldiers, telling his fellow soldiers that they're all just there (in Iraq) "to protect rich white men's profits," the profits of men who have their hands in the pockets of oil-rich countries.[136] Other stereotypes, like that of the ignorant war-hungry white-American soldier, are reinforced, however, when Sarsgaard's character, Troy, responds to Kruger: "Fuck politics – we're here; that's all that matters." So while there is some divide among the soldiers along racial and political lines, Basinger's theory that in combat films nationality prevails over ethnicity, fits here as in most other combat films of the period studied herein; Swofford's basic training drill sergeant shouts at the new recruits: "You are no longer black, or brown, or yellow, or red! You are now green! You are light green, or dark green!" Unlike in other films of the genre (like middle-period film *We Were Soldiers*), where racial unity is simply stated to exist by superior officers (and then largely ignored for the rest of the film), the racial divide in *Jarhead* is seemingly negotiated and agreed upon by the soldiers themselves. The overall racial climate, however, is still primarily a relatively uncomplicated divide, "us" (any American soldier) vs. "them" (the enemy Other, in this case Arabs); the racial hierarchies at the base or root of self-perpetuating combat remain unchallenged.

Both sides of the stereotypical Other are also reflected in this film as in most others of the genre; Others appear barbarous and despicable, but also dangerous and formidable. When the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Kazinski, played by Chris Cooper, describes Iraqis in his opening speech to the Marines, he asserts: "They are tough. They will stop at nothing. They have used nerve gas ... these Iraqis who have raped and pillaged little Kuwait are not in our gun-sights yet ... you will maintain a constant state of suspicious alertness," suggesting that the enemy is perhaps venerable and dangerous *because* they are surreptitious, use nerve gas, rape and pillage. As well, much like in the opening of and throughout *Three Kings*, the images of the

enemy Other are at times mediated through binoculars, rifle scopes, and sights in *Jarhead*, creating a visual and metaphorical distance and placing the Americans at the top of both the technological and visual hierarchy. These shots align much more logically with the narrative in *Jarhead* than they do in *Black Hawk Down*, though.[137] For example, because the lead characters of *Jarhead*, whose perspective we share, are snipers (and therefore spend a great deal of time looking through binoculars and rifle scopes). Despite this more justifiable use of technological distancing, the us (Americans) vs. them (Arab enemy Others) divide is still strong; upon seeing their "foes" through the magnifying glass, Swofford says wonderingly: "That's what they look like," almost as if examining an exotic specimen or an alien, as though these enemy Others are not even human. Because the viewer shares the perspective of these protagonists throughout the film, s/he is invited to share these racially/nationally disconnected sentiments, reinforcing an us vs. them rational for war/conflict.

'Othered' women, too, are objects to be looked at, and not just as objects to be saved by the benevolent white interveners, but also as objects of possible sexual violence: As described in chapter two, Fowler pelvic thrusts, pretends to speak Arabic (really just gibberish), and simulates cunnilingus towards a veiled woman riding in a passing car, telling his fellow soldiers: "She'll never forget me. That bitch wanted me." This scene strongly implies Fowler's total lack of consideration of the woman's agency, and even suggests that he feels a sense of entitlement to sexual activities with this woman because of his 'superior' position as one of her white American saviours. He even self-aggrandizes in much the same way that many combat films do, suggesting that she will remember him forever (this lasting collective memory arguably the intended effect of the ending of many combat films and war memorials which list soldiers' names). Then again, however, much like in the case of *Three Kings*, a generous reading this scene would see Fowler's

character as a critique of some of the American action and behaviour in the Gulf, rather than as a prescription for what an American presence should look like.[138] While the focus in *Jarhead* as a whole is still largely on the American experience, the representation of enemy Others is less polarizing and problematic than in more regressive middle-period films such as *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers* where the American experience is privileged at the expense of the Other rather than simply in the absence of the Other.

Perhaps because of criticism faced after Hollywood outputs focused on earlier wars, up to and including Vietnam,[139] some more recent iterations of combat films have seemingly made an effort to broaden the perspective of these conflicts beyond a strict focus on the purely white, European focus that had largely dominated Hollywood combat films up to the 1990s. In a basically unprecedented cinematic move, Clint Eastwood's companion films *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006), present the same battle from an American perspective and Japanese perspective respectively, giving rise to some complex ethnic/racial dynamics, rather than the fairly strictly polarized us/them binaries typical of the genre.

Flags of our Fathers' most obvious racial dynamics stem from the problematic representation of the film's Native American character, Ira Hayes, played by Adam Beach. Like in many of the films discussed previously herein, the most basic level of racism directed at this character is verbal. Many of the other characters use racial slurs and ignorant stereotypes towards him, one character asking: "Is that your girlfriend? I bet she's a pretty damn good-looking squaw" and someone else chimes in: "I bet you're missing her and that wigwam." Strangely, he retorts by showing them pictures of Japanese torture methods, and calls them cowpokes. Hayes doesn't want anyone to know that he was at the Iwo-Jima flag-raising and is so adamant about it that he's willing to get into a knife-fight over it. He and the other men who were there are being

asked to return to America so they can be used in the homefront campaign to sell war bonds. When his Captain, who initially calls him a redskin, discovers Haye's reluctance, he intensifies his slur, calling Hayes a "dumb red-faced idiot." Once Hayes is home from the war, against his initial wishes, President Harry S. Truman tells him: "Being an Indian, you are a truer American than any of us. Bet your people are proud to see you wear that uniform," reinforcing the racial difference between Hayes and the other soldiers, and between Native Americans and non-native Americans generally by tokenizing him, suggesting that he's an example for his race because he's serving in the American military. Similarly, at another war bond drive, an older white man tells Hayes: "I hear you used a tomahawk on those Japs – is that true?" and when he replies "No sir," the man tells him: "Well, tell them that you did, son, it makes for a better story," again illustrating the willing racial ignorance of Americans in-charge, and their unwillingness to let go of racial stereotypes, especially if those stereotypes help them sell what they're trying to sell. Perhaps this attitude is a good allegory for combat films generally; Hollywood is willing to trade in racial stereotypes as long as it helps sell the product.

More troubling than the casual verbal racism and ignorance Hayes faces is the depiction of his extreme alcohol-abuse problem, which seemingly begins when he returns to America after fighting in the war. While his struggles may indeed represent the real struggles with substance abuse faced by many troubled returning soldiers,[140] especially in a time before the recognition and widespread diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in veterans, the attribution of severe alcoholism to the film's only native character seems a dangerous reinforcement of problematic stereotypes still quite prevalent and destructive in North America today. There is no question that this character has intense issues with alcohol, in fact, most of his narrative arc is devoted to these problems; he throws up off the side of a train, falls up the stairs at a hotel while

on war bond duty, and swings a chair in the street at cops because the bar he's at "won't serve 'Indians'," not even war heroes. Others are not oblivious to this issue and its racial significance, a fellow soldier complaining: "Jesus Christ he's drunk – goddamn Indians," adding, "He's an embarrassment to the uniform." Yet no one really helps him; in a later, present-tense (frame-narrative, non-flashback) scene of the film, one soldier admits that years after the war he saw a man on the side of the road that he thought might be Hayes but didn't stop "because I was in a rush – and he was Indian," revealing that even Hayes' so-called friends and military brethren are put off (or scared off) by his race. The representation of such attitudes doesn't do much to dismantle stereotypes that persist today and simply reinforce white guilt over Native American substance-abuse problems.

After the war and the bonds drive is over, Ira's descent becomes more rapid. He is shown doing manual labour on someone else's farm, having his picture taken by white tourists for a couple of coins (like a circus sideshow attraction), and being thrown in jail (which story, of course because of his war-bond-selling fame, is picked up by the paper, further perpetuating the stereotype); eventually Ira ends up dead "from exposure" though the implication is that he got drunk and fell unconscious outdoors (seemingly on a reservation from the accompanying visuals). Overall, the character's Native-ness and subsequent alcoholism are his most salient features. While the other characters also have reservations about selling bonds and being characterized as heroes, perhaps even struggle with their own cases of undiagnosed PTSD, Hayes is the only one who is depicted as having a substance-abuse problem. The film's connection to and anticipation of *Letters from Iwo Jima* is its only saving grace as far as the representation of race is concerned. In echoes of similar shots from *Letters*, there are multiple shots from the point of view (POV) of the Japanese guns and gunners in *Flags*. These shots,

appearing periodically throughout the flash-back battle scenes shift or at least disrupt the audience's sole identification with the Americans by distancing the audience and literally putting viewers in the position of 'enemy' Other, peering at advancing American troops from underground bunkers. While these shots are significant in their positioning of the spectator in the same POV as the 'enemy Other,' they are few and far between, easy to miss unless one is paying close attention for them. More significant than these POV shots alone is the relationship between the two films. Akin to what *We Were Soldiers* attempts to do with parallels between the American General, Moore, and his Vietnamese counterpart, Lt. Col. Nguyen Huu An, played by Duong Don (analyzed in greater depth previously), but to a much greater degree, where *Flags of Our Fathers* portrays the battle and its aftermath from an American perspective, *Letters from Iwo Jima* portrays the same battle (including the events leading up to it) from a Japanese perspective, attempting to tell both sides of the story.

In many ways, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, more so than many other Hollywood combat films, humanizes its Japanese characters and extends their portrayal beyond the boundaries of stereotypically flat, one-dimensional archetypes; the narrative is composed of letters written by the soldiers, each of the characters has somewhat of a back-story, and the soldiers are shown doing regular activities such as digging trenches. One of the central characters, General Kuribayashi, writes, presumably to his wife, of the mundane details of life, telling her that he's sorry he didn't have time to take care of the kitchen floor before he left. These more complex portrayals work towards combating flatness of enemy Other characters from other combat films including the binary stereotypes promoted (or at least not problematized) by other films. For example, at one point a Japanese soldier suggests that they should just let the Americans have the island so they can go home, combating the stereotype (perpetuated in other combat genre pieces

like *The Pacific*) that all Asian soldiers are "kamikaze" die-hards so dedicated to honour and virtue that they would rather die than surrender. The film's images too, not just the words, reinforce this human element. One scene sees General Kuribayashi in his undergarments in the middle of the night planning (a very humanizing scene reminiscent of aforementioned scenes from *We Were Soldiers* of Moore up late, planning and strategizing because unable to sleep), and here viewers are in General Kuribayashi's private space and learn that in spite of his focus on his military duties, he's also just a father who misses his child.[141]

Despite many progressive elements, the film does, however, still uphold some other stereotypes in that the Japanese General is depicted as only having the knowledge to beat the Americans because he has studied them and their strategy (he, like Iraqi soldier Said from *Three Kings*, has an American education). Similarly, given that this is still a Hollywood film, an American attempt at representing Others ("they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented"), attitudes towards American soldiers and the Japanese 'selves' that those construct stick fairly close to stereotypical self-consolidating script; Japanese soldiers in the film declare that "The Americans are weak-willed and inferior to Japanese soldiers" because "they let their emotions interfere with their duty." A later scene serves to partially combat these (American representations of Japanese-held) stereotypes, however, when the Japanese take a wounded American soldier in and Baron Nishi, an Olympic hero and commanding officer, orders them to treat him rather than torture and/or kill him. When another soldier, Shimizu, played by Ryô Kase, protests that the Americans wouldn't treat a wounded Japanese soldier, Baron Nishi questions: "Have you ever met one?" admonishing his soldier for being assumptive and stereotyping American soldiers without ever having met one, insisting that they treat the prisoner. Nishi talks to the American prisoner about his horse which was killed by an American

bomb in an earlier scene, raising tension and implying that Nishi might kill or torture the

American for killing his horse (but he does not). This tension, of course, arises because viewers

have been conditioned by previous genre films to expect this to turn into a torture/death scene.[142]

When the American eventually succumbs to his injuries, the Japanese soldiers who have been

treating him read his letter[143] aloud, illustrating that these Japanese can view the Americans as

people too. Shimizu admits that he knows nothing about Americans, and that he thought they

were cowards, but that the experience of seeing the American prisoner die and hearing the letter

from his mother changed his perspective. In this way, the Japanese soldiers are portrayed as

flexible and open-minded, but significantly few matching scenes appear in the genre where

American soldiers act humanely towards a dying enemy Other (e.g. read their letters to/from

loved ones in order to come to a greater more compassionate understanding of that enemy

Other); instead, Americans burn enemies' letters and photos and steal enemy Others' belongings

(as explored further within the next section of the chapter). In the end, it is still the Other who

must change/adapt to understand and tolerate Americans rather than the other way around.

In fact, in contrast to the empathy and humanization that the Japanese develop towards

the Americans in *Letters*, the Americans in *Letters from Iwo Jima* are shown to be the ones that

are brutal, shooting surrendered Japanese soldiers who should be treated as Prisoners of War

(POWs), just as the Japanese soldiers assumed they would. In the end, however, Japanese

survivors are laid down next to the wounded American soldiers and receive the same treatment.

Much like in the other films discussed herein, the final focus is on the men's families, but this

time it's the Japanese men's families, not the Americans'. So while the film is not without its

issues in terms of racial representation, it goes a long way towards shifting the focus away from

the American experience of the war, and attempting to understand the enemy Other's

perspective. So while these films share a great deal of traditional, familial sentiment that might align them more closely with the more WWII-nostalgic middle cycle of the period, temporally and because of their much more progressive racial dynamics (only when taken together), they belong to the later cycle. Another such borderline case arises with HBO's *The Pacific*, which temporally falls within the most recent cycle, yet is dragged back towards the WWII-nostalgic middle-cycle by virtue of its pairing with *Band of Brothers* and some of its representational politics.

Recent or Regressive? HBO's *The Pacific*

HBO seemed to attempt a similar feat as the *Flags/Letters* pairing several years later with their release of the miniseries *The Pacific* (2010), a companion to 2001's wildly popular if Eurocentric *Band of Brothers* (2001). Rather than explore the perspective of the enemy Other, however, *The Pacific* is still predominantly concerned with the experiences of white American soldiers; it is just set in the islands of the Pacific rather than in Europe. In this miniseries, the enemy Other is overtly declared to be "the Japanese," and the miniseries' audio, both in voiceover and via character dialogue, repeatedly insists that "they" are rapidly taking over "the world" one island at a time. One of the real-life veterans of the conflict, in a talking-head style interview at the outset of the first episode (mirroring the same technique used in *Band of Brothers*), remembers and reveals American ignorance of this part of the world in that people didn't even know how to spell the name of the place they were going – Guadalcanal; similarly, this ignorance is anticipated in the viewer as throughout the series, audiences are repeatedly oriented with images of a globe/map that zoom in to the islands on which the action they are about to see is taking place.[144] Unlike *Letters*, which works towards maintaining a focus on Japanese characters to the exclusion of Americans, the overwhelming centre of sympathy and

focus in *The Pacific* is still on the Americans; the Japanese can hardly be considered as anything more than a flat, one-dimensional enemy, hardly even qualifying as 'characters.' In this way, among many others, *The Pacific'*s racial politics align it much more with the WWII-nostalgic middle-cycle of films which generally tend to uphold much more stereotypical representations of race, gender and American family values.

Indeed, the us/them, American/Japanese binary is strongly constructed in the aforementioned opening scenes of the first episode of the miniseries in which a commanding officer reinforces to his troops that the Japanese are the enemy and that "they are taking over the world." Reinforcing the heteronormative nuclear family values typical of middle-cycle, WWII-nostalgic films, he tells the men to spend Christmas with their families, praying for peace and goodwill to men and then to report back, "ready to sail across God's vast ocean, meet our enemy, and kill them all." In the following scene, an American man at a large family dinner toasts not to peace and goodwill to man, but to his brothers who are going to war in the Pacific: "A year from now, when this is all over, we'll sit down at this table and have a welcome home feast. Just get the job done and come home to us." All of these opening scenes already strongly establish an "us-them" binary between Americans, who appear sympathetic and morally righteous because of their traditional family values, and with whom the audience is encouraged to identify, and the Japanese, whom the audience is encouraged to vilify because we know nothing about them except that they are "the enemy" that is "taking over the world," separating these men from their families and forcing them to go to war. When, by the following Christmas, the men are not back home celebrating with their families, the implication based on this early scene is that by not losing the war quickly, the Japanese are keeping these American soldiers away from their family, further vilifying this largely faceless foe.[145]

While this miniseries is in many ways similar to depictions of "the good war" (WWII) that precede it, it differs in some significant ways. In an important departure from other films of the same period depicting "the good war," while the pre-beach-landing boat scenes play on audiences' generic expectations and are quite similar to their equivalent scenes in *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, and *The Thin Red Line*, the actual landing scenes are quite different; pre-landing, the men, and arguably the viewers too (especially ones who have seen the other aforementioned combat films), brace themselves for a bloody and chaotic landing, but when the soldiers in *The Pacific* reach the beach, there's no running and shooting mayhem, no gory carnage, only men sitting around casually on the beach, joined by the confused new arrivals standing agape. Arguably, this scene plays upon and violates the expectations of viewers who have seen the earlier films and miniseries and are anticipating a verisimilitudinous blood-bath *a-la Saving Private Ryan* upon landing, so, much like the newly arrived soldiers, viewers too are simply confused. This cinematic trick, among others, strongly links the viewer's perspective with the American soldiers whom they have been following throughout.

Audience sympathy and identification is further inclined towards the Americans by the type of hierarchical language used throughout the film. As with other films of the genre examined herein, verbal racism is used heavily towards the Japanese 'enemy Other.' When the soldiers are about to engage in direct combat with the Japanese, their commanding officer's incredibly racist rant only reinforces this self-consolidating Other binary: "those slant eyed monkeys used that island and its airfield to kill us. We will yank the surviving Japs out of their shit-filled holes by their yellow balls. They'll go round-eyed when the first American plane lands on their airfield." While a sympathetic reading might see this scene as a criticism of this type of racist language and attitude, the troops' extremely enthusiastic response suggests that this speech

is a necessary patriotism-inspiring one that serves to dehumanize the Japanese enemy Other in order to ensure the consolidation and preservation of the American self. The American soldiers' behaviour towards their enemy Other throughout the miniseries also reinforces the effect that this type of 'inspirational' speech can have on soldiers' conduct towards enemy Others.

The binary construction of sympathetic Americans versus barbaric Japanese is further reinforced when the marching American troops come across some dead American soldiers tied to trees with their pants cut open and genitals and eyes bloodied, followed by a straight cut to several shocked and horrified reaction shots of the young American soldiers who are perhaps just realizing the stakes of war, or at least what they might be in for if they're caught by the Japanese. Such a sequence constructs the Japanese as brutal and barbaric, and encourages the viewers to identify with the victimized and vulnerable American men whose point of view they literally share because of the camera's shot/reverse-shot perspective. It is additionally significant that this first scene of brutal violence be attributed to the hereto faceless Japanese enemy Other, solidifying the ruthlessness of the enemy Other; this scene also therefore serves to justify or at least motivate any future scenes of American violence or brutality, constructing it as justifiable retribution.

While the Japanese are the first to have brutal torture attributed to them, the American soldiers are not immune from appearing barbaric; they too, not just their commanding officers, use virulently racist language and behaviour towards the Japanese enemy Other, saying things like "Let the little yellow bastards come." Worse still, a group of American soldiers taunts/tortures a Japanese survivor of a gunfight by shooting around his feet, forcing him to run and "dance" before repeatedly shooting him non-fatally; finally, one of the main characters, Leckie, played by James Badge Dale, intervenes by mercifully shooting the Japanese survivor in

the heart to end his suffering. One of the other soldiers responds to Leckie's mercy-killing dejectedly "Aww what'd you do that for?" disappointed that Leckie has spoiled their sadistic fun. This horrific behaviour towards Japanese prisoners is repeated in the fourth episode of the series when the group that Leckie is a part of comes upon a camp of sick and wounded Japanese, killing all that they find; one young marine even slowly and graphically strangles a man by hand, smiling uncertainly at Leckie, as if seeking approval, reassurance, or accolades for what he's done. Importantly, though, as previously noted, all of these scenes of needlessly cruel behaviour on the part of American soldiers occur *after* the initial gauntlet of the mutilated American soldiers in the jungle, therefore appearing like explicable (if not acceptable) reprisal, torture for torture, an eye for an eye.

Significantly, too, sympathy for Americans is maintained in the face of such brutality by the fact that all of the American characters who commit these needlessly malicious acts of violence are not main characters whose back-stories the viewers share in. The main characters are those like Leckie, who seem deeply disturbed by (and sometimes intervene to prevent) their fellow soldiers' barbarity, implying that Americans are mostly good and moral, it's just a few bad apples with a lack of self control or who have been driven to these acts by the violence they've witnessed at the hands of the Japanese. This vicious behaviour towards Japanese prisoners/survivors is also seemingly justified by reinforcing the stereotypical notion that East Asian enemies are somehow more surreptitious than enemy Others of other races.[146] This stereotype is reinforced in the second installment of this miniseries when one character blurts: "Jesus Christ – the fuckers really are sneaky," in reference to Japanese soldiers. This sneakiness and duplicity is reinforced in the penultimate episode when the Japanese are depicted as using civilian women (who have seemingly been forced to wear suicide vests) and their children as a

distraction to allow the Japanese forces to sneak up on the Americans (with a sniper and machine

gun) while the Americans attempt to assist the imperiled civilians (more white men saving non-

white women from nonwhite men). In all, the largely faceless Japanese enemy Other appears as a

brutal, sneaky aggressor whose inhuman behaviour is only repaid in kind by a few out-of-control

American soldiers whose cruelty is excused by the brutality they've been forced to witness and

whose own behaviour is kept in check by those 'good' American soldiers like Leckie who

manage to keep it together and reign-in fellow soldiers' viciousness in the face of so much

violence. In such a formulation, the us/them binary with Americans at the top of the racial

hierarchy remains unchanged, and violence comes across as a necessary evil.

The brutality depicted in this miniseries is not limited to living soldiers but, as

foreshadowed at the beginning in the scene in which the American soldiers' bodies are found

tied to trees and mutilated, it extends to theft and desecration of bodies. The taking of souvenirs

is another generic element that crosses over the cycles from the period studied herein and across

the genre as a whole. Where in films about the Westerly part of the war soldiers are mostly

depicted as stealing weapons from enemy prisoners and corpses (e.g. the German Luger is a

prized find in many WWII-era films), in *The Pacific* (while weapons are taken), more personal

souvenirs are taken as well; in a less-extreme case, Leckie burns a photograph of a woman

(presumably a loved-one) that he finds in a dead man's notebook, and gets into a physical fight

with a commanding officer over a wooden box/chest he has taken from an abandoned Japanese

camp. In perhaps the most dehumanizing example of souvenir-taking though, a soldier from the

same unit as Eugene Sledge (one of the other main characters, played by Joseph Mazzello)

repeatedly cuts the gold teeth out of the heads of perished Japanese soldiers, and yet another

soldier later horrifically attempts to remove the teeth from a wounded Japanese soldier who

hasn't even died yet. Enemy Others here then are so insignificant in the eyes of the Americans that they can be stolen from (the soldiers feeling entitled enough to the stolen goods to get in physical fights over them), and their corpses and dying bodies can be brutalized without consequence.

Arguably the dehumanizing language used throughout to refer to this racially Othered enemy is a contributing factor in the behaviour and allows such atrocities to seem less barbaric. When Eugene wonders aloud why the Japanese don't just surrender when it is clear they are outnumbered and outgunned, a fellow soldier retorts: "'cause they're Japs. We're going to have to root them out one by one. Fuckin' rats." Again, like the racist language in other combat films, its use here reinforces dehumanizing stereotypes, promoting the idea that the Japanese enemy Other is a persistent, animalistic vermin, and helping to recuperate the American image in contrast by implying that the Americans are just doing what they have to do to eliminate this problem. The American self has a low-bar to clear when consolidating itself against an enemy Other that isn't even human (rats). Americans are the good and the just because they are helping rid the world of its 'rats.' The 'universality' and the 'justness' of this American cause are reinforced in the sixth installment of *The Pacific* when a character notes in voiceover "History is full of wars, fought for a hundred reasons. But this war, our war, I want to believe, I have to believe, … every man that is wounded, every man that I lose, that it's all worth it because our cause is just." Such a statement reinforces the deeply embedded ideology that WWII was "the good," because morally just, war, and implies that Americans are in the right and, by logical extension, that the Japanese are in the wrong; such a statement also upholds the idea that war is a part of history and therefore destined to continue in the future, a self-fulfilling prophesy when

combat films perpetuate the types of racial/ethnic/national hierarchies that are the root or basis for so many international conflicts.

Towards the end of the miniseries, the other stereotypical side of the flat Other image of the Japanese soldier (the dangerous, venerable opponent because focused, driven, brutal, and unafraid of death stereotype) is revealed and buttressed in a scene between main character John Basilone, played by Jon Seda, and a new recruit he's training. When the rookie frustratedly whines: "I'm so sick of this. I just want to get out there and slap a Jap" Basilone quickly and angrily retorts:

> That's what the enemy is to you, huh? A fucking buck-toothed cartoon dreamed up by some asshole on Madison Avenue to sell soap? Well let me tell you something: The Jap I know, the Japanese soldier, he has been at war since you were in fuckin' diapers! He's a combat veteran, an expert with his weapon; he can live off of maggoty rice and muddy water for weeks and endure misery that you couldn't even dream of! The Japanese soldier doesn't care if he gets killed as long as he kills you. Now you can call them whatever you want, but never, ever, fail to respect their desire to put you and your buddies in an early grave. IS THAT CLEAR?! [caps added to clarify emphasis in original]

In this formulation, then, the Japanese soldier is both dehumanized through unquestioned racism in thought, speech, and behaviour, and simultaneously constructed as a sneaky, dangerous super-soldier who would rather die than surrender, a fighting machine bent on killing American soldiers at all costs. While not everyone is willing to tolerate racist behaviour (for example, a nameless marine makes monkey noise as he walks by a Japanese P.O.W., and an altercation with a fellow soldier who takes exception ensues, and when Eugene pushes a P.O.W. his superior tells him: "If you ever hit another Japanese prisoner, I'll have you courts martialled"), the conflict still very much requires the dehumanization of the enemy Other, and at the very least requires the us/them binary to function coherently, with Americans on top as the main architects of the narrative with whom the audience identifies and sympathizes.

In all, while there are many interactions with the Japanese enemy Other in this miniseries, and some seem aimed to counteract racist portrayals of Japanese soldiers, the overwhelming majority of the miniseries is focused on the white American soldiers – their experiences of war, their lives back home – and the lasting impression left by the miniseries is of a one-dimensional Japanese character-type who is, on the one hand, sneaky, deceptive, and brutally dangerous, but on the other hand a subhuman species, not worthy of any respect or consideration, a "them" that is inherently against and therefore inferior to "us" and deserving of any sort of violence or punishment the American soldiers might inflict. Indeed, of the biggest act of mass violence the Americans committed against the Japanese during WWII there is only off-hand mention in the miniseries of "a bomb dropped on the mainland" with a little hint of its significance: "No, this one's different – vaporized an entire city… Killed a lot of Japs" before talk returns to banal topics of concern to the American soldiers, such as the fact that the mess hall is serving Coke and steaks tonight and that they "might even get a movie." The casual drop (pardon the pun) of the bomb topic into conversation and the easy shift back to chatter about dinner and entertainment serves to massively minimize and downplay the significance of the atomic bomb(s) in history, keeping the focus on the American soldiers and their domestic-type activities.

A voiceover narration in an early episode (Part Two) of *The Pacific* almost explicitly addresses the self-consolidating Other and perhaps best encapsulates an average viewer's experience with the miniseries: "we have met the enemy and yet learned nothing about him, but I have learned something of myself." While an optimistic view of the miniseries might read this as a self-reflexive criticism of the Hollywood combat genre's tendency to be so American-centric, the fact that the rest of the miniseries so overwhelmingly participates in many of the same representational patterns that make the genre so problematic suggests instead that the miniseries

might instead just reinforce that understanding "the enemy" is not really important, but gaining a better understanding of Americans is. Too, because of the "based on true events" nature of the narrative, viewers might come away feeling as though they have gained some sort of understanding or mastery of this multifaceted piece of history when really they haven't learned anything about the Other at all, only had simple racist stereotypes and ideologies about the 'good' American war reinforced; this concept harkens back to Baudrillard and Debord's notion that these genre films are all just spectacle and simulation anyway, the 'real' long since having been covered over to the point of being effaced altogether.[147] So while the disgusting acts perpetrated on Japanese soldiers are certainly not lauded and perhaps even condemned by the reactions of American soldiers in the miniseries, the overall identification is still only encouraged and possible with white American soldiers; no Japanese character in the miniseries has a name, let alone enough depth to sustain the kind of attachment necessary for viewer identification. The relative unimportance of Japanese figures (it is hard to even use the word characters) confirms their existence as mere screens to reflect/consolidate the importance and dominance of the superior American self.

Later Period Cycle: *The Hurt Locker, Generation Kill*

While *The Pacific*'s release date locates it in the most recent cycle of combat films in the period studied herein, its connection to the earlier *Band of Brothers* not only in terms of content but also in terms of production and creative input as well as its treatment of the enemy Other means it has much more in common with the middle, regressive period in many ways. While because of its link to *Band of Brothers* the miniseries might seem more progressive (like the duo created by *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* as examined previously), it actually has much more in common with the middle-period, WWII-nostalgic films in its status-

quo/regressive racial ideologies than it does with more progressive or at least experimental early-period films (like *Three Kings*) or the later period films with which it is more closely temporally related. Unlike the fairly stark us/them binary depiction in *The Pacific*, films from the more recent cycle of the genre (2005-2010) tend to be less overtly racist, and more ambivalent about their depiction of both enemy and civilian Others, and American soldiers.

Rather than sweep racial issues between soldiers under the rug to promote internal racial unity against an external racialized enemy Other, as in *We Were Soldiers*, or ignore potential internal racial tensions altogether, as in *Black Hawk Down*, the most recent iterations of combat films (much like the earlier *Three Kings*), seems content to have the soldiers work these issues out onscreen. Early in *The Hurt Locker*, for example, white crew member, Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty), and black crew member Sergeant JT Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) joke that they're going to start a grass business in the desert. This joke in itself is problematic enough given the history of British and American colonialism – attempts to make "foreign" countries more familiar by importing non-native species of flora and fauna – it is made worse still when white character Eldridge says he's going to sell the grass, and the black Sanborn can cut it. It's not clear who is laughing at this racially loaded joke; Sanborn doesn't seem to find it offensive, laughing and saying "I like that," and perhaps it wasn't meant to be offensive, since Eldridge also says: "We'll call it Sanborn and sons," implying that Sanborn would be the elder, the boss, and Eldridge would, therefore, be his subordinate, his figurative son in the equation (not only placing himself lower in the age-implied hierarchy but also suggesting a close kin relationship). Sanborn, unfazed, even continues the joke by seconding: "How about you sell it and I fertilize it." Any racial tension that may have arisen from the exchange is soon trumped by the tension created by possible enemy activity spotted by Eldridge at a nearby butcher's shop. Much like in

Basinger's findings in her study of WWII combat films,[148] in this moment, Eldridge and Sanborn are automatically on the same team despite their racial differences because they band together against an even more racially/nationally different enemy Other. As in many other films of the genre, a common (usually racialized) enemy Other allows American servicemen to paper over their own racial differences and consolidate their selves without disrupting the 'us/them' binary upon which so much racism still rests.

There is also a great deal of tension, some of it racial, between Sanborn and main character Sergeant First Class William James (played by Jeremy Renner); Sanborn calls James white trash and they later get in a fist-fight during which, at one point, James "rides" Sanborn like a bull – more racially loaded behaviour that goes un-discussed if not unacknowledged. The racial dynamics of this small bomb-squad unit are further complicated later in the film when Eldridge and Sanborn bond over contemplating 'accidentally' killing James, the newest member and lone-wolf of the group. In light of the aforementioned scene in which Eldridge and Sanborn overcome their racial difference because of their shared desire to eliminate the threat of the racialized enemy Other, this bonding over their desire to eliminate their white team-leader, James, oddly places him in the position of enemy 'Other,' a dynamic explored at much greater length in the following chapter. Clearly there is much more internal racial ambivalence in this film than in any other examined heretofore,[149] setting it apart from the middle period films especially, where the hierarchy of American self vs. enemy Other is much more distinct.

As in earlier cycles and all films from the period, in this later cycle of combat films the enemy Other is subject to racial slurs, but the use of these terms is much less prevalent than in earlier films; the term "Hajji" is used in a stand-off between the bomb squad at the centre of the narrative and a taxi driver. But when the taxi driver has a gun put to his head and is forcibly

removed from his vehicle and pushed to the ground, one of the American soldiers reacts to the violence bitterly: "Well if he wasn't an insurgent he sure the hell is now," suggesting America and Americans might be at least somewhat deserving (because of their brute force and ignorance) of the malice directed towards them by terrorists. Again, in no other film examined herein has there been such an overt concession to or understanding of the enemy Other's motivation for violence against Americans.

The film's visuals are also somewhat ambivalent; there are many shots throughout the film of Iraqis watching the American bomb-squad at work from their windows. These shots reinforce the idea that in this conflict it is often unclear who is an aggressor, and who is just a civilian. As such, these scenes can suggest complicity or even guilt on the part of the Iraqi spectators: are these watchers just curious civilians, or are they actually bomb-detonators, just waiting for the right moment to inflict the maximum amount of harm? These shots could also simply serve to illustrate the pressure on these soldiers as people are constantly watching them do their jobs; they certainly cause tension for the viewer either way. Finally, these shots can also raise the issue that this American presence is unwelcome and unnecessary and therefore might not achieve the results the U.S. is/was hoping for – none of these spectators ever appear impressed, relieved, or grateful. Perhaps the first option is the preferred reading given that at one diffusion-site these fears are literally iterated when Sanborn explicitly states how nervous he is because there are large numbers of Iraqi people watching. On the other hand, these types of scenes reinforce the racial tension created by the stereotypical fear that any Arab onlooker is a potential terrorist threat.[150] The duplicitous and barbaric lengths that the insurgents are willing to go to are further reinforced by a later incident in which the dead body of a young boy whom James had befriended earlier in the film is used as a weapon. James in particular, but all of the

other men too, are upset by this "body bomb" in which an explosive device is sewn into the young boy's body. So in this film, unlike many of its predecessors, while the representation of the enemy Other is rather ambivalent, the representation of the American soldiers is also quite ambivalent. While there still aren't many Iraqi characters with depth in *The Hurt Locker*, the American characters with depth don't necessarily come across any better in the end, and viewers may be left feeling ambivalent towards all characters, setting it apart even from early-period films (like *Three Kings* in which while the depictions of enemy Others are somewhat ambivalent); regardless, Americans are still the heroes and the ones with whom audiences are encouraged to follow and celebrate in their post-war lives.

Like *The Hurt Locker*, HBO's miniseries *Generation Kill* is similarly ambivalent about the representation of the moral quality of the soldiers it focuses on. Like other films of its cycle,[151] *Generation Kill* is based on true-life accounts of the U.S. Marine 1st Reconnaissance Battalion's experiences spearheading the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as reported by embedded journalist Evan 'Scribe' Wright, played in the series by Lee Tergesen, and is much more open (than middle-period films) about the racist language and stereotypes used by the soldiers it follows; as in other films from the early and recent cycle (e.g. *Three Kings* and *Jarhead* respectively), the term 'Hajji' is used regularly: in the first episode one of the soldiers declares excitedly: "[We] smoked them hajjis!" and perhaps most disturbingly, in the final episode another says: "dead hajji smell – that shit gets me hard" (disturbingly conflating sex and violence as so often happens in this genre). Racial slurs and stereotypes are not only restricted for use towards the enemy Other; another soldier speaks derogatorily about an Asian woman whose "eyes were so slanty you could blindfold her with a piece of dental floss." Like the Japanese enemy being described as 'rats' in *The Pacific* (and various other racialized enemy Others being

dehumanized by comparison to other animals and vermin throughout the combat genre), the soldiers in *Generation Kill* also use vermin metaphors to describe their dehumanized enemy others: "We've kicked the hornet's nest now we better be ready to kill all the fucking hornets," and make religious and sexual innuendos that reinforce stereotypes about the cultural differences of enemy Others: "It's lack of pussy that fucks countries up." The soldiers also express a need to assert their American masculine dominance in and through encounters with the enemy Other and their frustration at not initially being able to do so: "Our first contact with armed Iraqis and we wave at 'em like bitches." These sorts of comparisons and statements of course recall the self-consolidating Other behind so many of the genre's films.

But as with the other films about conflicts in Vietnam and the Middle East, *Generation Kill* reinforces the idea that it's not always clear whether an "armed Iraqi" is an insurgent or just a civilian. In a speech from the commanding officer about going to war in a country with a lot of civilians, the C.O. tells them they're not sure whether the people shooting at them are going to be in uniform or not: "We don't want to kill civilians – that will turn the population against us – and we will lose the war. Bottom line, if you fire a shot to save yourself or your unit, you've done the right thing;" the take-away here is that it's not that the American military cares about killing civilians, it's that doing so will lose them the war – *that's* the problem with it, the loss of the war, not the loss of innocent life. So the soldiers are receiving messages that not only dehumanize the enemy Other by comparing them to hornets, but also dehumanize them by suggesting that their lives don't matter individually in as much as they do as a "population" whose support they need in order to win the war. As with so many other films of the genre, what ultimately matters is American lives and military objectives.

Such a cavalier attitude towards the lives of civilian Others is reflected in the continuously loosening rules of engagement as the American forces move further into hostile territory: first, Americans are only permitted to shoot Iraqis with guns; then, they are permitted to shoot anyone who acts aggressively, and at one point, they are even authorized to "shoot anything that moves." The ambivalence about the importance of Others' lives persists when in the third episode Trombley, played by Billy Lush, (only somewhat accidentally) shoots an unarmed, non-combatant Iraqi child who subsequently dies from the wounds. Their commanding officer's response works to somewhat revise the earlier cavalier position about Iraqi lives: "We are American – we must be sure that if we fire, we are threatened. We need to remember that these are people too. We need to look past the huts and the camels and the different clothes and remember that they are people too, just like us. We didn't come here to fuck up their way of life." Finally, the upper levels of command, while still reinforcing stereotypes about the Others whose country the Americans are invading (stereotypes firmly rooted in and upholding the self-consolidating Other so deeply embedded in the genre), now explicitly acknowledge the human-ness of the enemy and civilian Other, and the necessity of not disrupting their lives, however different those lives may be. So again, like in some early-period films (e.g. *Three Kings* and *The Thin Red Line*) and other recent films of the same cycle (e.g. *Jarhead*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, and *The Hurt Locker*), where enemy and civilian Others are portrayed at least ambivalently, with some attempts at humanization, *Generation Kill* gestures towards a much less flat and "monolithic third world Other" than some more regressive WWII-nostalgic texts like *The Pacific* and *Pearl Harbor*. Despite these more nuanced representations, American military men remain the central focus of the miniseries, the primary architects of the narrative, and the ones with whom the audience is encouraged to identify.

As in *The Hurt Locker* from the same cycle, ambivalence persists in the representation of American characters too. While the humanity and humanness of the American military is troubled by the fast-and-loose nature of the ever-changing rules of engagement and by Trombley's reckless/murderous actions, America's humane-ness is then reinforced by the atypically emotional reaction of main character Sgt. Brad "Iceman" Colbert, played by Alexander Skarsgård; while Colbert has a reputation for remaining detached, as evidenced by his nickname, Sgt. Antonio "Poke" Espera (played by Jon Huertas) perceptively declares that Colbert is "losing it" because Trombley "accidentally, on purpose tried to kill a Hajji." So again, much like in *The Pacific*, while there are some 'bad' Americans who act brutally towards enemy and civilian Others, the miniseries implies that most Americans, at least the main characters, the ones that the viewer is encouraged to identify with, are "good" in that they are deeply upset by the bad behaviour of their fellow American soldiers. This type of framework again reinforces the moral fibre of the American military and aligns the viewers' sympathies more so with the white American military protagonist's emotional trauma rather than with the civilian Other who was shot and killed (or his family); in the hierarchy of significance, white Americans still come out on top.

In another layer of differentiation of Others which helps combat a monolithic representation of third world Others, this series draws distinctions between the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the series progresses, it becomes clear that many of the soldiers in this unit were also involved in military activities in Afghanistan and they speak often, almost nostalgically, about it, which serves to nuance the portrayal of the enemy Other far more so than in many other Hollywood combat films studied herein (perhaps with exception of some of the earliest films in the period such as *Three Kings*). Early in the series (episode two), Sgt. Antonio

"Poke" Espera says: "I'm so ashamed. Back in Afghanistan we didn't leave a speck of Americana behind" when he sees American soldiers defecating on Iraqi lawns. In the third episode another soldier ruminates: "Remember when they would come out and wave at us in Afghanistan?" in response to the significantly less welcome greetings they receive in Iraq. Finally, in episode five, someone states ruefully: "This sure ain't Afghanistan" after which all of the men nostalgically "cheers" to Afghanistan, suggesting that this conflict is much less desirable.

So while this differentiation between Afghanistan and Iraq is a welcome change in that it contests a monolithic enemy Other often found in Hollywood combat films where conflicts are interchangeable (think of the voiceover from *The Pacific*: "history is full of wars, fought for a hundred reasons" or the grizzled veteran from *Jarhead* who contends: "All wars are different all wars are the same")[152] and where any racialized Other is an enemy Other and they are all the same, this repeated contrast between Iraq and Afghanistan also serves to construct a binary, two different Others, and also two different American interventions. In this formulation, the Afghani Other is pleasant and welcoming (the noble savage or, in Spivak's formulation, the brown person being saved from brown men by white men), and the American soldier is paternalistic (practicing a 'take only pictures, leave only footprints'-type policy), and this is the formulation that the soldiers seem to prefer in contrast to their experiences in Iraq. This binary formulation in a way then just reinforces the self-consolidating Other, suggesting that the American soldiers' bad behaviour (defecating on lawns) is explained or excused by the lack of warm welcome on the part of the enemy and civilian Others. In Afghanistan the colonized need to be saved by the colonizer, constructing the American military as the paternal saviours, and in Iraq the unruly malcontents are 'put in their place' by American military men shitting on their lawns.

In perhaps the most overt confrontation of race and racial issues within the American

military of any film studied herein, there is also a great deal of conversation in *Generation Kill*

about Latino soldier Poke's ethnic identification and about how he seems to be whatever race is

'cool' at the moment, but Poke's own words and attitude seem to be the most racist of all. In

episode two, he tells a story about how being from outside of LA, he's witnessed gang violence

which has caused him to decide to hang out only with white people "because they don't stab

people with screwdrivers." In the fourth episode he reiterates that he doesn't hang out with

Mexicans because they scare him: "They have $20,000 stereos and guns and whenever we go

into a liquor store, I'm afraid we're going to rob them." He also dispenses gendered and cross-

race 'hood truisms: "Women are always the fiercest – you gotta watch out for them – doesn't

matter if it's a black … from South central or a rich bitch from Beverly Hills – they'll come at

you screaming – even if you have guns. They think they're protected." Despite his seemingly all-

encompassing racism, Poke is also depicted as one of the most racially sensitive soldiers,

becoming very upset about the American military unit of which he's a part unnecessarily

shooting people at a roadblock (presumably because of language barrier – the driver doesn't

seem to understand that he is being told to stop). Along similar lines, when Colbert thanks him

for his work, Tony/Poke again reveals his discomfort with the violence of the war in his

response: "Do you realize what we've done here? The shit that we've done, the people we've

killed? We did that back home, we'd be going to prison." Colbert makes light of these concerns,

returning to the running joke of Poke's ethnicity: "You're thinking like a Mexican again… back

home they'll be laying on medals." Poke does display a great deal of sensitivity to the death of

Iraqi people (as does Colbert in other scenes), and his levity and racial jokes seem to buoy the

spirits of the other soldiers and add a lighter tone to the series as a whole. These jokes are not

only made at the expense of Mexicans either; in the seventh and final episode Poke quips: "21 days to invade a whole country. Gotta give it to white people." This joke might act as a synecdoche for the film's message as a whole, a tongue-in-cheek critique not just of the American military initiative in Iraq, but for white American neo-colonialism as a whole. This reflexivity about the American military's role in Iraq is quite refreshing and might very well be the most overt of the entire genre.

While all of the films examined herein, especially since all are based on actual accounts of soldiers' wartime and post-wartime experiences, may in some ways reflect the actual circumstances of American soldiers' encounters with enemy and civilian Others and the racial dynamics within the U.S. Armed Forces, these highly racially charged on-screen representations are filtered through at least two lenses/perspectives: that of the soldiers themselves and that of the filmmakers; in the case of a miniseries like *Generation Kill*, representations even pass through a third lens in that the soldiers' experiences are recorded by and therefore filtered through a journalist's perspective too. So while these representations may be 'true' in that they are based on actual events, they are always inevitably filtered through a dominant white American perspective given their Hollywood production. These representations, therefore, and especially given their truth claims (based on actual events/testimony/journalistic coverage etc.) inevitably shape viewers' understandings of the people depicted onscreen, and these attitudes and ideas can have concrete consequences for racialized people in America and around the world. Further discussion of the very real life consequences of these racial representations will be undertaken in the conclusions of the final chapter.[153]

Chapter 5

The Soft body Counterpart to Vietnam's Hard Bodies and the Newer, 'Softer' Masculinity in Post Gulf-War Combat Films: *The Thin Red Line*, *The Patriot*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *Generation Kill*

While, as examined in the previous chapter, 'foreign' soldiers and civilians are often the most obvious target for Othering in Hollywood combat films, sometimes the enemy that is 'Othered' comes from within the American military, as revealed in this chapter. The films released in the roughly ten to fifteen years after the last American troops were withdrawn from Vietnam (1975-1989) have been covered in great detail by a number of scholars,[154] and a major shift in representations of masculinity in combat films took place in this period.[155] In studying contemporary combat films, it is important to note the new patterns established in this post-Vietnam period to determine what, if anything, has changed since this paradigm-shift in representations. One of the most notable trends of the Vietnam combat film and other action/adventure films of the time explored by Susan Jeffords among others is the 'hard body' archetype.[156] Most if not all of the films released in the ten years after the end of the Vietnam War feature a version of this strong, sculpted, muscled male body. One of the most pronounced and oft cited examples of this archetype is Sylvester Stallone's eponymous character from the *Rambo* films. Less extreme examples of this body type can be found throughout other Vietnam combat films and beyond as in popular action film franchises of the 1980s such as *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon*.

Another fascinating and crucial, but hereto unrecognized or at least un-examined figure is what I term the 'soft body counterpart' to Vietnam films' hard bodied leads, examples of which I identify herein in most, if not all, of the major Hollywood combat films about Vietnam; the hard body noted by scholars writing about Vietnam films is almost always accompanied by a soft

body that goes unidentified or at least unexamined by these same scholars. I argue that this soft body *must* be and is always either re-assimilated or violently rejected in the Vietnam films, but that a seemingly greater tolerance for 'softness' emerges in the Post-Gulf War films. In these films, the bodies are still mostly hard, but the qualities that make a man a good leader and soldier, or at least worthy of a starring narrative role are a lot 'softer' – possessing internal mental or emotional intelligence in early films (*The Thin Red Line*), family values and brotherly love in the regressive period (*The Patriot*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Black Hawk Down*), and self-awareness or introspection in the later cycle (in *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker* and *Generation Kill*). However, in each case, these 'softer' elements must never get in the way of one's soldiering, must never become a threat to the unity of the military establishment/institution and by extension the nation (if they do, they must be fixed or r/ejected as in the Vietnam films).

This chapter examines the soft body counterpart as it emerged in the post-Vietnam-era period of combat films and traces its implications for masculinity, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and nationality into the more recent cycle of post Gulf-War Hollywood combat films, where the tension between the docile soldierly body and the individualistic hard body causes a seemingly internal or psychologically 'softer' masculinity, but one that ultimately upholds the same ideological function as the previous cycle's hard bodies. In essence, while the masculinity may seem to 'soften' (as Jeffords argues of 1980s hard-bodies seeming to 'soften' in the early 1990s), this shift towards a 'softer' masculinity only serves to re-package the same conservative ideological family values that undergird the (in this case combat) genre as a whole rather than actually signaling any kind of shift in ideology. Before examining the films themselves, examining previous work on masculinity and the body is crucial to understanding the concept of

the docile body inherent in soldiering, the concept of the hard body, and the ways in which these men's bodies are represented and linked to the process of unity and nation-building.

<u>Foucault and the Docile Body</u>

The army is one of the main locations of discipline Foucault explores along with the school, the monastery, the hospital, and the prison in *Discipline and Punish*; it is no accident that Foucault begins his chapter on docile bodies with an examination of the soldier, writing that the soldier of the seventeenth century was more "natural" than man-made: "the soldier was someone who could be recognized from afar; he bore certain signs: the natural signs of his strength and his courage, the marks, too, of his pride; his body was the blazon of his strength and valour" (135). It is also no surprise that a masculine 'hard body' is the preferred archetype for a soldier in Foucault's description of such a "natural" soldier: "'The signs for recognizing those most suited to this profession are a lively, alert manner, an erect head, a taut stomach, broad shoulders, long arms, strong fingers, a small belly, thick thighs, slender legs, and dry feet, because a man of such a figure could not fail to be agile and strong'" (135). Foucault argues though that this focus on the "natural" shifted after the seventeenth century and notes that "by the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit" (135). And, of course, all of this forming and moulding, shaping and disciplining has to do with the body, "the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces" (136). While this type of discipline is not restricted solely to the military, it is telling that the first example Foucault gives of the disciplined body and the one to which he repeatedly returns is a military one.

It is here, with his example of the explicitly and unquestionably male soldier, that Foucault develops the concept of a docile body: "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (136). Docility is different from slavery, service, etc., argues Foucault, because it's not exactly forced or coerced, and it is "directed not only at the growth of its [the body's] skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and" visa versa (137-8). Thus, the more obedient one is to the training and discipline systems of the military (or whichever other institution of which one is a part), the better a soldier (or student or patient etc.) one becomes, and visa versa. The more one conforms, the better one is, and the better one is, the more one is conforming. In short, the docile body is well-trained and therefore somewhat automated and self-regulating in its behaviour. This type of discipline also, argues Foucault, "defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (138) over which others may have a hold (or control). This definition of a docile body certainly applies well to military bodies, but could also, one might cynically argue, apply to those audience members who watch combat films unthinkingly or uncritically and whose thoughts and feelings on the subject of combat are conditioned to the practice of film-going or film-viewing and are therefore 'docile' and subject to the ideologies promoted by the films they see.

The very detailed and minute movements and operations of the body are particularly important to this concept of docility, because every one (movement) is subject to discipline. When speaking of military bodies, and military "*manoeuvre*," specifically rifle drills, Foucault writes: "over the whole surface of contact between the body and the object it handles, power is

introduced, fastening them to one another. It constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex" (153). Military bodies and weapons, therefore, become inextricably linked in this formulation (more on this link between body and weapon herein with regard to hard bodies); this intimate connection between body and weapon is perhaps part of the problem with returning soldiers explored in films from the later part of the period like *Jarhead* and *Stop Loss*. This type of discipline that Foucault describes becomes necessary in the military to ensure an efficient and loyal force. Again, while this type of discipline is certainly not limited to a military sphere (and Foucault examines it in a number of other arenas), it is certainly quite evident there, and this connection between body and weapon, disciplined movements and operations of the body, foreshadows Jeffords' description of the 1980s-90s hard body years later.

The military applicability of Foucault's theory continues when he emphasizes that "discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations" (146). The literal rank system of the military speaks to the spatial and hierarchical arrangement of which Foucault writes. The functioning of the individual soldier is part of the functioning of the group under this system of disciplined docility:

> a new demand appears to which discipline must respond: to construct a machine whose efficiency will be maximized by the concerted articulation of the elementary parts of which it is composed. Discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies, of extracting time from them and accumulating it, but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine. (164)

Indeed, military chains of command and unit structures are all about distribution of bodies for efficiency.

In this formulation, in order for the military machine to run smoothly and efficiently, all bodies must be docile: "the soldier whose body has been trained to function part by part for

particular operations must in turn form an element in a mechanism at another level" (164) such that the malfunctioning, disobedience or lack of conformity of one bodily unit compromises the functioning of the unit as a whole and must be fixed via an "intervention (of differentiation, correction, punishment, [or] elimination)" (160). And, of course, the American military has its own system of punishment outside of the regular rule of law and order such that any form of disobedience or lack of conformity that threatens the machine as a whole can be appropriately dealt with (either by punishment, re-disciplining the body, or elimination, death or ejection from the military unit). The fact that the American military system of justice actually takes precedence over the regular legal system in many cases is a testament to how serious this docility training and control is, and how much power the American military has in American society.

So while "the body is constituted as part of a multi-segmentary machine" (164), the machine doesn't just run itself; its

> carefully measured combination of forces requires a precise system of
> command. All the activity of the individual must be punctuated and sustained
> by injunctions whose efficacy rests on brevity and clarity; the order does not
> need to be explained or formulated; it must trigger off the required behaviour
> and that is enough ... it is a question not of understanding the injunction but
> of perceiving the signal and reacting to it immediately. (166)

Again, this description of docile bodies fits the military perfectly; soldiers must be able to react instantaneously and bodily to orders (even non-verbal) under threat of death. This type of training doesn't just not require thinking on the part of the docile body (soldier or even film-viewer), it requires the docile body to be conditioned to react without thinking. This type of docility functions based on a status quo, and might therefore be disrupted by changing mores or ideologies, and thus this system of conditioning functions best when nothing ever changes.

So while soldiers are clearly required to be docile bodies for the efficient functioning of the military machine, the hard bodies examined herein and identified by Jeffords in Vietnam

films and 1980s action films,[157] and that also come into play in different form in the Hollywood combat films examined herein, are slightly different in their relation to authority; they are much more individualistic than a typical docile body, and while often working to sustain a conservative law-and-order status quo, they almost always operate alone or at least somewhat outside the law. I argue that these inherent differences between a hard body and a docile body (both created by and for a system military/social/political trying to perpetuate itself) are an explanation for the internal conflict or growing 'softness' represented in post-Gulf War combat films.

What a Man's Gotta Do to Separate Self/Other

Antony Easthope's work in *What a Man's Gotta Do* is helpful here in understanding the individual mind within the hard body or the docile body. His work is in line with Foucault's in many ways, but is more specific and directed, as he uses psychoanalysis as developed by Freud and Lacan (Easthope 3-4) to examine various iterations of masculinity in popular culture. In the psychoanalytical frame that Easthope relies on, the ego is not innate but rather must be "developed. At first the infant cannot distinguish between itself and the outside world. Its 'I' is brought into existence as it comes to identify itself as inside and everything else as outside, the self being defined by what is other than the self" (40). In order for coherent functioning, and "to maintain and defend itself and the line between inside and outside the 'I' has two strategies, disavowal and denial" (40), where disavowal is pretending something in the outside world doesn't exist and denial is repressing internal threats. This self-consolidating process is the basis of much of the theoretical framework of the previous chapter, only here the self must consolidate against much more intimate Others (rather than external, enemy, Others), especially in a disciplined setting such as the military, rather than the external, enemy Others discussed in the previous chapter.

While not writing explicitly about the military, Easthope uses many military metaphors, writing: "the castle [of the Self] must be defended against hostile troops and treacherous members of the garrison" (40-1) and asserts that "the human ego identifies its unity above all in an image of the body as a unified whole and fears above all the image of the body in pieces" (41). Such statements reveal the deep applicability of these concepts to scenarios not just of personal conflict, but of national and international conflict as well. Perhaps the fear of the body in pieces of which Easthope writes is the reason men at war (or watching war movies) feel more of a need to cling to the masculine myth and violently reject/disavow that which does not conform to that hegemonic masculine ideal.

Indeed, aggressive conflict and the masculine ego are deeply linked under the masculine myth, according to Easthope's reading, because "for psychoanalysis, aggression is an effect of the ego and the ego's struggle to maintain itself" (41), and this is a near-constant struggle; despite and as a defense against the constant changes wrought by time, "the 'I' must persist as a continuing identity … find repetition and establish itself as a fixture" (42). Easthope argues that a "force so bound is all the more likely to explode into aggression against what is other than the self" (42). He continually asserts that "at present in the dominant myth the masculine ego is imagined as closing itself off completely, maintaining total defence. To be unified it must be masculine all the way through and so the feminine will always appear as something other or different and so a security risk … [and] when the feminine seems to have infiltrated within, … it threatens the whole castle and must be savagely suppressed" (42-3). This violent rejection of the feminine happens both between individuals (as in the violent ejection of those perceived as soft, feminine, and therefore Othered, as evidenced in many Vietnam films discussed further herein), but also on an individual level with hard-bodied soldiers whose disciplined docility (perceived as

'weak' or 'soft' because conditioned and controlled by external people or structures) is in conflict with their independence and hard body status.

Easthope argues that "defensive mastery [of the self] requires constant vigilance. The masculine ego must be watchful and it will also be anxious, and these effects are worked out very much in terms of sight and vision" (43). He links this phenomenon to visual media by arguing that "film and television can give the impression that the eye of the 'I' is outside," and that "this kind of visual dominance, seeing and knowing everything, comes from a particularly masculine perspective … to keep in sight means to keep under control" (43). This idea of sight as mastery relates back to notions from the previous chapter wherein viewers can come away from a combat film feeling as though they have gained some sort of understanding and therefore mastery over the situation, and control over the Others portrayed onscreen. This idea of mastery in relation to the masculine ego threads throughout Easthope's text, especially in relation to the body and the nation (43). At the bodily level, within "the masculine ego the body can be used to draw a defensive line between inside and outside … So long as there is very little fat, tensed muscle and tight sinew can give a hard, clear outline to the body. Flesh and bone can pass itself off as a kind of armor … A hard body will ensure there are no leakages across the edges between inner and outer worlds" (52). And, according to Easthope's framework, "the masculine ego must master everything. If the physical world on the outside can be overcome as nature, on the inside it may be dominated as the body, and an idea of the body" (51). That mastery of the self, the body, can eventually be translated into mastery over one's own nation and even other nations. But the ability to master also relies on docility and one's commitment to the military system of discipline which requires a giving over of the self to the system of command, and therefore somewhat of a loss of individuality. The conflicting impulses of self-control and docility can

cause problems at an individual level, and particularly within as strict a system of discipline as the military as examined with the 'soft-bodies' herein. But, as the combat films of the period reveal, soft-bodies can be and are always overcome (either re-assimilated or ejected from the military), and the masculine myth, along with all of the other racial, gendered and nationalist ideologies with which it is tied up, remain unchallenged and largely unchanged.

As noted, this mastery of the body is often linked to the 'eye' or the gaze; Easthope notes that "images of the perfect young male body return to the masculine gaze a flattering reflection of how he would like to see himself. So the pleasure of the usual representation of the masculine body is narcissistic. But these images of the hard, trained, disciplined body under rational control are not just there to be identified with – they are there to be looked at. They are styled for a masculine look in a particular kind of way" (53); Easthope argues that these hard male bodies, perfect physical specimens "are watching themselves in the same way they are being watched" (54), like in Bentham's/Foucault's panopticon,[158] and that "the masculine body is to be observed because it is under the eye of the father and wins his approval" (Easthope 54) or at least aims to win his approval. The gaze here is clearly male whether its one looking at oneself or being under the eye of the father. This to-be-looked-at-ness of the ideal masculine body can therefore create some homophobic panic too because while to-be-looked-at, the masculine hard body is *not* to be desired by other men: envied, maybe, but not desired sexually. In the sporting images that Easthope examines, and in the combat films examined herein,

> the most obvious aspect of these images of the body … is that they express aggression towards others. The hard outline co-operates with this in several ways. It provides the notion of controlled aggression and discipline, the body under a watchful eye, an eye which is the eye of the father of law. So aggression is legitimated. Then again the hard body disavows its vulnerability, as though every tendon and perfected movement were saying, 'It can't happen to me.' Partly, the defined outline contributes here since it

stresses the body as surface and conceals the weakness of the inside, or
rather, the insides. (54)

In this conception,[159] the hard body is not only an ideal to strive for, but also serves to legitimate

aggression towards others, thereby disavowing the possibility of harm to the male body

represented in the image.[160]

Easthope further links this type of representation to nationalism arguing that "this type of

nationalism is masculine in the way in which it marks such a hard line between inside and

outside … nationalism fits perfectly with the masculine ego and the masculine body, so that each

overlaps and confirms the other" (56). In his analysis of this type of masculine nationalism, he

describes its features:

> Obviously, 'they' are bad and 'we' are good; they are 'evil-minded' and we
> are well-intentioned; they are 'madmen', characterized by 'mental instability'
> while we are rational and 'look to our defences' while we 're-think' a balance
> of priorities. Reason, perfect vision and the rule of law ('legitimately') all go
> together. But it is not just that 'we' and 'they' are contrasted – it is rather that
> a really firm line is drawn between the two, a defended barrier, like the
> battlements around the self of the hard edges of the male body. 'We' are
> familiar, 'they' are foreign; 'we' are *inside*, 'they' are *outside*. In this version
> of nationalism, friend and foe, at home and abroad, are superimposed on an
> idea of the masculine ego and its other, everything outside that threatens it
> (56)

While Easthope's analysis is actually written based on a news article about Britain, its

fundamentals also apply indisputably well to the combat films at the heart of this study. A very

hard line must be drawn between self and Other during wartime, and any threat to the unity of

the 'self', whether at the individual level, or within the military unit, must either be reconciled to

the self or aggressively Othered. Easthope, therefore contends that "'We/they' and the metaphors

call on the reader to identify with a patriotism that is implicitly masculine" (57) and suggest to

the reader that "If I am masculine I am at one with the nation" (57). This also means that

"defence of the realm means defence of the masculine ego" and that such an ego, by "mastering

the outside world through nature and the inner world through the body, … can hope to master others through the idea of nation" (57). In essence, nationalism is so deeply linked to the masculine ego such that one supports and reinforces the other; the entire combat genre, therefore, serves to reinforce traditional masculine dominance and all of the other ideological 'norms' that go along with it. This chapter examines the disastrous consequences for military men who do not conform to or buttress the masculine myth within the genre.

Easthope also briefly links these ideas to the realm of combat itself, arguing that "combat exercises a profound attraction to the masculine imagination, whether in fictional or documentary form" (64) and that "Whatever real war may be like, its fictional version is made up of three components" (64); one of the most important of these three is disavowal: in combat "the enemy represent a threat from the outside, a fact which can be defended against by disavowal, pretending it doesn't exist or is not as bad as it seems. The castle of the masculine ego is much more deeply committed to defence through disavowal. From it issues a sense of invulnerability – 'It can't happen to me'" (Easthope 65). Also linked to this defence of self for Easthope is the aforementioned "masculine ego's desire for mastery. Partly this is achieved through knowledge … [and] partly it is achieved through mastery of the body" (65). It is this "bodily aptitude" that enables the soldier, for example, to complete many physically challenging tasks, "And throughout the combat sequences the narcissistic pleasures of the ego issue in aggressive violence. Energy bound to make up the 'I' is released against everything that appears to attack it. The unity of the body is [re]affirmed when the body of the other is destroyed, as though its motto in killing and mutilating were, 'I am everything so you are nothing – earth, a piece of shit, a dead body, a body I master by making dead'" (Easthope 65). In this way, the violence of combat is almost therefore required for the maintenance of the self's boundaries, its

intactness. Typically in combat this energy can be released against the enemy Other, as examined

in the previous chapter, but in some cases, the intactness of the internal 'I/we/us' of the

American military must be solidified by the rejection of any member that "that appears to attack

it" (Easthope 65), and sometimes that threat comes from within rather than from outside.

This type of masculine narcissism also requires a certain legitimization of the male bond,

however, because of the closeness between soldiers:

> In the dominant versions of men at war, men are permitted to behave in ways
> that would not be allowed elsewhere, caressing and holding each other,
> comforting and weeping together, admitting their love. The pain of war is the
> price paid for the way it expresses the male bond. War's suffering is a kind
> of punishment for the release of homosexual desire and male femininity that
> only war allows. In this special form the male bond is fully legitimated.
> (Easthope 66)

So war is an extraordinary space and place where masculine bonding is perfected, but the male

femininity permissible in such a scenario is finite; if anyone crosses the line, displays too much

femininity, or not enough masculinity, he must be corrected or ejected:

> Male femininity [can] be seen at work in … many other traditional
> masculine forms of activity – war, sport, drinking, banter, swearing - …
> [and] such femininity has to be dealt with somehow, if the [masculine]
> myth is to sustain itself. One way to cope with it is to try to throw it out.
> This is particularly a task for the masculine self. The masculine ego has to
> defend itself from 'the enemy within', and this mainly takes the form of its
> own femininity. (Easthope 104)

War, therefore, is both a perfect space for the expression of masculine femininity as it facilitates

masculine bonding, and yet it is also a dangerous and precarious space because the moment the

soldier's 'femininity' passes a tipping point, he becomes the enemy within and is exposed to

violent punishment, ejection, and even death.

This defence of the self (and by extension the nation) is exactly what's at stake with the

soft body in wartime; the soft body represents a threat to the unified hardness of the American

military unit and, by extension, the American nation, and thus its femininity must be violently suppressed/(r)ejected: "the dominant myth of masculinity demands that male homosexual desire, if it cannot be sublimated, must be expelled" (Easthope 105). Easthope contends that the resultant homophobia often appears or manifests via projection, hysteria, and paranoia. Projection, he notes, "rests on a distinction between subject and object, internal and external [and] names the effect by which something that threatens an individual from within can be imagined as a threat from the outside" (105). Importantly, projection works not just on an individual level, but can also operate at a social level as well, for example: "In Nazi ideology the supposed humiliation of Germany after the First World War was turned into anti-Semitism, and a group such as the Jews imagined to be dirty and abject" (Easthope 105-6). In the case of the combat films, the hard body projects its fears, anxieties, insecurities about itself onto the soft-bodied Other, and this projection results in (often homophobic) abuse. As Easthope alerts us, "Because homophobia is the projection of what is felt as the enemy within in the guise of the enemy without, it always has a strong cultural meaning and content. Homophobia, particularly when it leads to paranoia, always gets bound up with ideas and fears about social groups, nations and classes" (108). In short, homophobia in the case of these combat films is not just about one-to-one human relationships; it is always tied up in the larger social, national, and international struggles being pictured. And these anxieties about self/Others resting on the theories of self-consolidating Other discussed at greater length in the previous chapter are not only expressed through homophobia, but also through any violent rejection of a perceived Other: punishment, re-training, ejection from the group and/or death.

<u>Connell – Masculinities</u>

Much like Easthope, R.W. Connell, too, while not writing specifically about the military, uses a great deal of military metaphors and language such as the phrase: the "frontline troops of patriarchy" (79). In fact, Easthope's work informs Connell's in many ways; Connell clearly articulates, like Easthope, the fact that "masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition" (43). Arguably, Connell's most important contribution to the field in this text is the firm underlining of the idea, latent in Easthope's work, that there is not *one*, singular masculinity; there are, in fact multiple, even infinite masculinities that are not fixed, but rather highly mutable, different in certain places, and times than in others: "Discursive studies suggest that men are not permanently committed to a particular pattern of masculinity. Rather, they make situationally specific choices from a cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour" (Connell xix).[161] This cultural repertoire is shaped by texts such as combat films, which are one form among many cultural examples of masculinity. The idea of one 'true or dominant masculinity, what Easthope terms the 'masculine myth' corresponds to Connell's enduring concept of hegemonic masculinity: "at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted" ideal form of masculinity, the one which holds the most social power (77). In the military, a highly regimented system resting so heavily on the training and docility of its bodies, the range of acceptable masculinities is incredibly limited to hegemonic masculinity, and the 'ideal' nature of this type of masculinity is reinforced by the respect afforded to this version of masculinity within society at large (e.g. discounts, privileges, etc.).

In the case of the male military bodies examined herein, the hard body is the hegemonic masculinity which violently casts out the non-hegemonic, softer, masculinities it encounters. In the later cycle of films, this hegemonic masculinity appears to be shifting towards a hard body with a soft, or at least conflicted, heart, though according to Connell "there is widespread feminist skepticism about the 'new father', the 'new sensitive man', and other images of a kinder, gentler masculinity" (41) that Jeffords discusses in *Hard Bodies*. Much like Easthope, Connell also links the construction of hegemonic masculinities to sociocultural realities, relying on her own and others' empirical research (as cited), to prove that "there is a dimension of masculinity in the culture of imperialism (Gittings 1996) and in the construction of nationalism and national identities (Nagel 1998),"[162] and that "it is specifically male heroism that is celebrated in the US national anthem 'The Star-Spangled Banner', in Australia's 'Anzac Day' ceremonies, in the Arc de Triomphe – and [that] this tells us something important about the process of nation-building, and the kind of society being built" (Connell xvi). In other words, the support of this dominant version of masculinity is built into the very foundations of Western nations and the ways in which people express their patriotism in these countries. Further, Connell asserts too that "the movement of populations and the interaction of cultures under colonialism and post-colonial globalization have linked the making of masculinity with the construction of racial and ethnic hierarchies. It seems that ethnic and racial conflict has been growing in importance in recent years in many parts of the world … [and] this is a fruitful context for producing masculinities oriented towards domination and violence" (xxii). Certainly these types of conflicts have not lessened in intensity since Connell revised and released the second edition of *Masculinities* in 2005. Examining the types of masculinity represented in Post-Gulf War Hollywood combat films, such as the ones examined herein, therefore provides valuable insight

into the types of masculine behaviour being modeled for viewers and built into the

nationalistic/patriotic framework of America (and anywhere else these films are watched and

resonate).

Harkening back to Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler's early works on gender and

sexuality,[163] Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, much like Easthope's masculine myth

is deeply linked to the body and to popular culture:

> Mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath
> the ebb and flow of daily life. … True masculinity is almost always
> thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or
> to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and
> directs action (e.g. men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape
> results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the
> body sets limits to action (e.g., men naturally do not take care of infants;
> homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse
> minority). (Connell 45)

Connell argues that biological determinism, and therefore this image or idea of 'natural

masculinity' is shored up by metaphors of bodies as machines (48) and that "when a metaphor

becomes established it pre-empts discussion and shapes the way evidence is read" (48). In

essence, once a hard body (or body as machine) metaphor takes hold in a certain arena (e.g.

combat films, action/adventure films), it is very difficult to conceptualize of masculinity in any

other way.

Picking up on the homophobia with which Easthope was also concerned, Connell concurs

that "the point of these [homophobic] practices is not just to abuse individuals. It is also to draw

social boundaries, defining 'real' masculinity by its distance from the rejected" (40); the idea is:

if I hurt you because you are (or just seem) gay, or feminine, I must therefore, in opposition, be

masculine and straight. Connell argues that gay masculinity is the most conspicuously oppressed

form of masculinity, "but it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and

boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy. The process is marked by a rich vocabulary of abuse … Here too the symbolic blurring with femininity is obvious" (79). Indeed in combat films, it is any soft bodies that are the subordinated masculinities that are subject to abuse and must be violently expelled from the 'circle of legitimacy' to protect the coherence of the individual self, of the military body, and of the nation.

Cohan's Masked Men: Masculinities and the Movies in the Fifties

More specific to representations of wartime and post-war masculinities, Steven Cohan's work examines "the postwar masculinity crisis" as depicted by some of the most popular films of the fifties, looking at the film's stars and marketing, and relying on theories from feminist scholars such as Judith Butler's concept of performativity.[164] While certainly not exclusively caused by or related to armed conflict, Cohan notes that war was a major contributing factor to this "crisis" of masculinity: "demobilization required restoration of the gender relations that World War II had disturbed both in the home and the workplace, while anxiety about the mental stability of returning veterans exaggerated the danger their ungovernable masculinity posed to the social order" (xii).[165] Picking up on the 'softening' of masculinity observed by other scholars including Connell and Jeffords, Cohan continues that "Cold War politics further complicated the picture by projecting contradictory ideals for American manhood, requiring a 'hard' masculinity as the standard when defending the nation's boundaries, yet insisting upon a 'soft' masculinity at the foundation of an orderly, responsible home life" (xii); this combination of and/or conflict between 'hard' and 'soft' masculinity required of American men during and after armed conflict is at the centre of the issues explored in this chapter. Cohan notes that during WWII "an ideology celebrating 'home' and 'nation' motivated patriotism by equating a single normative masculinity with the American character" which is precisely the same sort of equation still evident in these

films (particularly the middle-period, WWII-nostalgic cycle), and the reason that non-normative

masculinities must be violently ejected from the military apparatus to ensure its continued safe

and effective functioning. This leads, finally, to a discussion of the hard body's soft body

counterpart, and its necessary violent ejection from the American military.

The Hidden Soft Body in Hollywood Vietnam Films

Susan Jeffords, in her ground-breaking works, *The Remasculinization of America:*

Gender and the Vietnam War and *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, notes

a trend among 1980s films to present hard, muscled, male bodies as spectacle. Several other

critics have picked up on her analysis and applied it to numerous action films of the 1980s with

characters played by such stars as Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, and Arnold

Schwarzenegger.[166] In *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (1989),

Jeffords links this hard-body type to representations of the Vietnam War, particularly to figures

like Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) of the eponymous franchise and Colonel James Braddock

(Chuck Norris) of the *Missing in Action* films. Characteristics of the types of hard bodies that she

discusses also occur in a number of other Hollywood renderings of Vietnam including the

characters Willard (Martin Sheen) in *Apocalypse Now* (1979), both Sergeants Barnes (Tom

Berenger) and Elias (Willem Dafoe) in *Platoon* (1986), and Sergeant Hartman (R. Lee Ermey)

and Animal Mother (Adam Baldwin) in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Close examination of these

films, however, reveals that this Vietnam hard-body is almost always accompanied by what I

term a "soft body counterpart." Surprisingly, despite the amazing amount of critical attention

given to these films and the hard bodies within them, little to no critical attention has been paid

to their softer-bodied counterparts. These soft-bodies are Othered, and often in ways that mimic

the racialized and gendered Othering that predominates in combat cinema and has been explored

in previous chapters. The ways in which these soft body counterparts are Othered in these films constructs them as posing a great risk to the internal unity of the normative American military masculinity, and reveals deep connections between soft-bodies as the enemies within and racialized masculinities as the external enemies. The threat that these soft bodies pose to the coherence and cohesiveness of the American military, and therefore the American nation, necessitates that they either be eliminated through violent ejection or 'reprogrammed'/remasculinized and reintegrated into the standard American military masculine norm.

Lina Khatib's work in *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World*, while concentrated on more contemporary Hollywood war films rather than post-Vietnam films of the 1980s, offers unique insight into the ways in which the Othering of Vietnam soft bodies is much like the Othering of racialized (masculine) enemy Others (as examined in the previous chapter). Several of her arguments about the ways in which American men and the American nation are constructed in opposition to racialized enemy others in Hollywood war films suggest a connection to the ways in which these soft-bodied Americans are Othered and therefore must be eliminated.

A critical element of her argument focuses on the ways in which Hollywood war cinema constructs/portrays the American nation and American masculinity as an active representation of that nation. Hollywood films, she finds, portray an "American landscape that is (cinematically), traditionally non-penetrable" (30). Rather, more often in these films, "the masculine American nation can be seen as raping the feminized, weak landscape" (26). In fact, in every case, "the United States remains the stronger side. It is not marginalized, it marginalizes others" (Khatib 32). In essence, the representation of America and the American military is always linked to

strength, hardness, and even aggression. Importantly, she also proposes that "Gender in the[se] films is a national symbol or myth; it is part of narratives through which the United States" imagines its identity (recalling Spivak's notion of the self-consolidating Other), noting that within these gendered frameworks, "the male has been looked at as an active embodiment" of the American nation (Khatib 63); more explicitly, according to her investigation, "Hollywood constructs the American nation as male" (12). So, not only are male bodies physical representations of the nation, but the American nation itself is also masculinized, rather than following the typical feminized representation of a 'motherland.' In this formulation, the U.S. is not a weak, penetrable place that needs protecting, it is an aggressive force that will go out and protect others (the neocolonial version of Spivak's white men saving brown women from brown men), doing what it wants, when it wants to. Khatib suggests that in Hollywood war cinema, "*women may symbolize the nation, but men represent it*" (Khatib 83, italics in original). In other words, women are the passive symbol, having the qualities of and anxieties about the nation mapped onto their bodies, whereas men are the active representative of the nation, using their bodies to take action, potentially against other nations; this contention also has particular resonance within the realm of Hollywood cinema where filmmakers are still predominantly men, literally representing their version of the nation onscreen, and even more resonance within the realm of the combat film wherein all but two of the films from the period studied herein have male directors.[167] Taken together, if the U.S. imagines itself as impenetrable and male, and men are active representatives of the nation (particularly in war films where, as explored in the third chapter, women are still largely excluded from active-duty combat), it stands to reason that any men who are not in line with the masculine impenetrability of the nation are Others and must be dealt with accordingly.

In her analysis of the masculinity in these war films, Khatib necessarily picks up on Jeffords' hard body theory of the post-Vietnam era:

> that era was characterized by cinematic representations of two oppositional masculinities: the "soft" bodies, signifying immorality and disease, and the "hard" bodies, signifying strength, loyalty, and courage. While the soft bodies belonged to others, … the hard bodies constructed 'white masculinity as a kind of default position, ostensibly lacking specificity but defining the universal in the form of the white male'. (Khatib 65)

In other words, the opposition between the hard body archetype and the soft-bodied Other can be understood under the framework of Spivak's self-consolidating Other; the American hard body (and therefore, the American nation) defines itself as masculine and impenetrable against the soft body Other who is therefore, by default, feminine and penetrable. But while Khatib and others including Jeffords herself consistently conceive of the soft body as a racialized enemy Other (e.g. a Vietnamese or Arab man), the following analysis demonstrates that in many of the Vietnam War films there is also an American soldier whose 'soft body' is seen as oppositional to the rest of the American hard bodies, and who is therefore treated as an enemy that must be eliminated (or 'fixed' and reintegrated). Khatib proves that while the face of American military masculinity in Hollywood films may have changed: "its representation remains one about mastery over the Other" (Khatib 65). As the following examination of popular Hollywood Vietnam films shows, however, this Other that the American military masculinity must gain control over doesn't necessarily always come from outside in the form of a racialized enemy Other. In fact, in almost every Vietnam combat film in which there is a hard American body, there is also a soft American body which constitutes an internal threat not just to the individual hard body, but also to the unity of the American military and nation, and in every case this threat must be and is eliminated in some way.

Before exploring filmic examples of this phenomenon, it is essential to understand how the hard and soft bodies are constructed as opposites and how the hard body defines itself against the soft, just as America defines itself as impenetrable in opposition to a penetrable, feminized Other landscape. Khatib, following Jeffords and others such as Chris Holmlund and Yvonne Tasker, defines the hard body as "the representation of the prowess of the United States" (66). As Jeffords puts it in *Hard Bodies*, this "indefatigable, muscular, and invincible masculine body, … this hardened male form … came to stand not only for a type of national character – heroic, aggressive, and determined – but for the nation itself" (25). Here too, Jeffords points out that the hard body is frequently the focus of the camera, often muscle-bound, shows a keen skill with weapons, and is almost never fatally injured (Jeffords 24-5). The hard body is also often accompanied by a 'hard' personality; hard bodies are fast, powerful and dangerous; they are not emotionally weak or overly sentimental. Most importantly, the main hard body figure is always white, hypermasculine, and heterosexual (often aggressively so). There is at least one hard body figure (sometimes more) in *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, and *Full Metal Jacket*. A brief examination of each of these hard-bodied characters and their soft-bodied counterparts reveals the ways in which the soft-bodies are Othered in very similar ways to racialized enemy Others, because they are threats to the unity of both the individual and the national 'self.'

Hard Body Gone Soft: Kurtz's Association with Others in *Apocalypse Now*

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) contains perhaps the most exaggerated instance of a soft body counterpart. The film follows Captain Benjamin L. Willard's (Martin Sheen) journey up a (fictional) river in Vietnam on a mission to 'eliminate' Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando), who has gone rogue. We are first introduced to a shirtless (hard bodies are often filmed shirtless)[168] Willard in his hotel room in Vietnam. Willard explicitly narrates in

voiceover the necessity of the hard body in war by vocalizing his fear of "getting softer" while waiting for a mission. He expresses concern that the longer he spends in his room, the weaker he gets. In contrast, he thinks that "every minute Charlie [the U.S. military term for Vietnamese enemies] squats in the bush he gets stronger." So, from the outset, the American hard body is quite literally verbally constructed against and in opposition to the racialized enemy Other; their differences are presented in terms of strength versus weakness, hardness versus softness.

Kurtz, on the other hand, is decidedly a soft body, not only physically, but also mentally. He is described by the high-ranking U.S. military officials that assign Willard to his case as "one of the most outstanding officers this country has ever produced" – past tense. The military believes Kurtz to have gone insane – mentally soft – since arriving in Vietnam. The first images viewers see of Kurtz are pictures from earlier in his military career and in these pictures he looks lean and decorous in his dress uniform. When viewers (and Willard) first see Kurtz in person, however, he is clearly much larger. Although he is almost totally concealed by shadows throughout most of the scenes in which he appears, it is clear from the initial full-body shot as well as numerous close-ups of his face that he is no longer hard – not even close. Despite filmmakers' best efforts to keep Kurtz's figure in the dark, by the end of the film it is clear that his trim military figure has been replaced by a rotund, out-of-control soft body.

The obvious change in Kurtz's figure is not the only indicator of his having 'gone soft.' Significantly, unlike every other Vietnam herd-body, Kurtz does not do any of his own fighting; instead, he has his followers do everything for him. Neither does he move with as much as ease as hard bodied heroes typically do; he walks slowly and needs to use his arms to lift his weight when climbing a step. Kurtz's association with nature and with racialized Others also signals his feminized transformation. When Willard and his men arrive at Kurtz's compound, they find that

he has a large group of (presumably) Vietnamese people, all painted in white and dressed in loin-cloths, guarding the entrance, a fact which clearly and explicitly associates him with 'the Other' (in this case also the enemy). The photojournalist (Dennis Hopper) staying at the camp makes this colonialist association clearer when he declares that Kurtz "feels comfortable with *his people* in the jungle" (emphasis added). Kurtz is also much more tanned than every other American soldier including hard body Lance B. Johnson (played by Sam Bottoms), a famous California surfer who is shown tanning in his very first scene. This darker than dark tone of his skin, in addition to his black linen apparel – in stark contrast to the light-coloured military khakis sported by the 'true' American soldiers in the film – sets him apart from this mainstream group and aligns him much more closely with the racialized enemy Other than with the American military.

Finally, in one of his last scenes, Kurtz tells a story in which he describes himself as crying – something hard bodies definitely don't do (except, perhaps over fallen comrades, but even then generally not); he says: "I wept like… like some grandmother," explicitly feminizing and aging himself. In the same story, Kurtz argues that the Vietnamese soldiers who cut off every arm that the Americans had inoculated, just to spite them, are "stronger than us," undermining the American military of which he was once a part by reversing the us = strong, them = weak binary through which the American military defines itself. Kurtz now appears to aspire to the "strength" (barbarity) of the enemy Other, having lost, rejected or forsaken the American military unit of which he was once a representative. Obviously while Kurtz may once have been a hard body, and "one of the most outstanding officers this country has ever produced," he has now gone rogue and is associated with femininity, nature, and the racialized enemy Other; in short, he is now a soft body who must be, and is, eliminated (killed) by Willard's hard body, to maintain the integrity of the American military at all costs.

<u>Born of Two Fathers: Taylor, Barnes, and Elias in *Platoon*</u>

If Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* is one of the clearest examples of the soft body counterpart, the case of Sergeants Barnes and Elias in *Platoon* (1986) is perhaps the most complex.[169] Barnes and Elias are both commanding officers in the same platoon and are constructed as the leaders of two 'camps' within the platoon; Barnes leads the 'harder' (whiter) half of the platoon who drink, play cards and take pleasure in doing violence, while Elias leads the more easy-going, pot-smoking half of the platoon who are mostly black and Latino. While both men display elements of the hard body archetype (exposed muscles, combat and leadership skills, and bodily inviolability), they are framed in constant opposition to one other. In the end, Sergeant Elias is the softer of the two hard bodies by virtue of his emotional softness, association with racialized men, and his less heteronormative behaviour; he is also the first of the two men to be killed, and at the hands of the harder-bodied Barnes, no less.

Barnes exemplifies the hard body archetype perfectly: he is often shot shirtless or at least sleeveless, his well-developed muscles perpetually glistening. Barnes' face has several deep scars along its right side, evidencing his long history of battle as well as his ultimate inviolability; several characters repeat that he has "been shot seven times and never died," and that "the only person who can kill Barnes is Barnes," reinforcing his impenetrability and his skill in battle. But as much as Barnes embodies these 'hard' characteristics, in comparison to Elias he seems too hard; when, during their first night raid, a soldier is shot and screams out in pain Barnes presses his scarred face almost cheek to cheek with the dying soldier and whisper/shouts: "Shut up. Shut up and take the pain." This emotional hardness and near complete lack of sympathy and compassion for his fellow American soldiers is one of several key differences between Barnes and Elias and part of Barnes' ultimate failing.

The men's emotional differences are perfectly exemplified by their respective behaviour towards main character Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) when he gets sick from carrying too much gear. When Taylor collapses, coughing, Barnes reacts by insulting him: "What the hell's wrong with you Taylor? You are one simple son of a bitch," striding off angrily, needlessly swiping at nearby vegetation with a machete and thereby reinforcing the violence of his words and attitude, his complete lack of empathy (even for his own American soldiers), his too-hardness. In contrast, Elias bends down to help Chris, unloading some of his gear and telling him: "You're humpin' too much stuff; you don't need half this shit." He smiles kindly and tells Taylor: "I'll haul it for you, but next time you check with me first, okay?" The men's opposing reactions to Taylor's distress, a sign of weakness, suggest that while Elias is still hard, physically able to carry the extra gear, he is also 'softer' emotionally, willing to help out his fellow soldiers where too-hard Barnes, barely breaking his stride, can only offer harsh insults, criticism and the implied threat of retaliatory violence.

His kindness to his fellow soldiers is not the only way in which Elias is softer than Barnes. In another telling sequence, the viewer is witness to both 'sides' of the platoon enjoying some 'R & R.'[170] The scene opens with young protagonist Taylor being led into a dim, warmly-lit tent where Elias's men are smoking marijuana and listening/dancing to Motown music. Almost all of the black and Latino men in the platoon (King, played by Keith David, Big Harold, played by Forest Whitaker, Rhah, played by Franscesco Quinn, etc.) except for Junior, played by Reggie Johnson, are in this tent. What follows is a very homoerotic exchange in (almost) extreme close-up between Taylor and Elias, in which a shirtless Elias suggestively asks Taylor if it's his "first time" (smoking marijuana) and then tells him: "Put your mouth on this" before blowing smoke into the opposite end of the rifle he's just instructed Taylor to put his mouth on.

The sequence then cuts immediately to another tent in which the remaining members of the platoon – Barnes's 'side' – are listening to a country song whose first discernable lyrics are "We don't smoke marijuana." A muscled and shirtless (hard) Bunny, played by Kevin Dillon, complains: "Where is everybody?" while Junior, the only black man in Barnes's tent, complains about the "honky shit" on the radio, saying he prefers Motown (perhaps suggesting that his place is in Elias's tent, where they are listening to Motown). The opposition between the two groups only grows clearer as the sequence continues.

In the course of their conversation Junior proceeds to call Bunny a "killer" to which Bunny somewhat inexplicably responds: "Yeah, but I still like a piece of pussy every once in a while. Ain't nothing like a piece of pussy except maybe the Indy 500." Further underscoring Bunny's linkage of sex and violence, Junior adds: "The only way you'd get a piece of pussy is if a bitch dies and wills it to you." This exchange distinctly ties sex, violence, and even death together for Bunny, an issue which re-emerges later in the film when Taylor (with support from Elias) prevents Bunny from engaging in gang-rape, to which Bunny angrily responds: "What are you a fucking homosexual Taylor?" These exchanges both recall Easthope's and Connell's arguments about homophobia and the aggressive re-assertion of one's own dominant masculinity via the homophobic Othering of someone else.

As the tent scene progresses, the camera moves deeper into the tent past Bunny and Junior (where Confederate flags are prominently displayed on the walls) and eventually comes to rest on the remainder of Barnes' crew including O'Neill (John C. McGinley), and a shirtless Barnes himself. The men engage in banter while playing cards with their commanding officer, the soft and ineffectual Lt. Wolfe (Mark Moses), who never appears shirtless and inexplicably and without provocation jokes almost hysterically, "wouldn't want to get raped by you guys!"

(referring to Barnes and the other card-players whom O'Neill had earlier called "cock-suckers"). Again, one's position within the masculine hierarchy here clearly depends upon one's ability to dish out homophobic insults and be perceived as potentially sexually dominant, even violent. Finally, at the close of the exchange a male radio announcer declares discernibly: "Venereal Disease is nothing to laugh about." The threat of homosexuality in this homosocial scene is thus clearly disavowed through humour and the aggressive assertion of heterosexuality (e.g. Bunny's declarations about liking pussy); in stark contrast, the threat of homosexuality is seemingly embraced in Elias' tent. The juxtaposition of these two scenes works to clearly establish the difference between Barnes' 'too hard' camp, associated with shirtless and potentially sexually violent white men, and Elias' softer camp, associated with shirtless darker-skinned soldiers engaging in borderline homoerotic behaviour.

When the sequence shifts back to Elias's tent the men are still smoking marijuana and dancing closely together, with their arms around one another. Elias in particular is dancing in a traditionally male-female ball-room dance formation with another male soldier. The juxtaposition between these two tents reveals the other key differences between Barnes and Elias; namely, that Barnes associates largely with hard white "rednecks" who make racial jokes and aggressively police against homosexuality by asserting their dominant and even violent heterosexuality, while Elias gets high and dances shirtless with black and Latino soldiers. So while Elias does embody several key attributes of the hard body archetype, in the final breakdown he is simply softer than Barnes by virtue of his emotional softness, association with racialized soldiers, and his more open sexuality. This softness, in the end, gets him killed by Barnes, who is then killed by Taylor in retribution. Other scholars have noted the dual fatherly relationship of Barnes and Elias to Taylor,[171] and while Jeffords suggests that this 'birth' of

Taylor is Taylor becoming Barnes, the masculine taking over/subsuming the feminine, I suggest that their deaths might allow for the 'birth' of a 'new' masculinity in Taylor, one that is not too hard (like Barnes), not too soft (like Elias), but still a dominant and hegemonic masculinity nonetheless, an idea to which we will return below with the discussion of the most recent cycles of post-Gulf War combat films. Regardless of what this dominant masculinity looks like, however, the fact remains that throughout the genre, it is masculinity that is dominant and it is this masculinity that is the active representation of the American nation; the repeated and aggressive policing against 'Otherness' and perceived threats to itself (whether racial or otherwise) undertaken by American military masculinity in the combat genre, especially in the absence of any other normative model, only reinforces its general dominance.

Born Again Hard: Pyle goes 'Section Eight' in *Full Metal Jacket*

A final and perhaps most poignant example of the hard versus soft body dynamic in Vietnam films is Sergeant Hartman's (R. Lee Ermey) merciless torment of soft body Private Pyle (Vincent D'Onofrio) in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). From the outset, Hartman explicitly frames himself as a hard body, telling the recruits: "Because I am hard, you will not like me." He declares that although he is hard he is "fair," claiming: "there is no racial bigotry here. I do not look down on niggers, kikes, wops or greasers. Here you are all equally worthless." This statement immediately proves to be fallacious, however, when Hartman stops in front of a black recruit named Brown (Peter Edmund) and renames him "Snowflake" and again when he punches Joker (protagonist Pvt. J.T. "Joker" Davis, played by Matthew Modine) in the face for not believing in the Virgin Mary, and forces the recruits to celebrate Christmas. Hartman's "no discrimination" policy certainly does not extend to sexuality, for the Sgt. continuously calls the recruits "ladies," threatens them with sexual violence, and repeatedly accuses the men of being

homosexual, saying, "I'll be watching you," suggesting that he'll be policing the men's sexuality and violently punishing transgression. Again, as Easthope and Connell maintain, the dominant or hegemonic masculinity asserts itself by projecting homophobia outward. In the case of the American military, as depicted in this film, the dominant masculinity is a 'hard' one that Hartman is attempting to mould the men into, after his own self; Hartman's actions, if not his words, suggest that hard Marines (or at least the kind he is trying to shape them into) are those who are white (Snowflake), Christian (celebrate Jesus' birthday and believe in the Virgin Mary), and heterosexual ("I'll be watching you"). Finally, in line with arguments about expelling those that do not fit the dominant masculine mould, Hartman tells the recruits that it is his job to weed out anyone who cannot "hack it" in the Marines. And from the very first scene, supporting my contention that along with each hard-body in Vietnam-era films comes a soft body, Leonard Lawrence (Vincent D'Onofrio), shortly to be renamed Private Pyle (because, according to Hartman, "only faggots and sailors are called Lawrence"), distinguishes himself as one such soldier who can't hack it, who consistently fails to conform to the hard masculine norm of the American military.

When, making his inspection rounds in the opening scene, Hartman reaches Pyle, clearly the most overweight man in the line of new recruits, Hartman calls him ugly before questioning: "What's your name fatbody?" This description immediately stands in stark contrast to Foucault's description of the ideal soldierly body as one which possesses "a taut stomach, broad shoulders, long arms, strong fingers, a small belly" and whose "body was the blazon of his strength and valour" (135). Hartman next accuses Pyle of lying about "not sucking dicks": "Bullshit! I bet you could suck a golf ball through a garden hose!" Such a verbal attack again recalls the notion of projecting homophobia onto Others to consolidate one's own ideal masculinity. Hartman then

proceeds to force Pyle to choke himself, threatening: "I will gouge out your eyeballs and skull fuck you!" Hartman thereby reinforces his dominant masculinity as the one that penetrates, not the one that is penetrable, recalling Khatib's arguments as cited in the previous chapter. Finally, after Pyle has been released from Hartman's choking grip, Hartman ends the scene with the warning declaration: "Private Pyle, you had best square your ass away and start shitting me diamond cuff-links or I will definitely fuck you up." Hartman is of course reinforcing that Pyle must fall in line, become the disciplined docile body that the American military requires to function or face undesirable consequences. Pyle cannot remain within the American military the way he is because he is seen as unfit to actively represent the American nation.

Unfortunately, "fatbody" Pyle is unable to improve his performance and his torment at the hands of Hartman (and later his fellow recruits) only worsens; through discipline and punishment, they attempt not only to get Pyle to conform to their standard of American military masculinity, but also to distance themselves from him (consolidate their own superior masculinity against his inferior masculinity). When Private Pyle accidentally confuses left from right in a drill, Sgt. Hartman calls him stupid, and slaps him in the face twice (once on the right and once on the left side of his face to illustrate). Later, in a sexually-tinged and infantilizing punishment, Hartman forces Pyle to march behind the rest of the men with his pants down and his thumb in his mouth, symbolically visualizing his insufficient (or immature/infantile) masculinity/sexuality. Next, Pyle fails to scale an obstacle while Hartman yells at him: "Get your fat ass over there Private Pyle … Get your fat ass up there ... Your ass looks like about a hundred and fifty pounds of chewed bubblegum" Clearly, Pyle is again being singled out for his weight and his inability to perform the physical tasks that the rest of the marine recruits have no problem completing; Pyle's physical softness is a large part of his failing (recalling Kurtz's much

larger post-military body which required elimination). As if this initial underperformance wasn't enough, Pyle continues to fail at physical tasks, unable to do one pull-up or climb a tall obstacle while Hartman again shouts at him: "Get up here fatbody! … You're too slow!" When Pyle eventually reaches the top and is unable to make it over the top to climb down the other side Harman threatens Pyle, in a telling outburst: "I'm going to rip your balls off so you cannot contaminate the rest of the world!" Hartman's comment therefore frames Pyle's 'softness' and weakness as a threat to the 'world' which, for Hartman, means the Marines and America. Clearly then, Pyle is not fit for the military because he does not conform to the physical hard-body standards, and these physical failings are explicitly linked to his questionable sexuality, and to the need to eliminate him so that he does not "contaminate" the American military, the rest of the nation, or even "the world" (as Hartman puts it) by acting as a representative of America in international conflict/combat.

Pyle's luck seems to change when Hartman orders protagonist Joker to teach Pyle everything; Joker's hardness is therefore solidified in his selection as role-model for Pyle (but in his role as mentor to Pyle he's more like a 'softer' Elias-type character than a too-hard Barnes-type character). Joker's successful articulation of ideal masculinity is evidenced by the fact that under his tutelage, the seemingly helpless Pyle finally begins to improve slowly, showing particular skill with his rifle. Unfortunately for both of them, however, Pyle is subsequently caught with a jelly doughnut in his footlocker (food in footlockers is forbidden generally, but for Pyle specifically because he is "too heavy"), and Hartman decides to punish the whole squad for any mistakes Pyle makes from this point forward (in this instance forcing Pyle to eat the jelly doughnut while all the other recruits "pay for it" by doing push-ups). This punishment again

foregrounds Pyle's weight, his physical 'softness,' making it one of the clearest markers of his status as 'Other,' separating him from the rest of the 'hard' Marines.

The last straw for Pyle comes when he is gang-beaten in the middle of the night by all of the other recruits including, unbeknownst to Pyle, a frustrated Joker, his mentor and only friend, who is goaded into participating. This group beating of the outcast, more than just retaliation for the extra push-ups they had to do, is the in-group of the normative American masculine military turning its anger/aggression outward at the Other in order to consolidate itself. After this late-night beating (during which Pyle's gut is hanging out of his T-shirt, further underscoring his softness and difference from the rest of his military peers), Pyle clearly becomes more withdrawn from the rest of the group, a loner, an outsider, an Other; he ceases participating in group activities, begins talking to his rifle, and stares menacingly and unflinchingly at Hartman as the sergeant gives the Marines an 'inspiring' speech about homicidal former-marine rifleman. Rather than becoming part of the group, Pyle has been forced inward. This kind of separation and extreme individuation and difference cannot be tolerated in an institution such as the American military which requires docile bodies in order to function coherently, and the friction created by Pyle's difference soon becomes fatal.

Soon after Pyle withdraws into himself and away from the group, Joker tells fellow marine, Cowboy (Arliss Howard), that he thinks Pyle's a "Section Eight" – military parlance for someone who is discharged for mental illness; such mental 'softness' is also unacceptable in an institution in which the hegemonic masculinity is a hard, dominant one. Unfortunately, Joker is correct about Pyle's mental state. While Pyle's physical hardness (in the form of his shooting skills) continues to improve, his mental fortitude disintegrates. Hartman congratulates Pyle on his good shooting, declaring enthusiastically: "Private Pyle, you are definitely born again hard!"

and Pyle does indeed finally "make it" as a marine, theoretically a hard body like the rest. On graduation night, however, his inner, mental, softness is revealed when he snaps and shoots Hartman before turning the gun on himself, proving that he is, in the end, still not hard at all – at least not in the way the Marines wanted him to be. His 'softness' now lies in his going rogue, turning against the American military by murdering one of its own, just like the other examples given herein (Kurtz and Barnes). Private Pyle's 'Othering' illustrates that it's not just his weight, his physical softness, that makes him an 'Other;' it's also his inability to perform military masculinity the way Hartmann drills into them that it ought to be performed, as white (Hartman's renaming Brown 'Snowflake'), Christian (forced celebration of Jesus' Birthday and the Virgin Mary), and heterosexual ("I'm watching you"). Ultimately, because of his various 'soft spots,' Private Pyle must be eliminated so that he "can't contaminate the rest of the world," (the Marines and America). Pyle's 'softness' cannot be allowed to contaminate the dominant masculinity of the American military which must be preserved in its current form in order that it continue to perpetuate itself and the gendered, racial, and sexual norms upon which it rests and also seeks to uphold.

Casting Out: The Eviction of Soft Bodies from Vietnam Films

In each of these films, after being linked too closely to nature, the enemy (Kurtz) and/or racialized Others (Elias), having their sexuality questioned, or just not being "man enough" to 'hack it' (Pyle), the soft body is killed, eliminated in every case by a harder body; Kurtz by the younger and much leaner Willard, Elias by the 'impenetrable' Barnes, Sgt. Hartmann by Pyle, and Pyle himself by the 'born again hard' side of his split personality. In each case, the younger, 'harder' soldier, the more ideal embodiment of hegemonic American military masculinity, eliminates the 'soft spots' that threaten the unity of the force, thereby strengthening American

military dominance by eliminating the weakest links. In *Apocalypse Now*, Willard suspects that Kurtz wants to "go out [die] like a soldier, standing up, not like some poor, wasted, rag-assed old renegade" and that he does when, in the end, a shirtless, bloodied and dirty Willard succeeds in eliminating the corpulent, 'old renegade' who went against the hard-bodied grain of the American military machine. Interestingly, in this case, the fatal blows are delivered by machete rather than by gun as is typical of these scenes; too, the scene of Willard butchering Kurtz with a machete is intercut with parallel scenes of a sacrificial animal slaughter by the natives in Kurtz's encampment, lending Kurtz's death a similar sacrificial quality – Kurtz must be killed in order for the rest of the American military to carry-on with its dominance, its strong, unified front. Similarly, too-trusting (or just more willing to be killed than to commit near-fratricide by killing one of his fellow soldiers) Elias is shot by Barnes and left in the jungle to die but Barnes is finally killed by Taylor who usurps the masculine mantle with his middle-of-the-road masculinity (not too hard, not too soft, just right). Pyle too uses his new-found "hardness" (military shooting skills) to kill his too-hard tormentor, Hartman, and then takes his own elimination unto himself knowing that he isn't (and maybe doesn't want to be) as 'hard' as Sergeant Hartman.

While some might argue that this pattern (the creation and elimination of soft bodies) suggests a critique of the American military in that it is the entity that has created these men that need to be eliminated, in each case their elimination is only represented as necessary and desirable because they have strayed from the 'right' path as set out by their training and their superiors, and in each case they are succeeded by younger, more docile or at least more compliant American military bodies, and the show goes on (quite literally in the case of *Full Metal Jacket* where the elimination of the too-hard, Hartman, and the too-soft, Pyle, occurs at the

midway point of the film, and the film carries on with no narrative attention paid to the consequences of these deaths, as though it never happened). In effect then, the elimination of those that fall outside of the norm of military masculinity strongly reinforces hegemonic military masculinity and its connections to the larger cultural ideologies that support it: hierarchies of gender, race and sexuality, and a pervasive 'us vs. them' binary militarism.

Sherene Razack's work in *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*, is helpful here in illuminating the ways in which this 'casting out' of the soft body operates in much the same way that the casting out of racialized Others, particularly Arab men, happens in the contemporary West. Razack writes of "a national community organized increasingly as a fortress, with rigid boundaries and borders that mark who belongs and who does not" (6). In each of these films the American military can be read in much the same terms: a community that represents the nation and that operates as a fortress with rigid boundaries marking those who belong and violently ejecting those who do not. In each film, those military men who do not conform in the strictest sense to a 'hard' masculinity and therefore do not represent the nation in the way in which it understands itself (and wishes to be perceived), must be eliminated. Razack contends that within such a system "violence against the racialized Other comes to be understood as necessary in order for civilization to flourish, something the state must do to preserve itself" (9). She also suggests that "The use of the discourse of contamination and disease is used to reaffirm colonial ideas about the inferiority and bodily degeneracy of colonized peoples" (38), echoing the ways in which Jeffords argues soft bodies are contrasted with hard bodies.[172] Indeed, this purportedly necessary violence as a way to protect the community and the use of the discourses of contamination, disease, and bodily degeneracy echoes the violence committed against the soft bodies in the films as when Hartman shouts at

Pyle: "I'm going to rip your balls off so you can't contaminate the rest of the world." Razack

makes a compelling case that in contemporary Western society: "violence is easily authorized

against those who do not belong" (176) and, echoing discussions of theorists such as Foucault

and Easthope from the beginning of the chapter, "the boundary between self and Other must be

policed through violence, lest it collapse" (Razack 19). The eliminations of soft-bodies in the

films are, therefore, much like what Razack describes as "self-defense against those whose

inherent difference threatens the nation" (176); while they are white Americans in every case,

their deviation from prescribed and acceptable forms of military masculinity renders them a

threat to the unity of the organization and therefore to the nation as a whole. Razack also points

out the connection between this type of system and the cultural ideologies that are mutually

supportive of one another in arguing that "the project of empire – the West's domination of the

non-West – [historically] required strong infusions of a violent heterosexuality and patriarchy"

(59). Arguably, this is what makes it so imperative that American military masculinity maintain

it's 'hardness,' with all of the violent heterosexuality and patriarchy that hardness implies. Any

bodies that do not conform to these norms are unfit to serve in an institution that is constantly

taking part in the project of empire and they must, therefore, be eliminated; this is particularly

true of *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket* whose Kurtz and Pyle have gone "Section Eight,"

demonstrating mental softness and therefore their 'unfitness' for the duty of representing the

nation. In light of the preceding discussion, Razack's words about the "intersection of militarism

and the crisis of masculinity" and "specifically the media's celebration of violence, hegemonic

masculinity with its insistence on 'masculine hardness' against feminine softness … combined in

a 'furious jingoistic patriotism'" (64) seem as fitting as a description of these Vietnam films as

they do of the real-life, post-9/11, Abu-Ghraib period about which she writes and on which some of the other films to be examined further in this chapter focus.

By maintaining, as Razack suggests, "an interlocking approach … focusing on the ways in which bodies express social hierarchies of power" (Razack 63), the preceding analysis illustrates the ways in which the Othering of Vietnam soft-bodies is often accomplished in much the same ways as the Othering of racialized masculinities in combat films – association with nature, feminization, suggestion of homosexuality and threat of sexual violence – and too that the consequences of this Othering – eviction and/or death – are often similar, sometimes the same. This is not to suggest that the plight of characters in movies is as serious a problem as the real-life consequences of racial Othering that Razack details, it is simply to point out that the Othering of soft bodied characters in Vietnam films is part of a larger system of Othering and that both lead to pernicious attitudes that can have serious, real-life consequences. As Razack concludes, "the 'foreigner outside the tribe has never been welcome' … because we require the distinction between those inside and outside the tribe to mark our own belonging" (180). As the foregoing analysis of three popular Hollywood Vietnam films illustrates, this was as true in the late 1970s to mid-1980s as it is in today's post-9/11 political climate, and these issues continue to play out in post-Gulf War combat films.

<u>'Softer' Hard Bodies in Post-Gulf War Hollywood Combat Films</u>

Masculinity theorists such as Jeffords and Connell were, in the 1990s, sketching or anticipating a shift in hard body masculinity towards a softer, seemingly more 'sensitive' masculinity, as I've suggested in relation to protagonist Taylor from *Platoon* (a middle ground between the too-hard Barnes and the too-soft Elias). However, as the foregoing analysis of Connell's text reveals, some theorists including Jeffords were, at the time, also skeptical of this

'new, softer' masculinity; Jeffords, for example, reads this softer 'new man' archetype as an incredibly malleable one that is prone to shift exterior forms while still concealing the very same interior, regressive patriarchal ideology. So while in the Vietnam films examined herein the binary between hard and soft is often quite clear, in post-Gulf War films, that boundary begins to blur, perhaps because of the deteriorating rationale (and lack of public support) for conflicts, the resultant lack of clarity about who the enemy is, and the continuous, ongoing nature of conflicts since Vietnam.

Noting the relation between these filmic hard bodies and the culture that produces and consumes them, Jeffords contends that hard body films are "geared toward manufacturing a national desire to produce more hard bodies like Rambo's and reject the soft bodies that" are in opposition to them (*Hard Bodies* 38). Studying popular Hollywood action films more generally (rather than war films specifically) in *Hard Bodies*, she uses *Kindergarten Cop* as an example marking "the transition from law enforcer to family man" (141) that she sees as occurring in hard body films from the late 1980s to early 1990s. She argues that through this type of transition, however, "without changing direction, only course, these softer hard-body films continue to suggest, as did the films throughout the 1980s, that the happiness and well-being of society as a whole depends on the condition of these men, whether that happiness be defined as national security, social justice, or familial bliss" (154). In each case, the "happy ending" is only achieved when the buff male hero has accomplished his goals, both physical and emotional, and achieved what he wanted to achieve in both his personal and professional life. So while the hard-bodied hero might now seem a little 'softer' emotionally (particularly in his association with the American family), his politics remain the same: centred on the maintenance of status quo, and happiness (usually in the form of control and domination) for the white American male.

In essence, the 'flexibility' of this hard body model (shifting to iterations with greater emphasis on emotion, a "soft heart" from the early 1990s onward), is slippery precisely because it allows the model to change outward appearance (seeming more "soft" and perhaps, therefore, less threatening) without any change to the traditional, conservative values that underlie it, and which it serves to uphold. Writing in the early 1990s, Jeffords believed "the warm-hearted fathers of 1991 [would] not be the models of masculinity for the 1990s" (180). The following analysis tracks the shift in this newer, 'softer' hard-body in the combat films from the Gulf War to the present, revealing that Jeffords' assessment of the situation and prediction for the future is not necessarily borne out in the combat genre, arguing that the tension between the necessarily docile body of the soldier and the necessarily individualistic hard body produce a seemingly 'softer,' more internally conflicted hard body in the combat film, but one which nonetheless still upholds the conservative values of the traditional hard body (ultimately in line with Jeffords' argument) and combat film model.

Early Period: *The Thin Red Line*

From the early part of the period comes a strange, contemplative, philosophical film like Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* in which an ensemble cast[173] wanders through an amorphous war that is ostensibly the Pacific front during WWII; the non-linear film, gently guided by the voiceover narration of (largely) Jim Caviezel's character, Private Witt, who repeatedly goes AWOL (Away Without Leave) from his unit, dwells in his memories, and is deeply existential and contemplative about the nature of man (his gendered word choice) and war. Despite appearing most often shirtless (typical of hard bodies), his narration of his complex and deeply emotional and philosophical internal life and his long, lanky body immediately set him apart from the much simpler and more muscular hard-bodied masculinity of the 1980s and

early 90s. Other characters seem to recognize this 'flaw' in his masculinity too; when Witt is caught AWOL, Sean Penn's character, First Sergeant Tom Welsh, attempts to "dish out" some fatherly tough-love, telling him: "You'll never be a real soldier, not in God's world," informing Witt he's sending him to a disciplinary unit. Unconcerned, Witt casually replies: "I can take anything you dish out; I'm twice the man you are." This challenge is explicitly based on masculinity and manliness which is related to soldiering and is here equated to discipline and the ability to withstand punishment (masochism). Welsh is not only more 'hard' emotionally and in terms of rank here, but is also more of a physical hard-body; while the narrator appears shirtless in the opening scenes, he is too thin to be a typical hard-body, and in these scenes his shirtlessness actually serves to link him to the non-white Pacific island natives within whose group he is immersing himself.[174] Indeed, given Witt's deep internal emotional life, which could be construed as mental 'softness,' there are echoes of Kurtz from *Apocalypse Now* in this opening scene in which the narrator immerses himself in the local population and its activities – even paternally playing games with the children – but this time, the body (Witt's) is soft in its lack of muscle tone and almost-emaciation rather than its portliness.

In this later 90s part of the period though, masculinity isn't just about being hard anymore; as Jeffords points out with her analysis of *Kindergarten Cop* and other, one must, in this period also be compassionate and fatherly, too, more like Elias than Barnes (from *Platoon*). And Welsh fits this mould: while Welsh is 'harder' than Witt, he's not too hard – he's not publically shaming Witt or seeming to take pleasure in punishing him; in fact, he seems reluctant to do so, like he's (a disappointed father) really just trying to straighten Witt out and set him on the "right"– masculine, soldierly – path by disciplining him with paternal tough love. Welsh is also depicted as 'softer' than some of the other soldiers in the unit; just before they advance up a

hill, a soldier says he is sick to his stomach and while Woody Harrelson's character, Sergeant

Keck, doesn't believe him and tells him to get up anyway (much like Barnes to Taylor in

Platoon), Welsh decides to take this soldier to the medic, once again displaying compassion and

fatherly instincts (as Elias does with Taylor in *Platoon*). Similarly, Welsh later endangers

himself to get a wounded soldier back behind the lines, and get him painkillers, but when

Captain Staros (played by Elias Koteas), says that he's going to recommend Welsh for

commendation, Welsh violently refuses, suggesting that his actions are not motivated by the

desire for glory or personal validation, but by concern for his fellow soldier; this is the kind of

'softness,' the kind that fosters masculine bonding and enhances rather than harms the American

military, that is tolerated and even encouraged. Given too-hard Keck's untimely and un-heroic

demise shortly after this scene (accidentally pulling his own grenade pin and then having to fall

on it to avoid blowing up his entire unit), Welsh's version of masculinity certainly comes out

ahead, appearing much more desirable. Even Keck's manner of death reveals shifts in

masculinity, showing that even 'hard' American soldiers are not infallible. Other soldiers, too,

are shown losing their cool before and during battle – the emphasis resting much more on

compassion than on perfect courage and total impenetrability as it did with the hard bodies of the

previous decade.[175]

In fact, increasingly, towards the end of the film, the older, 'harder' generation of military

masculinity, represented by Nick Nolte and John Travolta's characters, Lt. Col. Gordon Tall and

Brig. Gen. David Quintard respectively, is critiqued as too hard. Tall explicitly relates his

masculinity to his soldiering and fathering and to how much he has subjected himself to military

discipline, declaring: "I have worked my ass off, brownnosed to the generals, degraded myself

for them and my family." But this subjection of self to military discipline conflicts with his

'harder' individualistic desire for personal gain; he later becomes so focused on winning that his judgment becomes clouded and he's willing to needlessly sacrifice American soldiers' lives for a chance at personal gain and glory. Koteas' character, Captain Staros, must at one point refuse Tall's order because it is pointless and suicidal; he offers a better plan, but Tall insists they go for the glory, and forces Staros out of his position of command because he's "too soft." Tall cares more about forward momentum than the safety, efficiency, and efficacy of his soldiers; when John Cusack's character, Capt. John Gaff, insists that the men need water, Tall responds uncaringly that they're all tough boys and "if they faint they faint." When Gaff replies that they could die from the lack of water, Tall callously retorts that they could die from enemy fire, too; given all of these comments and actions, it's clear that he's more than willing to sacrifice these soldiers not for the success of the military as a whole (which would be an acceptable and appropriate sacrifice) but needlessly (as he is offered alternate and better strategies but refuses to heed anyone's suggestions), and for his own personal gain. Tall also fails to conform to the newer, 'softer' hegemonic masculine model preferred in the 1990s onward in that he's not a caring father figure; during the film he's explicit about his disappointment with his son's choice to be a bait salesman, a job that Tall perceives as less masculine and respectable than being a soldier. Importantly, this kind of 'hard' older masculinity represented by Tall is depicted as too-hard, brutal and selfish and ineffective because it commands no respect from other younger military personal, even high-ranking members like Gaff and Staros who, in the examples given above, are represented as the more desirable examples of masculinity: hard and physically capable, but also soft on the inside (caring, fatherly soldiers); they represent the 'new softer man' who has the best interest of the soldiers under his command in mind and, by extension, the American military and nation as a whole.

There are certainly other examples of too-hard masculinity in the younger generation of soldiers in *The Thin Red Line*; one of the voiceovers says: "I killed a man – worst thing you can do – worse than rape. I killed a man and no one can touch me for it;" here there is almost pride and power in killing, and joy in it being sanctioned[176] (and references to the connections between war and sexual violence as in the aforementioned tent scene full of too-hard soldiers from *Platoon*). Similarly, while one American soldier shows compassion to a dying Japanese prisoner, another cruelly tells a dying Japanese soldier that birds are going to eat his dead body. So both kinds of masculinity still exist and perhaps compete, but the film is clear about which kind it prefers: the newer, softer man fares better overall, garnering more respect, admiration and fraternity than those 'too-hard' soldiers who die ignominiously and have their unreasonable orders refused. This preference is also evident in the time which the film spends dwelling on the soldiers' subjectivities. There are repeated flashbacks of mothers and wives back home for those 'softer' characters who have a more developed internal emotional life, and a huge difference in volume between the action scenes with lots of background noise and chaos, and the calmer, more reflexive scenes with lighter, gentler audio and sometimes slow-motion visuals, in which the soldiers are thinking, daydreaming, having private moments etc. The differences both in quality and quantity encourage the viewer to enjoy, almost relax into the reflexive moments set in serene spaces, and shrink back from the battle scenes. The emphasis strongly suggests that these reflexive moments are at least as important if not more important than the action sequences and therefore that the men who have these reflexive moments are favoured over those who only participate in action sequences.

The narration of the film as a whole is very romantic too: "husbands want to stay changeless for wives, come back to them the way they were before" and "Love ... who lit this

flame in us? No war can put it out, conquer it ... if I was a prisoner, you'd set me free." While these meditations seem to be about heterosexual couplings, there are also some homoerotic or at least deeply loving scenes between soldiers in the film. In one scene, a soldier who's dying asks his friend to hold his hand in example of the close bond between men that's only sanctioned in this uber-masculine space (recalling Easthope's arguments, where else would men be able to hold hands and comfort each other in such a manner other than on the battle field?). Similarly, at one point, while Witt is caring for another man, pouring water soothingly over his head, the narrator philosophizes: "maybe all men got one big soul, different faces, same soul;" significantly, though, all of the faces he's looking at, and that appear onscreen are the face of white soldiers, suggesting that while the sentiment is inclusive, the reality is that that people of colour don't count in this vision of mankind's unified soul. Along the same lines, Witt as the narrator later wonders: "We were a family. How'd it break up and come apart, so that now we're turned against each other? ... How did we lose the good that was given us?" Again, while these musings could relate to a heterosexual coupling (a young woman appears in repeated dreamy flashbacks), the existentialist focus of the film suggests that the narrator is reflecting on larger, more humanist ideas, the brotherhood of man being the "family" that has come apart. Significantly, however, many of these musings and contemplations occur over shots of Witt in nature, AWOL and cavorting with the natives of the Pacific islands. Ironically, Witt, the one soldier who seems to believe in the innate goodness of humanity, the "family of man," ultimately ends up alone in the jungle, surrounded and slaughtered by Japanese soldiers. The implications of this ending seem clear: a man so contemplative, meditative, and Romantic, is too 'soft' for this military world. The harshness of war wins out, and Witt's softness is wiped out, extinguished. The final scenes show Witt swimming with the 'native' children again as in echo

of early scenes – suggesting that this is his paradise, perhaps (given the almost-theistic nature of the narrated ponderings) that he is in heaven, or some sort of better place now that he's no longer on Earth, mired in war.

In the scenes that follow Witt's death, his fellow soldiers mourn him by making an iconic homage to him with a rifle planted in the ground and his helmet hanging on top. In the film's final comment on masculinity, Sean Penn's character, Welsh, who's been tough but compassionate throughout the film (and who once told Whit that his death would mean nothing) breaks down and weeps alone by the memorial after everyone else has left. This last-man-standing final scene suggests that Welsh's middle-ground, tough-but-sensitive masculinity is the one that lives on, outlasting Witt's too-softness, reinforcing that it is a combination of exterior toughness and his interior compassion that are required of American military men; this representation of the preferred version of masculinity extends to men generally as the leaders of the (national) family.

Middle/Regressive: *The Patriot, We Were Soldiers, Black Hawk Down*

In the middle/regressive cycle of the period, around the early to mid-2000s, the definitive markers of masculinity are still deeply and intricately tied to fatherhood or fatherliness, but the brutal 'hardness' of previous decades (1980s) also returns with a vengeance. These two films, *The Patriot* and *We Were Soldiers*, are very much alike in this way, and not just because they both star Mel Gibson. In fact, in many ways, they should, based on the patterns and conventions typical of films about the two wars they are about, be quite different films in that *The Patriot* is about The American Revolution, and *We Were Soldiers* is about Vietnam. But each is also seemingly symbolizing or standing in for other wars, so while *The Patriot* is ostensibly about the American Revolution and war for independence, it is also deeply fraught with issues at the root

of the American Civil War – slavery, racism, etc., and while *We Were Soldiers* purports to be

about Vietnam, it's politics and emotional tenor link it much more closely to films about WWII.

In each, Mel Gibson's character is a simultaneously talented soldier and devoted family man, and

the message is the same: internal (American) racism can be overcome by focusing anger, rage,

and violence outward, against Others; the goodness of American families is paramount; and it is

the disruption that war causes in American family lives that is to be vilified, not war itself, which

is depicted as a necessary and crucial part of nation-building. In each film, Gibson's character is

both a brutally efficient warrior (whether by physical violence or tactical strategy or both), and

the fiercely devoted head of a large nuclear American family, reinforcing the traditional,

conservative family (and racial and gendered and heteronormative and nationalistic/militaristic)

values upon which these middle-period, WWII-nostalgic films are based and to which they seem

to want to return.

Benjamin Martin (referred to herein as Martin Sr.), played by Mel Gibson, is (at first) the

sole head of the Martin family (his wife having died some years before the film's opening), a

well-respected member of the community who is locally famous for his role in the American-

Indian conflicts. Martin Sr.'s legend as a military force to be reckoned with is established very

early in the community assembly when his role in "Fort Wilderness" (a military battle viewers

do not learn the significance of until much later in the film) is repeatedly referenced; Thomas,

one of Martin's sons, also asks his father what happened at Fort Wilderness, a question which

receives no answer. Martin Sr. is respected jointly for his soldiering and his status as an esteemed

family man and unfortunately those two elements of his character seem to be in conflict at the

outset of the film when Martin refuses to vote for war with the British, and initially refuses to

fight because he is a father and therefore doesn't have "the luxury" of going to war. But when

Gabriel Martin, Martin Sr.'s eldest son (played by Heath Ledger), bucks his father's authority by joining the army against his father's wishes and when one of Martin Sr.'s younger sons is ruthlessly and needlessly shot by a villainous redcoat shortly thereafter, Martin Sr. quickly changes his mind about not having 'the luxury' of going to war, passing his younger kids off on his sister-in-law-cum-wife, so he can devote himself almost entirely to soldiering again.[177]

In addition to being family-oriented, Martin Sr. is also religious (as are all of the Martins, in fact), praying: "Lord make me fast and accurate" before his opening salvo on the British troop taking his son Gabriel away to his death. After Martin Sr. kills the last redcoat by hitting him in the back with a tomahawk there is a strange, vaguely religious scene in which Martin Sr., pictured from a low angle with the sun shining down on him through the trees sinks to his knees looking skyward, covered in the dead men's blood. This oddly almost-silent scene after the previous chaotic fast-paced blood-bath seems to imply some sort of religious intervention benefitting Martin in his incredible feat of successfully taking on and defeating a dozen soldiers almost single-handedly. This is the version of masculinity prized throughout the film: a father who is also preternaturally good at soldiering, his violence authorized or justified by the war's threat to his family.

This prized ability to soldier does not have to be innate, however, it can, like Foucault suggested, be taught, the body and mind disciplined. When Martin, in efforts to recruit for a militia says "Harry, they're not soldiers their farmers, they'd be better off just letting the British march through," he is proved wrong when, under his tutelage, those 'farmers with pitchforks' form a very effective militia that has a large role in ultimately defeating the British; the difference between a soldier and a farmer with a pitchfork turns out to be discipline and training backed by the will to defend one's family (and nation). In addition to the class differences based

on nationalism that the previous discussion raises (British regulars, gentleman soldiers, vs. American homesteaders with pitchforks), the film also depicts some other national differences in masculinity between Martin Sr. and the French national soldier that he works with, Jean Villeneuve (played by Tchéky Karyo), but this juxtaposition only reinforces the film's ideological message that at the heart of each 'good' type of masculinity is fatherliness. Villeneuve is more dapper and decorous than Martin and the other Americans, but the connection between the two men, the way they are able to bridge their differences throughout the film is via their shared devotion to fatherhood. Similarly, the British soldiers want the war to be fought in a gentlemanly manner: "There must be gentlemen leading armies" according to Lord Cornwallis (played by Tom Wilkinson); Cornwallis also admonishes his underling, Col. William Tavington's (played by Jason Isaacs) ungentlemanly behaviour in hiring an American traitor, Capt. Wilkins (played by Adam Baldwin). Yet while the Brits appear 'cleaner' in physical appearance/uniform, their tactics (though carried out by a traitorous American middle-man) are 'dirtier:' spying, burning women and children alive in churches, etc. Indeed, it is primarily through their attacks on American families (shooting one Martin son and taking another captive; burning women and children in churches) that the British forces are vilified throughout the film.

Martin Sr. later reveals, however, that the British are not the only forces to have used 'dirty' tactics, admitting his guilt to his eldest son, Gabriel, about his role in the brutal and inhuman treatment of Native Americans at 'Fort Wilderness;' such a confession is dampened, however, by the suggestion that these terrible acts were committed only in retaliation for similarly brutal aggression by the natives themselves, implying, despite Martin Sr.'s guilt, that the natives 'deserved it.' This racial guilt might explain Martin Sr.'s seemingly incongruous sympathy for and pointedly good treatment of African Americans in the film; all of his servants

are free, not enslaved, and he combats racism at every turn in the film, requiring that any slaves signed up for the militia by their masters 'make their mark' on the page, and insisting that they be treated equally once they are a part of the militia. Yet this attitude smacks of colonialism in its paternalism: Martin Sr. is the benevolent white man (possibly motivated by racial guilt) 'saving' the film's 'coloured' folk, again recalling Spivak's notion of the white man as 'saviour' of non-whites.

So while there are other types of masculinity on display in the film and Martin Sr. does harbour guilt about his own past wartime actions, his patriotic American fatherly soldier is still the pinnacle of desirable masculinity in the film, his seemingly anti-racist stance elevating him even further. He becomes an emblem of war whose "victories and losses are shared" by more people than he can know according to his friend and military mentor Col. Harry Burwell, played by Chris Cooper; Martin Sr. is the quintessential American soldier. At the film's climax, when he runs forward with the flag yelling for his men to hold the line, despite or perhaps even because of (the film suggests) his immense personal losses (both his son Gabriel and Gabriel's young wife have since been killed by the villainous British Col. William Tavington), people follow him into battle, and he leads them to victory. The fact that he, the embodiment of the older military generation, not one of his 'softer' sons, survives to rebuild a newer better America after the revolution (his fellow surviving militia members literally help him rebuild his burnt-down house in the final scenes) reinforces the privileging of this older, harder, masculinity over a newer, softer one in the middle cycle (of the post-Gulf War to present period) and encourages an ideological return to tougher foreign-policy (internal racism should be overcome to defeat the non-American Other) and more conservative family values (white hyper-proficient militarily men should be at the head of large heteronormative families).[178]

Much the same as *The Patriot*, but set during Vietnam, the film *We Were Soldiers* centers on Col. Hal Moore, an experienced and talented soldier and family man. Moore, it's mentioned twice, was in Korea, so experience soldiering is clearly constructed as important to the type of older, harder masculinity depicted in this cycle of the period. Moore is also educated, possessing a Masters degree in international relations from Harvard; upon learning of this his neighbour exclaims "Harvard?! He's not one of those academic pussies is he?" as the camera focuses on Moore emerging from his moving van carrying an arm-load of books, biceps bulging. But Moore's book-smarts, like his biceps, are revealed to be in service of his soldiering; he is a pragmatic, realistic problem-solver. During the training scenes, for example, he solves the dilemma of how to deal with landing the choppers under fire and losing men, ordering: "You learn the job of the man above you, and you teach your job to the man below you in rank. That goes for every man in this outfit, understood? We'll be landing under fire, gentlemen. Men will die." While he doesn't relish the idea of losing soldiers, he's practical and practiced enough to recognize that it will happen and devise a solution to the potential problems these deaths will cause in the operation of the military machine. Moore's ideal masculinity is again reinforced when contrasted with the too-hardness of one of his subordinates toward the end of the film; he questions his abilities, wondering aloud to his second-in-command Sgt. Maj. Basil Plumley (Sam Elliott): "I wonder what was going through Custer's mind when he realized he led his men into a slaughter" and Plumley's no-nonsense response is: "Sir, Custer was a pussy. You ain't." The fact that Moore is declared hard and respected by fellow soldiers, even older, too-hard men like Plumley, reveals that his paternal yet practical patriotism is the favoured type of masculinity in the film. Even Plumley's too-hard masculinity isn't punished as harshly as in other cycles of the period: while his dourness is a source of humour in the film, the soldiers under his command still

follow his orders and he survives the film's long and bloody battle. Moore's centrality, however, reinforces the preferability of his breed of masculinity over Plumley's. Not only is Moore intelligent and strategic and respected by older and younger soldiers alike, he, like Martin Sr. from *The Patriot*, is compassionate towards his soldiers (worrying about sending them into a bloodbath) and is also a religious family man; during a scene at home he asks his children if they've said their prayers, and when they reveal they haven't, he tells them to "fall in" and says prayers with them, linking his duties as a soldier and as a father.

While Moore's fatherly soldier-figure is the masculine exemplar of the film, there are, too, examples of men that are too-hard (like Plumley seems) or too-stupid, and men that might be too-soft. A young soldier who has been identified by his fellow soldiers as one who "wants to win medals" quickly puts the rest of his unit in mortal danger by chasing glory, running after an enemy scout (disregarding sound advice not to) and, in the process, getting his own unit surrounded. He is shot and says, as he's dying, "I'm glad I could die for my country." This sort of negative portrayal critiques inexperience and individualism because this individualism and the desire for personal glory disrupt the strictly disciplined system of the American military and cause it to malfunction – more lives are later lost trying to save the unit that is cut-off as a result of this soldier's impulsive, selfish actions. An example of a more acceptable level of bravery is embodied by secondary character Maj. Bruce "Snakeshit" Crandall, played by Greg Kinnear, an American military helicopter pilot so named because he'll "fly lower" than it (snake shit), whose nickname suggests he's a brave and able pilot. Snakeshit isn't too hard though; his compassion and love for fellow soldiers is revealed when he throws up as he watches the blood of those soldiers being washed out of his helicopter. This display of softness and emotion is immediately tempered, however, by equal attention to his 'hardness' when he threatens to kill a medevac pilot

who yells at him for leading them into a "hot" (under fire) landing-zone; Snakeshit yells: "You have the balls to face me but not the enemy?" These back-to-back incidents reveal that while he's emotional when it comes to losing his fellow soldiers, he's still masculine and hard because of his soldierly skill (ability to successfully pilot his helicopter in and out of 'hot' zones) and bravery (at least more so than this other pilot who is comparatively suggested to be too cowardly and concerned for his own life to fly into a hot landing zone).

As Jeffords argues in the introductory chapter of and throughout *The Remasculinization of America*, often the higher-ups in the military and the American government take the blame for any problems in war whereas the American soldiers themselves are the 'good guys' in hard-body films (3-4), and these middle-period films are no different. *We Were Soldiers* places a strong emphasis on a "leave no man behind policy" (also emphasized heavily in other films of the period like *Black Hawk Down*), reinforcing the idea that these men are a family and that they will not leave one of their family behind, but that the enforcement of this policy happens on the ground, and has little to do with the higher levels of authority. It is telling that this policy seems to be much more heavily emphasized in films about conflicts in more 'foreign' countries such as Vietnam and Somalia, where the enemy and civilian Others are not white (as opposed to European countries and the Civil War/American revolution where the policy is not emphasized and bodies are sometimes left behind or buried where they fall, as in *Saving Private Ryan*, for example). It is significant that it should become more important to bring everyone (dead or alive) home the more *other* than home the place where combat occurs is; the 'leave no man behind' policy is not nearly as heavily emphasized in films about WWII, where most of the fighting is being done in Europe, places more 'like home' (for American soldiers/viewers) and where the people look and sound more familiar. Moore is very devoted to bringing everyone home from

Vietnam in *We Were Soldiers*, much more so than his superiors back home who seem more concerned with winning and losing than honouring promises to men. In fact, the callousness and hard-heartedness of the upper echelons of the military and government are reinforced in *We Were Soldiers* when Moore calls "Broken Arrow," meaning, in this case, that an American unit has been overrun, and higher-ups who are not on site (they appear in a command room and communicate by what appears to be satellite phone) respond "My God. There's no hiding it now," implying that their main concern is hiding American military fallibility and/or Vietnamese superiority in battle, not saving men's lives. So, like Jeffords argues of the 1980s/early 1990s films she deals with, here too in these middle/regressive period films,[179] it's the government that's the bad guy, not the hard body soldier himself; the 'good soldier' in these films is always a tough one who listens to his commanding officers, has respect and love for his fellow soldiers and fights resignedly to get home to his family (the unity of which is threatened by this conflict but never wholly broken).

Another significant difference between this film and the films from the early and later part of the period is that the older military men with 'boots on the ground' can be well-respected and wise rather than simply written off as exemplars of too-hard masculinity. As alluded to previously, Moore's second-in-command, Sgt. Maj. Basil Plumley is a grumpy older man of few words and little affect who, despite his grumpiness is revealed to be a wise and competent soldier whose years of experience, while perhaps the reason for his grumpiness, allow him to keep his cool under the pressures of battle. Throughout the film, Plumley constantly gives Sgt. Ernie Savage (played by Ryan Hurst), a pleasant young soldier, a hard time in response to Savage's innocuous greetings (e.g. "Nice day" or "Beautiful morning," which are returned with a scowl or a question: "Is it?"). The juxtaposition between the two men's dispositions serves as comic relief

in an otherwise fairly self-serious film, but the reason behind Plumley's jaded attitude is revealed late in the film: an air strike allows the men to finally go and rescue the aforementioned unit that has been cut-off from the rest of the American forces for hours, but there aren't many men left alive by the time they get there; back at the main American position from which protagonist Moore commands, a soldier is overheard reporting "40 KIA 2 MIA" at which Plumley turns pointedly to the surviving Savage and declares as seriously as ever: "That's your nice day Sgt. Savage." This statement drains the humour from the situation and implies that it's too many days like these, where the American military takes heavy casualties, that make Plumley so cynical and negative; Sgt. Savage is 'green', inexperienced in combat, and Plumley sees him as naïve because Plumley's combat experience has made him jaded. Plumley's secret 'softness' is revealed, however, when Sgt. Savage, the sole surviving commanding officer of the stranded platoon weeps and Plumley looks empathetic; Plumley clearly feels for this soldier's loss of innocence, though he knew from experience, the film implies, it would happen eventually. While Plumley's experience may make him crotchety, it also makes him a cool, level-headed soldier who can walk around calmly in the most chaotic of battles, doing his job expertly and unfailingly despite the very difficult circumstances. While in other cycles of the period Plumley might be killed of ignominiously, disrespected by younger soldiers, or made a complete laughingstock, in this middle/regressive cycle he is a respected elder whose tough exterior is represented as an understandable consequence of his years of combat experience that allow him to be most proficient in his soldierly duties. The respect for older, combat-hardened but efficient soldiers is much more typical of middle-period films than early or later period films where older generations of military men are often depicted as too-hard and eliminated, but throughout the period (and the genre as a whole), one's success as a military man still always depends on one's

conformity to a very specific and disciplined hegemonic masculinity (even if the definition or elements of that masculinity shift slightly throughout the genre).

Black Hawk Down, a filmic version of the 1993 American intervention in Somalia, while having a slightly more ensemble cast, also focuses on a 'new man' (physically hard/capable but emotionally soft/compassionate) character who, while younger than the previously examined Mel Gibson characters, is still more contemplative and intelligent (than older hard-body figures), in addition to being a competent soldier. Protagonist, Sgt. Eversmann, played by Josh Hartnett, is out to better the world, to help people rather than to win medals. He, perhaps naively, tells his fellow soldiers that he thinks he was trained to make a difference rather than simply to fight. From a slightly older generation, 'Hoot', played by Eric Bana, also represents ideal American military masculinity and is philosophical about being in the military, but his outlook is less politically idealistic than Eversmann's and is more about brotherly love, and the aforementioned leave-no-man-behind policy.

Again, in this film, the quality of the person (man) is intimately linked to his experience and fighting ability with aforementioned comments like: "Generally speaking the Somalis can't shoot for shit," "Just watch out for the Sammies throwing rocks and you'll be fine," and "We're rangers, we're elite." These types of comments also serve to construct and reinforce a sharp contrast between 'good,' skilled Americans and the 'bad,' unskilled, even uncivilized (throwing rocks) enemy Other.[180] This film also serves to bolster respect for an older, more experienced generation of soldiers by revealing the weakness of inexperienced soldiers when one newbie, almost surprised, shouts: "They're shooting at us!" and another, more experienced soldier exasperatedly responds: "Well shoot back!" In many of these middle-period WWII-nostalgia films several American soldiers among the group are generally depicted as older or at least more

seasoned, implying that it's a good thing that America is at war so frequently because this regularity of conflict means that the branches of the armed forces still have older soldiers with experience within their ranks. The disturbing ideological implication of this type of representation is that if there were too long a lull between wars all soldiers would be 'green' or inexperienced and not know how to fight and defend the country as well (and would also therefore be less masculine and strong).[181]

While some American soldiers are portrayed as fallible in *Black Hawk Down*, making mistakes like falling out of the chopper, missing their meet-up points, and not being able to go back out into battle a second time ("I can't go back out there sir."), most of the main characters including Eversmann and Hoot want to go back out and are depicted as doing a very good job despite very unfavourable situation on the ground (especially the older, more experienced soldiers such as McKnight, played by Tom Sizemore). Even amongst the younger soldiers, masculinity is linked to good soldiering, and concern for symbolic masculinity trumps concern for ones own life: when one soldier gets shot in the leg, the first thing he asks is "Are my balls okay?" He is more concerned about his male genitalia, his symbolic masculinity, than his own life; it is his femoral artery that has been clipped by the bullet, not his balls, and though he doesn't yet realize it, he is actually dying. This concern with his conformity to hegemonic masculinity continues even when he finally recognizes that his injury might be fatal; he wants Eversmann to tell his parents not that he loves them, but that he's a good soldier: "Tell them that I fought well today, that I fought hard." That this young man's parting message is an almost desperate claim to good fighting and therefore a life well lived, marks strongly the connection between masculinity and soldiering, rendering it unmistakable. As in *We Were Soldiers*, it is

often the 'green,' young and inexperienced soldiers whose mistakes imperil the rest, reinforcing the never-ending need for an older, more experienced military masculinity.

Overall then, in these middle-period regressive films, ideal masculinity is related to the ability to be a good, experienced soldier, to be compassionate but strong, and intelligent and resourceful, but also a religious and devoted family man. The homoeroticism latent in all combat films is scaled way back in this period as are the explicit references to sex and profanity, and male bodies are kept much more under wraps (as compared to some of the Vietnam films discussed previously in this chapter or some of the films from the later part of the period to be discussed further herein), scaling down the (homo)erotic potential for the viewer. While these men may be compassionate and focused on the well-being of their fellow soldiers, there is no doubt in their minds about the goodness or rightness of conflict; it is simply an accepted and natural part of life. This confidence in the necessity of war and the moral righteousness of it eludes some soldiers from the later part of the period even if they are still determined to be good soldiers and strong, brave men representing their nation in war.

Later Cycle: *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*, *Generation Kill*

In the later films of the period like *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker*, and the miniseries *Generation Kill*, many soldiers are still physical hard bodies and their bodies are much more on display than in the films of the regressive middle-period cycle, but these hard bodies have many more doubts or troubles than the characters in the middle period. The homoerotic threats created by the meshing of sex and violence in an all-male arena filled with hard bodies and the innate tension between the individualistic tendencies of hard bodies and their military duties (requiring a certain amount of docility) creates a great deal of tension for the military masculinities of this later part of the period. Here, unlike in the comparatively chaste middle-period films, soldiers are

not so convinced that the wars they participate in are the 'right' thing to do, or even that they love their fellow soldiers and/or partners/families back home. Significantly less emphasis is placed on the importance of previous military experience and paternal soldier-soldier relationships in this more recent cycle; instead, the type of individualism and lack of docility (typical of Jeffords' 1980s/1990s hard-bodies) that threatens the operation of the military machine as a whole comes to the fore in this part of the period, signaling a potential resurgence of a seemingly 'softened' version of this figure and its associated politics.

Perhaps more so than many of the other films of this period, *Jarhead* makes a return to the explicit verbal link between sex and violence (very typical of the post-Vietnam films explored herein). Main character and narrator Anthony Swofford notes when he enters basic training that in the Marines "My hands are dick skinners ... my mouth was a cum receptacle, a shirt was a blouse." He's told and that "A marine's head is a jar, an empty vessel" to be filled up, reinforcing that while in training they are all docile bodies just waiting to be disciplined and that once trained they will be masculine fighting machines. When he misbehaves he's told he's being sent to a company full of "retards and fuck-ups," again (like in *Thin Red Line* where Witt is sent to a disciplinary unit) linking the competent performance of soldierly duties to masculinity and reinforcing that the competent functioning of the military machine as a whole requires the competent functioning of all its individual parts. Insults, too, like "You simple dick muthafucker," are related to sexuality and the threat of homosexuality in such a homosocial environment.

Yet, this type of homoerotic reference to masculine sexuality being aroused by soldiering is also emphatically embraced in other contexts: in a rousing speech before deployment, a commanding officer, Lt. Col. Kazinski, played by Chris Cooper, shouts: "I just felt my dick

move" when the Marines respond loudly, whooping and cheering, to his "Welcome to operation Desert Shield." Again, when all the troops yell in unison that they're going to "Kick some Iraqi ass" he responds "Oh man I just got a hard-on." This sequence explicitly links masculine desire for aggression and war with sexual gratification (or at least sexual arousal).

Swofford's commanding officer, Staff Sgt. Sykes (Jamie Foxx) doesn't shy away from talking about the men's bodies either; when they're about to be interviewed for television he tells them: "Take your shirts off; show your muscles; you've been workin' out." Indeed, once the men grow tired of the reporters' presence, they eventually get the reporters to go away by stripping off some of their clothes and simulating sexual acts (anal sex, oral sex) with one another. This homoeroticism is only sanctioned as a joke in this man-only space – there are still no women in even the most recent combat films – as the men are all very vocal and open about their heterosexual relationships with women back home. The linkage between the commission of violence and the practice of soldiering and the phallus, too, reinforces the heteronormativity of the film's message. The first thing Swofford thinks when he learns the war is over is: "I never shot my rifle." Many of his fellow soldiers seem to feel similarly frustrated; the celebration of the war being over deteriorates into a bunch of shirtless men encircling a bonfire shooting their weapons off into the air (many from crotch-level with their legs planted wide); being the operator of a gun is clearly constructed as a phallic privilege and Swofford feels emasculated and useless for not having been allowed or required to fire his weapon in the line of duty. This anger seems to be largely directed outward at the government[182] for castrating him or denying him the symbolic phallus, but Swofford has a great deal of internal turmoil as well.

Despite the number of hard male bodies on display in the film – Sykes is right when he says the men have been "workin' out" – there is a great deal of potential mental softness in the

main characters. Swofford declares that most problems that the Marine faces have standard responses but there isn't one for the Marine who's losing his mind. And indeed, it seems that Swofford may be having some trouble retaining his sanity. As detailed in chapter two, he becomes increasingly paranoid that his girlfriend is cheating on him, and becomes very bored and disillusioned by the lack of action in this conflict. At one point, Swofford even threatens to kill Fergus (played by Brian Geraghty), a fellow soldier, before turning the gun on himself and trying to make Fergus shoot him. Swofford's partner, or 'sight,' Alan Troy, played by Peter Sarsgaard, later makes Swofford apologize to Fergus; here, Fergus is the "weak link" (like Pyle in *Full Metal Jacket*), making a mistake that gets everyone in trouble,[183] but Swofford is potentially mentally soft and his transgression more serious because he threatens to hurt Fergus and then himself. These actions would cause damage to the military machine from within and therefore even the threat of them must be punished severely; too much of this kind of mental softness (e.g. Kurtz or Pyle) cannot be tolerated. Even Troy (ironically the voice of reason during Swofford's mini-breakdown), one of the seemingly 'hardest' and most dedicated to the Marines and the military is revealed to be 'soft' in the end; having lied about a criminal record to get into the Marines, he weeps violently when he learns he's to be ejected from the military and later (it is implied) commits suicide as a result of his discharge. So while there are still always hard bodies in these combat films, the later period films link this exterior hardness with an interior softness or at least a more troubled, less sure self. While each soldier still attempts to fulfill the military (and social) requirements of measuring up to hegemonic masculinity, and perhaps overcompensates by linking their capabilities for violence to their purported virile heterosexuality, large cracks in the façade of this unified military masculinity begin to show in this cycle of films.

In *The Hurt Locker*, too, external toughness and hardness is often matched by internal turmoil if not 'softness.' The main character, Sergeant First Class William James, played by Jeremy Renner, is a former ranger (while younger than many lead characters from the regressive period, he has experience like them) who engages in multiple tours of duty as a bomb-diffusion specialist in the Middle East. Like in most other combat films, the men link their military duties and sexuality by making sexually explicit jokes about "sticking it in" (some bomb-diffusing technology) "like it's your dick." Solidifying the connection between sex and military duties, James has a cigarette after each diffusion and at one point even comments "that was good," taking a drink, linking war to sex by engaging in stereotypical post-sex activities and making stereotypical post-coital comments after diffusing bombs; ironically, in these cases, unlike with sexual encounters, it is a *lack* of explosion that marks a successful session.

Also linking this film to others of the cycle, like *Jarhead*, there is a great deal of homoeroticism bordering on violence (as in the aforementioned 'field fuck' scene from *Jarhead* where the men blow off steam by simulating orgiastic sexual acts on one another while reporters look on). In *The Hurt Locker*, however, the homoerotic male bonding scenes are much more intimate, because of the narrower focus on a small, three-person, crew. At one point, the three men in the unit, James, Sanborn, and Eldridge fight (horse around or wrestle) while listening to James' angry metal music in his small, dark room. They take off their shirts while punching each other during this scene, and then James proceeds to 'ride' Sanborn like a bull. The scene comes to an uneasy close when James says he's just kidding. He says "You're alright Sanborn. Owen, get this man a drink," attempting, but not quite succeeding in defusing the uncomfortably violent and vaguely sexually-tinged tension in the room and for the viewer.

In this film, too, like the others examined herein, unquestionable masculinity and soldiering credibility comes only from boots-on-the-ground experience. Owen Eldridge, who has been seeing a military therapist since the death of the previous bomb technician (Staff Sergeant Matt Thompson played by Guy Pearce), accuses the doctor of not having any field experience, and therefore being weak and cowardly, setting himself up as masculine-patriotic in contrast: "at least I'll die in the line of duty; proud; strong." The doctor protests, arguing that he has his experience and Owen retorts: "Oh yeah? Where – Yale?" (echoing a familiar binary between those with 'real' combat experience and "academic pussies," as previously set up and deconstructed in *We Were Soldiers* – Moore's academic prowess combines with his physical prowess to make him a super-soldier). Here, even Eldridge, who is certainly the least hard-bodied of the small group both physically and mentally (he is, after all, relying on a psychiatrist), sees himself as more of a hard-body than the doctor by virtue of his front-line soldiering as compared to the doctor's relatively safe, feminine, nurturing role protecting other soldiers' mental health. Unfortunately, the doctor comes with them on their next field assignment after being taunted and not taken seriously by Eldridge, and, in trying to communicate with the locals (telling them in an overly patronizing manner to move), gets himself killed; Eldridge is further traumatized by this death, another that he perceives himself to have caused or at least failed to prevent. While his role is small, in a similar way to the soft body figures from the Vietnam-centered films analyzed herein, the doctor is a sort of soft figure in the film whose lack of field experience and inability to soldier well (speaking patronizingly and ineffectually to civilians in the streets) must be eliminated to ensure the continued efficiency of the harder masculinities.

Eldridge is not the only character whose mental turmoil is on display. James, too, seems to have a self-destructive streak, repeatedly going rogue off the base at night, against regulations

and without authority. Upon being caught, his excuse for sneaking off the base at night is that he was "at a whorehouse," seemingly a more acceptable/masculine excuse than revealing what he was actually doing, which is searching for the person responsible for building a bomb inside the body of a young local boy whom James had befriended. On one of these rogue occasions, he takes the other men with him on a wild goose-chase that ends in Eldridge being shot. This circumstance seems to be one of the things that upsets James the most through the film: afterward he cries, fully clothed, curled up in the shower because he's let his need for adrenaline get one of his men hurt; Eldridge (seemingly the most emotionally intelligent of the group) calls him on it too, refusing to let James get away without acknowledging his own internal problems. Indeed, James faces these issues when the men's tour ends and he is completely unable or unwilling to readjust to civilian life and instead re-enlists.[184] Perhaps much more so than in any of the other combat films examined herein (with the possible exception of *Jarhead*), the emphasis in *The Hurt Locker* is on traumatized masculinity: Sanborn is virtually the only main character who doesn't have some sort of obvious psychological difficulty. Regardless of their troubles, however, each of the men is still deeply dedicated to their soldiering, and the hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality that go along with it.

Perhaps because of its much larger, more ensemble cast, *Generation Kill*, an HBO miniseries from the later period cycle of films about the invasion of Iraq, has more physical hard bodies[185] than any of the films of this period in the cycle, but these hard body figures are more of a backdrop for leaner bodies like main character Sgt. Brad "Iceman" Colbert, played by Alexander Skarsgård. In this series, unlike in the middle-period regressive films, the command leadership, the older, guns-blazing types ("Godfather" and "Captain America" among others) are ridiculed by both the men and the series itself while younger, more thoughtful types (like Colbert

and Fick) are generally portrayed most favourably. At one point, for example, a commanding officer barks at his subordinates about shirts being un-tucked and moustaches (pronounced MOO-stashes) being in "violation of code" while the younger men make faces and laugh at him, deriding his authority behind his back. While much less "buttoned-up" than the military portrayed in the middle-regressive cycle of films, discipline is still required in these films' vision of the military. But unlike in middle-period films, soldiers here are open about disrespecting their superior officers' misguided efforts to maintain discipline; as Colbert puts it, "We're about to invade a country and this is what our leader passes on? Moustaches?" This older commander's style of getting in soldiers' faces about personal appearance makes him a caricature of military discipline; where in middle-period films military elders are respected (e.g. Plumley from *We Were Soldiers*), this series' treatment of this older, too-hard authority figure is one of ridicule, suggesting that Colbert is right: while a focus on 'MOO-staches' might have a time and a place in the creation of docile bodies and the maintenance of the military machine, it is not an appropriate focus for a unit about to spearhead the invasion of a country. The younger, leaner generation is therefore represented as the most desirable version of military masculinity here.

Much like in other films of this cycle and again in contrast to WWII-nostalgic, middle-period films, references to sexuality are explicit and constant in *Generation Kill*. Part One is called "Get Some," again explicitly linking sex and violence[186] and implying that male American soldiers are going to "get some" by being the perpetrators of violence, and the enemy Others are going to "get some" by being the object/receiver of physical violence and destruction. This implication is confirmed when the source of the episode's title reveals itself during a scene involving American soldiers shooting at enemy vehicles and an American plane swooping in, hitting its target with a missile, to which an American soldier whoops: "Yea, get some!" This

explicitness of the connection between the commission of violence and sexual arousal is at times disturbing, with the aforementioned claim by an American soldier: "Dead Hajji smell – that shit gets me hard." Such explicit references to and associations between sex and violence are completely absent from the middle period films examined herein.

The more overt homoeroticism common to this cycle of films is no less explicit in this series than in the other films of this part of the period; in the barracks the men wrestle, there are naked pictures of women, a man sleeping in his underwear on the floor curled up around his rifle, and many conversations about "jerking off," all fairly similar to scenes from fellow later period film, *Jarhead*. At one point one soldier accuses another (notably one of the physical hardest bodies, Sgt. Rudy Reyes) of being a "fag" suggesting that he should make gay porn. But the homoeroticism and violence of the homophobia is self-aware in these episodes: when one soldier says to another "your bitch asshole … from all that cock being shoved up it" he also adds, "Marines are so homoerotic – that's all we talk about." Even the men's frustration with their superiors is clothed in oddly aggressive homoerotic comments: "You've had Marines ready to go for twenty-four hours and you're standing here with your foot in your dick? No, check that, my dick." References to and links between sex, violence, and self-referential homoeroticism are so readily apparent they are unavoidable in this series but also in the cycle as a whole; this is a far cry from the much more chaste references to sexuality in middle-period and WWII-nostalgic texts such as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, *The Pacific*, *The Patriot*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Black Hawk Down*, where war is a much more moral pursuit and its pursuers are resigned family men rather than party-boys who throw homophobic insults at one another and disrespect their leaders.

Links between proficient soldiering and masculinity are no less apparent in *Generation Kill* than in other combat films of the cycle: "Kill on three … One two three kill!" is the men's rally chant. But this proficiency has nothing to do with religion as it does in the middle, regressive period films (Martin praying "Lord make me fast and accurate" in the *Patriot* and Moore asking God to ignore his enemies' prayers in *We Were Soldiers*). In fact, in *Generation Kill*, one Sgt. wants to hold a religious service but none of the leaders and very few of the men are interested in it. Indeed, Colbert lauds the unit's embedded reporter from *Rolling Stone* (upon whose book the miniseries is based) for his willingness to fight: "At least Rolling Stone [Evan 'Scribe' Wright, played by Lee Tergesen] will pick up a weapon …" whereas he lambasts the contentious objector because from Colbert and his men's perspective he just "eats our food and takes up our supplies but won't fire a weapon or transport us." In contrast, of himself and his fellow soldiers Colbert declares: "This is a fucking war and we're warriors!" reinforcing the fact that religion isn't that important, especially if it gets in the way of one's soldiering and that any type of masculinity other than that of a hard, dedicated soldierly body will not be tolerated kindly.

Much like in *Jarhead* though, there are varying levels of hardness to the male bodies on display in the series, and cracks in the façade of a completely unified hegemonically masculine military. In a scene similar to the football game that later degenerates into a 'field fuck' in *Jarhead*, in one of the final episodes of *Generation Kill*, all the men all play football (mostly) shirtless, but the game leads to violence when one man starts slugging another, and Cpl. Josh 'Ray' Person, played by James Ransone, tackles Sgt. Rudy Reyes seemingly unprovoked, shouting angrily, almost crying: "You're just like every other jock piece of shit in high-school!" Rudy, a hard-body who's demonstrated his emotional softness several times throughout the

series by being very interested in yoga, meditation, and clean eating, and who therefore attracts homophobic insults constantly (but doesn't seem to be bothered by them), is clearly upset and confused by this turn of events. Concerned, he calls after the softer-bodied Ray who, up to this point has been quite emotionally hard, but stalks away from this encounter crying, perhaps revealing some inner 'softness.' So, while some of the main members of the group are still clearly more 'hard' than others, each main character has at least one "soft spot;" ironically, though Rudy's body is the most stereotypically hard, he is one of the most caring and compassionate soldiers depicted in the series, and therefore he's also the one who is the target of most of the homophobic jokes.[187] It's almost as though the other men are jealous of or feel emasculated by Rudy's physical hardness and therefore use their homophobic jokes to try to undermine his superior embodiment of muscled military masculinity, or perhaps they find themselves looking at his hard body desirously and use homophobic jokes as a way of deflecting or projecting their own homoeroticism onto him (echoing Connell and Easthope).

Indeed, in the DVD special-feature interviews with the real-life Marines upon whom these characters were based, the men reveal that their humor does function like a "coping mechanism" as they talk a bit about the return home. Poke says "You bring back this product to society, they have to take it the way that they want it; there are very few things we hold sacred. That's how they trained us; to be killers." These comments suggest that the results of their military training, the killing and the soldiering, are inseparable from the crass, homophobic, and violent humour that they engage in. Poke's comments, too, suggest a sort of inevitability to the link between masculinity, fighting, and violence to be discussed more in the final chapter.

While Foucault's docile bodies are not only created by and necessary to an efficient military, such an institution is a perfect example of one which thrives upon the creation and

maintenance of docile bodies. This docility is deeply linked to the body, and in the military

instance, to the male body, down to its very minute movements and its linkage with its

tools/weapons. Docility requires that one give oneself up to, become subject to, the system of

discipline of which one is a part, again, in this case, the military. This surrendering one's self

requires a certain 'softness' or malleability that is inherently in conflict with the 'hardness'

required by the military machine. This conflict produces two discernible results within the

combat films studied herein: 1) the violent rejection of a soft body whose too-softness threatens

the unity of the military machine, and therefore the American nation, and more recently, 2) a

'softer' (but not too soft) masculinity that experiences a great deal of conflict balancing the hard

and soft elements within itself, but which still upholds a fairly traditional version of hegemonic

masculinity.

In the Vietnam films, the hard bodies are almost always accompanied by a soft body

counterpart whose 'softness' serves to consolidate the 'hardness' of the lead characters. These

men who are 'too soft' are always violently ejected from the military institution by way of death;

this death is almost always at the hands of a harder body (even in the case of Private Pyle, who

becomes simultaneously 'too hard' and 'too soft' mentally, if not bodily hard, before killing

himself). In the earliest and latest films of the post-Gulf War period that is the focus of this

study, a physical hardness, displayed musculature and toughness, is almost always accompanied

by greater emotional 'softness' than was displayed by the 1980s/early 1990s hard bodies of

which Jeffords originally wrote. These post-Gulf War characters are more contemplative,

philosophical, idealistic, compassionate, and even emotionally troubled than typical hard bodies

of previous decades. However, whatever 'softness' they display must never get in the way of

their soldiering, which is always paramount and performed with the utmost skill; any softness

that does get in the way of soldiering must be eliminated either by punishment/retraining (e.g. Witt and Swofford threatened with being sent to disciplinary units) or ejection/death (e.g. Eldridge's military therapist getting himself killed by ineffectual front-line soldiering). So while this increasing interior 'softness' may seem to suggest a shift in the representation of soldierly masculinity, the ultimate focus on good soldiering reveals that the conservative values underlying the hard body, and which the hard body works to uphold, are still very similar to when Jeffords first identified the paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s. The hard body is the central figure, and the films' ultimate message is still that the safety and future of the American nation depends on the tough (but "softer" and perhaps somewhat conflicted) American military man at the centre of these films.

Chapter 6

Brotherhood vs. Infighting and the Break-Down of Communication and the Chain of Command: *Saving Private Ryan*, *Three Kings*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Band of Brothers*, *Jarhead*, *Stop Loss*, *The Hurt Locker*, *Generation Kill*

The internal conflict experienced by soldiers and the homoeroticism/homophobia inevitable in the all/largely male arena of war explored in the previous chapter can have a significant impact on the often intense and strong bonds formed between military men during war. As with many of the other topics considered within other chapters herein, there is a clear connection between the way these bonds are figured in the earlier and later period cycles of combat films and the way they were depicted in Vietnam films (uneasy, strained and at times violent), with a nostalgic break in the middle represented by films and television miniseries such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*, where the representations of brotherhood are much more collegial and less fraught with tension.

In many of the Post-Gulf War combat films, *Three Kings*, *Jarhead*, *Stop Loss*, *The Hurt Locker*, like the post-Vietnam films, there is also a certain level of disrespect for the chain of command, revealed in some examples from the previous chapter. Commanding officers are no longer friendly paternal figures;[188] instead they are demanding and even violent/abusive as in post-Vietnam films (like Sgt. Hartmann from *Full Metal Jacket*). Rather than stick together, no matter what (as they largely did in WWII-era films), soldiers in these post-Gulf War films often turn against one another (sometimes violently) as they did in Post-Vietnam films (like *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*). There is, however, a middle cycle of films (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Band of Brothers*, and *We Were Soldiers* among others) within the period which, as in many other respects, frames the relationships between men in a much more positive light, focusing on the brotherhood of men and the "leave no man behind" policy. More recently,

however, with films and miniseries such as *Stop Loss, The Hurt Locker*, and *Generation Kill*, the relationships between soldiers are again much more troubled, even potentially deadly.

Examining these texts in light of the sociopolitical circumstances at the time of their production and initial consumption suggests that ambiguity about "the enemy" and a lack of moral certainty about the war-of-the-moment likely has something to do with the depiction of slackening bonds between men, and the growing lack of respect for the chain of command. In films about WWII and from the middle cycle of the post-Gulf War period examined herein (from the late 1990s to the early 2000s), the enemy is more clear-cut (tied to a specific nation e.g. British, Vietnamese, German), the bonds between 'brothers at arms' are closer (no one tries to kill a fellow soldier) and the chain of command is much more respected, with higher-ups acting as caring fathers rather than domineering and violent persecutors. In the bracket films (earlier and later cycles) of this post-Gulf War period,[189] however, there is a certain ambiguity about the enemy and the self (as discussed in the two previous chapters), preventing a closeness between soldiers, creating a break-down in communications, and inspiring less respect for authority and for the military machine as a whole. Carl Von Clausewitz's concept of the fog of war and Jean Baudrillard's insights into the particularities/peculiarities of the Gulf War help shed light on these breakdowns in the military bond as depicted in the earliest and more recent films of the Post-Gulf War period.

The Fog of War – Carl Von Clausewitz

Published posthumously in 1837 and later translated into English (1873), Carl Von Clausewitz's well-respected treatise on military history and practice, *On War*, introduced the concept of the "fog of war," the idea that there is always a certain level of ambiguity involved in the waging of war at every level. This ambiguity is at play on a grand political scale and

continues to have an effect at every level: military strategic (e.g. Generals), operational (e.g. Commanders), and tactical (e.g. individual soldiers themselves). The ambiguity arises from the uncertainty of a foe's intent, skills, resources, etc. as well as potential misinformation (whether accidental or intended), miscommunications and misunderstandings. As Clausewitz puts it: "each commander can only fully know his own position; that of his opponent can only be known to him by reports, which are uncertain; he may, therefore, form a wrong judgment with respect to it upon data of this description" (18). At a political level, for example, the fog of war might be illustrated by one country's assumption that their foe is waging war because they feel over-taxed when really their intent is to overthrow the government and completely enslave the population; the attacked country's defence would likely be mounted with much more vigour if the latter intent was understood. Another example of the fog of war at a political level might be the mistaken perception (caused by enemy feint) that one's foe has nuclear weapons, when really they don't.

One level below the political level, ambiguity at a military strategic level can be caused by an uncertainty about or flawed understanding of the enemy's or one's own resources and preparedness, in short, one's ability to wage war. This ambiguity can arise in many ways including, for example, because of faulty information, a misjudgment of morale or miscalculation of equipment, and can lead to either over or under-estimation of one's own or the enemy's capabilities. As Clausewitz's states: "in consequence of [an] error, he [a commander] may suppose that the power of taking the initiative rests with his adversary when really it lies with himself" (18) or visa versa. For example, if I am told that my forces consist of 50,000 troops when really I only have 45,000 (this new, lower number has been delayed in its communication to me from the front-lines where losses were more severe than initially reported)

and I believe my enemy only has 40,000 when they actually have 50,000 (they have an extra 10,000 militia in hiding), I am dealing with the fog of war.

This type of fog can also trickle down to the next lowest level, operational, because these large-scale miscalculations can affect long-term planning, strategizing, and allocation of resources. For example, given the above troop estimates, I might advise my commanders to attack enemy troops assuming my forces will have the advantage of numbers, which mistaken information the commanders will be using to carry out their orders and actions. At an operational level, therefore, the fog of war can be affected by the fog from above, but can also be affected by the chaos of battle, delays in communication, miscommunications, and miscalculations caused by the highs and lows of combat, so while a commander may attempt to eliminate or lessen the affect of the fog of war through the use of reconnaissance tools, these attempts may not always be successful (as at other levels) and can also be deliberately thwarted by the enemy (e.g. the hiding of troops, broadcasting of false reports, etc.).

These elements of the fog of war are also passed down to the tactical level, meaning that there are several factors at play, both in terms of deliberate creation of misinformation on the part of the enemy, and also in terms of the pacing and chaos of combat. Given the above scenario, for example, the commander will be surprised by the sudden appearance of 10,000 extra militia members, and may need to send a reconnaissance team to confirm the numbers, while readjusting the plan of attack, and relaying the new information back up the chain of command. The speed with which decisions must be made and actions carried out at this lowest, tactical level have the potential to increase the fog, because decisions based on inaccurate information can compound one another. For example, during the reconnaissance mission to confirm that these extra 10,000 militia are actually effectively fighting with the foe's forces,

soldiers may become separated from their own forces, lost, or impaired by the literal fog and smoke of battle, thereby delaying and/or causing mistakes in the relay of information.

As one travels down the military chain of command, therefore, the fog of war generally tends to increase, though it is not only a one-way street. For example, a soldier on the ground may actually be able to physically see that there are enemy troops in a different position or in greater or fewer number than had previously been reported, meaning that until this information is passed up the chain of command, the fog of war is actually less severe for this soldier on the ground than for the commander or the military assemblage generally (who is/are still operating under the previous, faulty information or assumptions).

So while in theory, and even in practice (drills, training), the military unit should function smoothly, "the beam turns on an iron pin with little friction," (Clausewitz 67) in reality, "all that is exaggerated and false in such a conception manifests itself in war. The battalion always remains composed of a number of men, of whom, if chance so wills, the most insignificant is able to occasion delay and even irregularity" (Clausewitz 67). Clausewitz's description here negatively inverts Foucault's conception of the docile body as cited in the previous chapter[190] wherein the smooth functioning of the (military) machine as a whole requires the training, docility, and automatic response to commands of each individual (soldier). Clausewitz continues: "The danger which war brings with it, the bodily exertions which it requires, augment this evil so much that they may be regarded as the greatest causes of it" (67). In other words, however well-trained and well-prepared an armed force, the "enormous friction" of which Clausewitz writes, along with the ever-present element of chance (e.g. weather) always bring about incidents which would be impossible to predict; Clausewitz's example, which occasions the term 'the fog of war' is as follows: "as an instance of such chance take the weather. Here the fog prevents the enemy

from being discovered in time, a battery from firing at the right moment, a report from reaching the general; the rain prevents a battalion from arriving at the right time, because instead of for three it had to march perhaps eight hours; the cavalry from charging effectively because it stuck fast in the ground" (66). Any one of these chance or deliberate elements on its own or a number of them at once can combine to create the fog of war. War is therefore never as simple as military strategy and tactics might make it seem: "activity in war is movement in a resistant medium. Just as a man immersed in water is unable to perform with ease and regularity the most natural and simplest movement, that of walking, so in war, with ordinary powers, one cannot keep even the line of mediocrity" (Clausewitz 67-8). While Clausewitz was writing in the 1800s, and draws his examples from the military campaigns of Frederick the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte, his concepts of 'friction' and the 'fog of war' are no less relevant today than they were at the time of his writing.

While advances in technologies of war such as 'smart bombs' and satellite reconnaissance, have aimed to limit, circumvent, or dampen the fog war, as Paul Patton points out in the introduction to Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, "electronic warfare involves new forms of deception by means of electronic interference and falsified signals. In the Gulf, such technological dissimulation was combined with old-fashioned tactical deception manoeuvres on the ground" (5), such that greater technology doesn't necessarily alleviate the fog of war, and may instead add a new layer to it, compounding the problem, or creating new problems. As Clausewitz pessimistically puts it, "great part of the information obtained in war is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of a doubtful character" (64), such that, despite technological advances, all participants in war suffer from a constant state of uncertainty. It is this increased uncertainty and ambiguity with the most recent conflicts (Gulf

War to present) that is reflected in the break-downs in communications and characters' bonds with one another, and in the lack of respect for authority in the films analyzed herein.

These advances in technologies of war have also changed the ways in which wars are represented. The increased coverage of wars as they are ongoing has had a direct impact on public opinion and feeling about the wars. As Patton puts it, "that is why the Gulf War movie was also an influential part of history even as it unfolded. Reports before and during the conflict phase directly influenced public opinion of the war" (*Gulf War* 13), and not just public opinion, but participants' opinions too. Baudrillard describes it in the case of the Gulf War as: "the disillusion of war, linked not only to defensive calculation, … but also to the mental disillusion of the combatants themselves, and to the global disillusion of everyone else by means of information" (*Gulf War* 68). Given the over-representation and increasingly mediated images (clips from bomb cameras broadcast over television or later viewed via the internet on computers or mobile devices) leading to the increased social and political uncertainty of conflicts since Vietnam, including both conflicts in the Gulf/Middle East, then, it follows that the fog of war has increased rather than decreased, despite the advances in technologies of war (reconnaissance tools, etc.).

Since part of the fog of war outside of political deceit and maneuvering also concerns the feelings and attitudes of the participants, those who believe more strongly in a cause are more likely to willing dedicate themselves to it fully and without abandon, while those who are confused or unsure about the political purpose of the war might be less dedicated to "the cause." This disillusion can have both positive and negative effects on the fog of war. For example, at a tactical level, a soldier might report being fit for duty because s/he is determined not to miss out on a fight or be left behind while their comrades participate in a mission (e.g. a *Black Hawk*

Down character imploring "Don't go back out without me, Sir"), but if this soldier is actually unfit for duty, his/her report has contributed to the fog of war by falsely inflating, however minutely, the numbers of able-bodied troops. On the other hand, if a soldier is not at all dedicated to the cause for which s/he is fighting, s/he might be more inclined to malinger, to over-report losses, or, at a command level, to be more conservative with tactical decisions.

In the films examined herein, much like the films from the post-Vietnam era of the combat film genre, the disillusionment of the soldiers and the public, and the increased fog of war at all levels, most starkly the political and individual levels, as expressed in the confusion over who is an enemy and who isn't (in the war on 'Terror,' for example, there isn't even a specific geographic locality or physical border to demarcate the lines of conflict), what the war is 'about' (weapons of mass destruction?), how long it will go on (stop-lossing) etc. These, and all of the other concerns surrounding conflicts since Vietnam, are reflected in an increased focus in these films on break-downs: break-downs in communication, break-downs in the bond of brotherly love between soldiers, and break-downs in the unquestioned and unshakeable respect for the military chain of command.

Early Cycle: *Three Kings*

Though this film appeared shortly after *Saving Private Ryan*, one of the emblematic and most famous of the middle, regressive-period films, *Three Kings* is somewhat of an anomaly, like *The Thin Red Line*, in that it fits in more closely with films of the mid-2000s in terms of most of the representational patterns revealed within. Centred around a small group of soldiers (Archie Gates, played by George Clooney, Troy Barlow, played by Mark Wahlberg, Chief Elgin, played by Ice Cube, and Conrad Vig, played by Spike Jonze) who go on a rogue treasure hunt during the end of the first Gulf War after discovering a map to a Kuwaiti bunker full of gold; the

film's premise alone reveals the men's lack of respect for military authority and the chain of command. If they in fact have real missions, they certainly don't care about them; they are firmly focused on finding and stealing the gold, and their eventual good deeds are largely incidental. In this film, while the bonds between soldiers are somewhat brotherly, no two soldiers – with the exception of Troy and Vig – are particularly close (and even between Troy and Vig, the relationship is almost more paternal or patronizing than brotherly with the later idolizing the former). The men in this film are thrown together by circumstance rather than drawn together by close bonds, shared experience, or affection.

The very first scene in the film foregrounds the confusion of this conflict, revealing break-downs in communication and in the chain of command. In it, a small group of American soldiers including Troy and Vig face an unknown person on a sand dome in the desert and the first line of dialogue is Troy asking: "Are we shooting?" It is not clear who he is asking, and a confused, broken-telephone-esque exchange echoing the famous Abbott and Costello comedy skit "who's on first" follows, the viewer at first only hearing Troy's side of the conversation: "What?" and again, repeating: "Are we shooting?" The respondent then repeats the question back: "Are we shooting?" Troy's response: "That's what I'm asking" Respondent: "What's the answer?" When the unknown person displays a weapon, Troy ends up being forced to shoot (the person turns out to be an Iraqi soldier) because no one knows the answer to the question ("Are we shooting?"). While not quite espousing a 'Shoot first, ask questions later' sentiment, the scene suggests that even if one does ask questions first, one will not receive satisfactory or even useful or coherent answers, and must shoot anyway. This sequence opens the film with the strong suggestion of a lack of direction, communication, and trust in the military machine. The men do not know who the enemy is, or what they are doing there, let alone why. This confusion

about the mission stands in as a representation of their feelings towards and knowledge about the war as a whole, and this lack of clarity translates into their attitudes towards each other and the military machine generally.

The trustworthiness of the military is also undermined when Clooney's character, Archie Gates (the soldier with the most seniority in the group), walks in on the soldiers with the map and, rather than reporting it to the appropriate military authorities, tries to take it for his own personal benefit. While clearly not the most intelligent soldier, Troy is savvy enough to realize what Gates is trying to do, and manipulates the concept of the chain of command to stop him; in order to blackmail Gates into letting them in on the 'mission' to steal the gold Troy tells him that if he, Gates, takes the map, Troy will be obligated to tell his own commanding officer about it. This manipulation of the chain of command to blackmail Gates into letting the rest of the soldiers break the rules with him works, and so, for the rest of the film, the men are totally outside of the military chain of command, committing illegal acts of theft and essentially being AWOL (Away Without Leave) from their respective units.

While on their quest for gold, the men experience the fog of war when they get lost, despite having a map (all those darn bunkers in the desert look the same, they say), and are purposefully misdirected by Saddam's soldiers who don't want them to steal Saddam's (ironically, stolen) goods. The Americans also experience the literal fog of the Gulf War when, after hitting a roadside bomb/land mine and during a gas attack by one group of Arabs (members of Saddam's army), they are separated from one another in the haze of chemical smoke. Troy is taken prisoner by said soldiers, and the others are frightened but saved by another group of Arabs (civilians being persecuted by Saddam's army) who shelter them in an underground hide-out; the American soldiers, visually and sensorially impaired by their vehicle-crash and the chemical

attack do not immediately recognize that these Arabs are "friendlies" (as opposed to aggressors), and at first resist their attempts to help. This confusion over who is friend and who is foe is perfectly exemplified by this chaotic and visually confusing sequence, and matches the men's (and perhaps the audience's) own confusion over the purpose and 'rules' of this particular conflict.

At the film's close, the only reason the men are not prosecuted is because they help some refugees escape violence by crossing the border which helps Colonel Horn (Mykelti Williamson), their superior, "get that star" (advance his rank in the military) by returning (most of) the stolen gold, saving some refugees, and getting good press. This ending only further undercuts the men's respect for superiors and the military apparatus, and underscores the very individualistic, to-each-his-own attitude displayed in the film's version of the military. Throughout *Three Kings*, but in its final scenes especially, the audience is encouraged to at least sympathize with, if not identify with, the protagonists of the film. Here, the thieves seem like likeable guys-next-door because the film reveals their very 'regular' post-war lives which have been just slightly enhanced by the stolen gold. This Robin-Hood-esque ending suggests that the men should not be viewed as guilty of greed or theft (especially, the implication is, because they're stealing from Saddam, and the gold was already stolen in the first place, meaning that they were more justified in stealing it); they just wanted a better life for themselves and their families. The sympathetic focus on these rogue soldiers[191] who care more about their own personal, monetary and post-military career gain than their commitment to the American military itself, is certainly a far cry from the films of the middle, regressive period (examined next) which focus on the importance of the military chain of command and the brotherly love and commitment which undergird their version of the American military.

Unlike *Three Kings* (and fellow early-period film *The Thin Red Line*), the films from the middle period do not focus on rule-breakers and those who disrespect authority. Instead, they centre on the love and commitment to one's fellow soldier at all ranks, whatever the cost. The premise alone of *Saving Private Ryan* stands in sharp contrast to the premise of a film like *Three Kings*; while *Saving Private Ryan* is also centered on a small rag-tag group of soldiers pieced together from different units, rather than going rogue, these men are on a mission to save one man whose three brothers have been killed in combat elsewhere, a mission sanctioned and in fact directly ordered by the upper levels of military command and the government. Not only is this film literally about the love between brothers (Ryan and his deceased biological brothers), but it' also about the brotherly and fatherly bonds that form between men in the military. Further discussion about the familial relationships depicted in this film is certainly warranted and necessary, and appears in the following chapter.

While events quickly get out of hand, or 'FUBAR'[192] for the men on the unsanctioned 'treasure hunt' in *Three Kings* even though they have a detailed map, the men in *Saving Private Ryan*, in contrast, are able to complete their mission of tracking Ryan down across Europe without any help or communication from military command, no map, and very little idea of where the moving target, Ryan, might actually be. While the men[193] do begin to fight over the legitimacy of the mission and the decisions being made higher up the chain of command, their paternal leader, Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks, manages to keep the men under control and focused on completing the mission, motivating them by reminding them that they all want to get home to their families.

In the end, Ryan, who has trouble accepting that other men have died so that he can live, asks Miller to tell him the names of the men who died on the mission to find and save him, and later pays homage to them at the Arlington cemetery in the film's frame narrative. Ryan's dedication to his 'band of brothers' is yet again demonstrated when he is found by Miller and his men, but refuses to leave without first completing his mission, demonstrating much more commitment to the military and its aims than any of the soldiers in *Three Kings* (and virtually any other film from the bracket – earlier and later – cycles of the period), who are largely self-interested. When Ryan doesn't want to leave and Miller questions what they will tell his mother if he dies, Ryan responds: "You can tell her I was with the only brothers I have left," implying his fellow soldiers, and adds, "I think she'd understand that." So while the men's mission isn't completed without any questioning of authority or legitimacy, the men do end up a bonded, solidified unit by the film's climax, willing to die, not only for each other ("the only brothers I have left"), but for their mission, too. There is very little doubt in these men's minds about the reason they are there, who the enemy is, or when and where he[194] needs to be killed and what little doubt there might be is never allowed to affect the men's actions; they always follow orders and do their duty. Though some of them may not agree completely with the mission, and some are better at their jobs than others, the soldiers never go rogue or disobey orders (thereby contributing to the fog of war) – instead they carry out their mission to the best of their abilities or die trying. Despite the greater difficulty of their mission, and the fact that they have less technology at their disposal than the characters in *Three Kings*, or any of the other Post-Gulf War films discussed herein, the small unit in *Ryan* does not get lost or suffer catastrophic loss of communication and in fact they succeed completely in the end – both in defending their position and in saving Private Ryan. This ending, of course reinforces the dominance and implies the

necessity of an American military based on traditional family values and led by those conforming to hegemonic masculinity.

Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* is another film from the middle regressive part of the period whose entire premise is also closely related to the consequences of the "leave-no-man-behind" policy. When a Black Hawk helicopter plummets in Somalia and a number of American soldiers are isolated from the rest of the American forces, the military units on the ground go to great lengths and suffer catastrophic losses to uphold this policy and retrieve all of their cut-off and kidnapped soldiers. While the film is not without its minor violations of the chain of command and a few break-downs in communication, the film overall upholds the idea that while at a larger, governmental level there may be problems,[195] the men on the ground remain firmly committed to one another.

Minor tests of the chain of command occur before the men leave base, but are quickly resolved; there is a scene in which one of the lower ranking soldiers does a comical impression of one of the men's superior officers, but he is quite chastened when caught: "You understand why we have a chain of command don't you? If I ever catch you undermining it again..." and it never is undermined again in the film. Similarly, the film's main character, Sgt. Eversmann, played by Josh Hartnett, admits in a mission briefing that he is relatively new in his position of authority, but stresses that they have all worked together before[196] and that as long as each man knows and does his job, everything will be fine. While all is not fine, Eversmann still manages to make it to the end of the film with his belief in this 'be the best you can be, get your men back safe' mantra intact.

For a film from the middle, regressive period, there is a lot more explicit miscommunication and malfunctioning military technology in *Black Hawk Down* than in other

films of the period. Even the premise of the film itself is oddly centered on the failure of American war technology with the focus on the two downed American helicopters, but these failures of technology and communication seem to be blamed, like Jeffords argues in *Remasculinization*, on the hands-off military command and the government, rather than the men on the ground; when the first chopper crashes, the remote-site commanding officer's first thought and comment is: "We just lost the initiative," not 'we lost soldiers.' This lack of focus on, and compassion for, boots-on-the-ground soldiers immediately constructs the upper echelons of military command as the 'bad-guy' whose fog of war misinformation and subsequent bad decisions are having negative effects for the men on the ground. These men on the ground however, are deeply committed to one another and to the leave-no-man-behind policy, risking life and limb and overcoming any break-downs in communication they may suffer such that these break-downs are simply another obstacle for them to overcome.

Miscommunication and technological difficulties do continue on the ground though too, showing the fog of war operating at all levels; at one point, the men's walkie-talkies are malfunctioning, so while the two units are literally within sight of each other, they can't communicate verbally because their technology isn't working. The mechanical failure in this instance is literally life or death because they're trying to use the walkie-talkies to communicate about evacuating a downed man. Further miscommunication is evident in a scene in which two soldiers are left behind because they aren't sure if the Hummers were supposed to come to them or they were supposed to go to the Hummers, but they eventually solve their own problem and make it back to their unit, reinforcing the resourcefulness of the individual American soldier (despite technological difficulties and miscommunications), and therefore the American military and nation as a whole.

Again in line with Jeffords' arguments, in each case, it is the technology, not the men themselves that is the problem; the men are trying to communicate with, save and protect one another, but sometimes, the film suggests, the fog of war just gets in the way no matter how much technology one has at one's disposal. The overwhelming focus is on the brave American soldiers whose dedication to one another and to the chain of command[197] helps them overcome adversity to complete their mission as a group, leaving none behind. Such a depiction stands in stark contrast to an earlier period film like *Three Kings* where the soldiers are much less altruistic and only save civilians as a means to benefiting themselves.

In a definitive moment of contrast to earlier and later films of the period, in *Black Hawk Down*, Hoot, an experienced and respected soldier played by Eric Bana, wisely tells the less experienced Eversmann "Just watch your corner and get your men home alive," adding that when he goes home and people ask him why he does it (continues to stay in the military), if he's "some kind of war junkie or something," he won't say anything because he knows that people at home won't understand that "It's about the men next to you – that's all it's about." These final comments from the sage, slightly older, more experienced soldier to the newer, younger commanding officer reinforces the commitment to brotherly love and the chain of command evinced by the characters within the film and expressed ideologically by the film as a whole. This sentiment is again made clear in the final closing title screens, which reassure the viewer that the American hostage, pilot Michael Durant, was eventually released, and that warlord Aidid was eventually killed (and that only then did the General in charge of the raid at the centre of the film retire, mission accomplished). No matter what challenges the men suffer as a result of the fog of war, the bad luck and timing, the 'chance' about which Clausewitz writes, their resolve will not be shaken; they will follow orders passed down the chain of command, doing their jobs

unquestioningly and out of pure dedication to their fellow soldiers and to the mission of the American military in which they believe seemingly unquestioningly. As with *Saving Private Ryan*, the eventual success of the mission (despite the overwhelming casualties) in *Black Hawk Down* suggests that this masculine-dominant, system of docility (or at least obedience to authority) is the path to success, the best way to fight the fog of war, and overall, the most effective method of operation.

With *Band of Brothers* as with *Saving Private Ryan*, the focus on brotherly love between soldiers and the commitment to the military apparatus and its attendant chain of command is apparent from the title of the miniseries itself; it is the main focus of the first episode and is a strong theme throughout the miniseries. The clarity of the 'who' and the 'why' of WWII is established at the very outset of the series as a determining factor in the men's commitment to the military and to one another; at the beginning of the miniseries, one of the real-life WWII veterans whose talking-head monologues open the first episode says: "We was attacked. Maybe we're just dumb country folk … where I come from, but it wasn't like Korea or Vietnam, we was attacked and a lot of us volunteered." These comments create a clear and explicit distinction between WWII and wars "like Korea or Vietnam," which were less clear-cut without an "attack" perpetrated by a clear and distinct nation, and therefore had less popular support. The reason behind the war and the 'why' and 'who' we fight are both very clear for these real-life WWII soldiers, and for the fictionalized characters within the miniseries upon whom they're based, too, who volunteer for tough training and get through it together, with the help of their leaders. While there are a few men in positions of authority within the series that are not respected, such as Herbert M. Sobel, played by David Schwimmer and 1st Lt. Norman Dike, played by Peter O'Meara, these characters are ultimately removed from their positions of authority, and it is

abundantly clear to the viewer why they are not held in high esteem by the men: they are bad soldiers, thus justifying their subordinates' disrespect.

For example, when Sobel is training the men, he doesn't let them help each other, not even on a training run when one injures an ankle. In these training sessions, the men are forced to crawl and roll through (purportedly human) entrails hanging from barbed wire while Sobel shouts at them from the sidelines. Rather than being proud of their accomplishments, Sobel becomes increasingly upset when the men don't fail. He continues to test them with physical feats and psychological games hoping that they will fall short, and it quickly becomes clear that his constant drilling is not about preparing the men for war, but is mostly about making himself look good when superiors are around; Sobel is quite the sycophant. Much like the too-hard glory-hungry soldiers discussed in the previous chapter, he's not actually concerned with the soldiers' safety and well-being or even really their effectiveness as a combat unit; he's concerned with advancing his own rank and reputation and it is this individualistic attitude that justifies his fellow soldiers' disrespect.

Sobel's harsh training regimen doesn't bother the soldiers too much at first, though, because they recognize that while his aim isn't necessarily just to make them better, tougher soldiers, that will be the result anyway; as one puts it: "This is the worst possible training the army has to offer and they volunteered for it – they want to do it so that when they're in the field the man in the foxhole next to them is the best." This training, they're confident, will help mitigate the effects of the fog of war. The men can rationalize Sobel's treatment of them by telling themselves it will make them better soldiers, and their shared experience allows them not just to bond, but also to trust one another's abilities. Sobel, on the other hand, is not trusted at all and is constantly villainized because the men see that he only has his own best interests in mind.

Rather than compromising the military brotherhood, Sobel's poor leadership simply causes him

to be alienated from the men, who just build their brotherhood without him and despite his

efforts to "break" them; when one 'slow' runner is made to run up the hill in full gear in under 15

minutes, three others decide to run with him in solidarity. This camaraderie angers Sobel who

(rightly) sees it as insubordination, but also perhaps realizes with jealousy the bond that is

forming between the men from which he is excluded.

The justifiability of the men's scorn toward Sobel is further reinforced by the revelation

that while his tough training regime might make good soldiers, he himself is not a good soldier in

practice; he gets jumpy in field training, can't read the map, gets his unit lost, and thereby gets a

whole bunch of his men 'killed' in a field training exercise. The men recognize that if Sobel

cannot even competently carry out his duties during training exercises, the fog of real war will

only magnify his incompetence. At this point, his men truly begin to question his authority

because, as one declares, "Once we get into combat the only guy you can trust is yourself and the

guy next to you," and nobody trusts Sobel – not as a leader, and not as a soldier. Even his

masculinity is questioned when, during these training exercises, Sobel's own mistakes cause him

to become hysterical. These behaviours cause the soldiers act out against him in the same

training scenario, getting him in trouble by impersonating a Major and ordering him to cut a

farmer's fence (which angers the real Major). This insubordinate act hits Sobel where it hurts: his

career and reputation. But, he cannot punish anyone for it since it was a group effort and the men

close ranks, refusing to sell out the culprit(s).

While this act with little repercussion (Sobel's only punishment is an angry tongue-

lashing from the Major) reads more like a practical joke, it confirms for Sobel (if not to his

superiors) the men's lack of respect for him. The true depth of their reservations about Sobel is

revealed shortly thereafter, however, when several soldiers attempt to resign their positions rather than go into battle with Sobel because of their doubts about his ability to perform his soldierly duty under the duress of the fog of war. Sobel isn't the only man in a position of military authority portrayed as unworthy of his position; another, 1st Lt. Dike, proves himself cowardly and incompetent later in the series by constantly going on long 'walks' by himself (away from the front lines) without telling anyone where he is, studiously avoiding active combat by retreating to command post, and revealing himself to be completely unable to make any combat decisions when actually faced with them. In both cases, these men are disrespected not because the men under them are rebelling against the military chain of command generally, but because their superiors are failing to adequately perform their military duties and roles and are therefore needlessly compromising the safety of the men and the functioning of the military apparatus as a whole. Both are framed as men whose combat leadership positions are only stops on the way up their career ladders (towards those amorphous higher levels that Jeffords maintains are the ones to take the blame for military failures rather than individual soldiers on the ground) and they therefore don't belong in the military 'brotherhood' of ground combat soldiers from which they are excluded.

Unworthy leaders like Sobel and Dike, however, are also always countered and more than compensated for in this cycle by good, well-respected leaders in the show like lead Lt. Richard D. Winters, played by Damian Lewis. These true leaders are depicted as caring deeply about the safety and well-being of their men, but also as being hyper-competent soldiers, able to stay calm, sane, and make wise decisions for the good of the unit. These strong leaders like Winters are able to keep the unit cohesive, giving morale-boosts at just the right moments, much like Hanks' character, Miller, in *Saving Private Ryan*, and the respect that they garner from the

men far outweighs the disrespect shown to characters like Sobel and Dike who are quickly removed from combat leadership positions by transfer and death respectively, echoing the removal of soft-bodies discussed in the previous chapter. The respect that men like Winters garner from their fellow soldiers and subordinates and the overall success of the mission (winning WWII!) again implies that this model of masculinity and military leadership is the 'right' one.

Any animosity that does exist between the men themselves is relatively minor and is centered on large differences like religion. An example of such seeming hostility between soldiers occurs in "Part Four," an episode about replacement soldiers. One of the talking-head veterans reveals that soldiers who came in as replacements were "accepted but also had to 'prove themselves'" and any tension between the men is explained by the fact that the older soldiers recognize that the replacements are trying to impress them, but they don't want to be too friendly with the replacements because they don't want to see them get killed or wounded like their friends (the soldiers the new guys are there to replace). Essentially, it's a defence mechanism: the older, more experienced soldiers are trying to protect themselves from the deep loss experienced when a fellow soldier with whom they have become close dies or is seriously wounded by avoiding getting close to the new soldiers/replacements. In this vein, at the beginning of "Part Seven" of the miniseries one of the real-life WWII veterans evidences the strength of the bond between men when he cries for the first time when speaking about how he thought he withstood the sudden deaths of his friends well at the time, during the war, but had trouble with it later in life, revealing "You don't forget them." In later episodes, even a regular soldier who was wounded early on, Pvt. David Kenyon Webster (Eion Bailey), gets the 'replacement' treatment because was in the hospital for so long that when he gets back most of the men he knew are dead

or badly wounded and those who remain are treating him like a newbie; while he is regarded by some as a coward because he spent so much time in the hospital ("That Webster he tried to get out of everything"), the strength of the 'band of brothers' eventually prevails; by the end of the episode Webster is back in the fold.

The strength of this military brotherhood so typical of the middle-period films is again reinforced in the final episode which ends with the title: "Band of Brothers for we who fight together today shall be brothers forever" and a boy asking: "Grandpa, were you a hero in the war?" to which Grandpa says: "No, but I served in the company of heroes" (echoing similarly modest sentiments about heroism in fellow middle-period films *Saving Private Ryan*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Flags of Our Fathers*). So the love and respect for one's fellow soldiers trumps all in the middle-period films, and the U.S. military still always end up being represented as modest, but heroic. In this cycle, then, the men still have close bonds, respect their leaders for the most part (and never actively question their orders during combat) and what relatively little failure in technology and communication there is can be attributed to the fog of war, and doesn't clearly affect the men's attitude towards the conflict in which they participate or shake their confidence in themselves or in one another or in the military apparatus as a whole.

Later period cycle: *Jarhead, Stop Loss, The Hurt Locker, Generation Kill*

In the later period films, however, respect for authority and the military machine goes sharply downhill; men lie to get into the military, fight with and almost kill each other, betray each other's trust by stealing one another's girlfriends/wives, going AWOL, and demonstrating a complete lack of respect for superior officers. Rather than being dedicated enough to the military to give their lives for it, many of the characters in these later period films express regret or at least experience deep ambivalence about their role in the military and these feelings are directly

tied to their lack of confidence about the motivations behind the conflict, and their uncertainty about who/what/why the enemy is, and their Baudrillardian disillusion about the conflict(s).

Swofford, the main character and author of the autobiographical *Jarhead*, tells viewers via voiceover in the opening scenes of the film that shortly after meeting the Drill Sergeant in basic training he discovered that joining the Marines might've been a bad idea (this voiceover is accompanied by images of Swofford having his head slammed into a chalkboard by said Drill Sgt.). When asked why he joined the Marines, he tells the Drill Sgt. and therefore the audience: "I got lost on the way to college." Right at the outset, then, the audience is told that the military is a violent place that is not and should not necessarily be respected; the 'normal' path would be to go to college; joining the military is a detour, an accident or a mistake.

This idea is further reinforced when Swofford meets his fellow Marines, and rather than demonstrating brotherly love, they haze him by pretending they're going to burn 'USMC' into his leg with a hot branding iron. Similarly, in a scene described in the previous chapter, Swofford too demonstrates anything but fraternal affection towards his peers when he threatens to kill a fellow soldier, Fergus, and then traumatizes Fergus by trying to force Fergus to kill him. There is absolutely no mention of military camaraderie, fighting for one's fellow soldier, or the leave-no-man behind policy. The only people who demonstrate extreme dedication and commitment to the military are Swofford's partner Troy, who is later revealed to be *too* dedicated to the military,[198] and commanding officer Sykes, who declares: "I love this job" but is largely an outsider to the group by virtue of his superior rank. In the aforementioned interview sequences (see chapter two), a few Latino soldiers, too, express a certain amount of gratitude for being in the military, but only when prompted, and in such a way that suggests that they might not have had many

other viable life choices and that their remarks may have been influenced by the borderline censorial commands of their superior officer, Sykes.

Miscommunication and technological malfunction also occur in *Jarhead* when, in one of the only true combat sequences, the communications battery dies and a soldier is forced to run to another position to retrieve a spare. But when he returns, the spare battery, too, is dead: "I just ran through incoming [fire] to get a dead fucking [radio] battery?" Worse still, in the scene immediately following the near-fatal dead-battery mishap, Marines are shot at and some are injured by friendly fire. This lack of preparedness and confusion about where things are, who's who, what works and what doesn't, very closely echoes scenes from both *Three Kings* and *Generation Kill*, reinforcing the confusion and frustration felt by the soldiers engaged in these conflicts. While the fog of war is always present, even in WWII-era and middle period films from the early-mid 2000s, the incidence of ill-preparedness, miscommunications, and friendly-fire are much more apparent in earlier and later films of this period (1999 and 2005-2010), than they are in the middle of the period or in films pre-Vietnam.

The increased emphasis on break-down in communication, a hallmark of this later period cycle, is exemplified in *Jarhead* by a scene which parallels one previously described from *Black Hawk Down* (wherein two soldiers are separated from their unit). In the scene from *Jarhead*, Troy and Swofford either miss their pick-up or are accidentally left out in the desert and forced to walk back to camp. The key difference between the failure of technology and the breakdown in communication in these films is that in *Black Hawk Down* the overall message is about individual soldiers banding together to overcome these difficulties and emerging as heroes (at the end Eversmann concludes: "no one sets out/asks to be a hero, it just ends up that way") but in *Jarhead*, the soldiers are literally forgotten in the desert; by the time they get back to base, the

war has ended without them even knowing, and by the time they get home to the U.S., everyone at home has moved on without them; no one thinks they're heroes, and they don't even have each other – they only reunite for Troy's funeral. The problem is not depicted as a problem inherent in war itself, however, it's with the way in which the men's lack of participation in the war negatively affects their life upon return; Swofford feels frustrated and impotent in his lack of ability to fire his weapon and keep control of his personal life (heterosexual relationship with girlfriend Christina at home) while deployed, and Troy commits suicide upon his return because being ejected from the military strips him of the only signifier of identity that mattered to him. While the war is 'won' and the men do celebrate it by phallically firing their guns around a bonfire, the abrupt end to the conflict (without much real conflict) while the protagonists are lost in the desert has a decidedly more anti-climactic feel than the victories depicted in middle period films such as *Saving Private Ryan*.

Both victories and enemies are much more decisive and clear-cut in middle period films than in films from the beginning and end of the period. In *Black Hawk Down*, for example, the clarity of enemy in Somalia ('Aidid's men') reinforces the men's moral certainty in their mission, and therefore strengthens the bond of brotherly love and responsibility between them, allowing for a faith in the military chain of command despite the dire circumstances, the technological malfunctions and the breakdowns in communication. In *Jarhead*, however, Troy is literally so frustrated by the military technology that is subverting his role as a sniper that he first angrily rebels and then weeps piteously when told they will not be allowed to shoot their target on their only mission because an air strike (a virtually guaranteed success because of its overkill) has been called in instead. Technology here is not just an aid to the soldier, it supersedes if not replaces him completely, recalling Baudrillard's analysis in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*.

When told not to fire, Troy overtly questions his superior's orders, and comes dangerously close to violating them (nearly physically attacking the issuer), clearly demonstrating his disregard for the chain of command, even though he understands very well the logical and strategic reason behind the decision and the orders. Even though Troy is the one violating military protocol and jeopardizing the military mission, he, being a main character, is the one that viewers are encouraged to empathize or at least sympathize with. In a middle-period film anyone this insubordinate and out of control would be severely punished, even killed; in such middle-period films as *Saving Private Ryan*, orders are only questioned when they seem to needlessly risk the lives of men, and they are always eventually followed anyway. In this *Jarhead* scene Troy almost disobeys orders because they subvert his individual desire to fire his gun, not because they don't seem designed to benefit the greater good; such behaviours recall notions of the struggle to balance hard body and soft body qualities examined in the previous chapter, dedication to one's individual goals vs. the docility required for the efficient and effectual functioning of the military apparatus.

Indeed, the desire to fire one's weapon (at anything at all) in these later period films supersedes the moral imperative to 'kill the bad guy' expressed in middle-period, WWII-nostalgic films: in *Three Kings*, soldiers shoot at nerf balls; in *Jarhead*, they fire their weapons into the air in celebration of the war being over; in *Generation Kill* Trombley wants to shoot dogs and does end up shooting at camels (accidentally fatally wounding a young civilian boy in the process). In contrast, in middle/regressive films like *Saving Private Ryan*, soldiers express desires to go out and 'kill some Germans' instead of being on the mission to save Ryan, or to 'slap a Jap' while in training in *The Pacific*. In any case, personal desire easily overwhelms adherence to rules, regulations, and the military chain of command in the earliest and later films

of the Post-Gulf War period, whereas even when orders and/or leaders are questioned in middle-period films, it is only ever for a 'good' (moral) reason like protecting the lives of fellow soldiers, and, even when questioned, the orders are still obeyed. The triumphant and heroic endings of the middle period films (and success of the missions) as compared to the ambivalence of the endings of early and later-period films suggests that the conformity to hegemonic masculinity, dedication to the military brotherhood and respect for the chain of the command evinced by soldiers in the middle part of the period is the way to achieve success as a nation.

The lack of devotion to military life continues in *Stop Loss* whose entire premise speaks to its disenchantment with the military apparatus and operating procedure. In this film a group of young soldiers, Brandon King, played by Ryan Phillippe, Steve Shriver, played by Channing Tatum, and Tommy Burgess, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, return from the Middle East traumatized and struggling to fit back into their civilian lives before King, the only one of the trio who doesn't seem to be having (as much) trouble adjusting, gets "Stop Lossed" (ordered back to war when his tour of duty and contract are supposed to be over) by a loophole in legislation allowing the government to redeploy experienced soldiers, involuntarily extending their terms of service if they are deemed essential to the national security of the United States.

There are a number of images in *Stop Loss* that call upon a more conservative war film iconography and ideology (and therefore in some ways connect the film to the middle/regressive part of the period) such as a 'Death Before Dishonor' tattoo, the men singing about "the red white and blue" in the opening credits, and their home video montage ending with "In loving memory of out fallen brothers … we will not forget." But these images are quickly turned on their head by the events of the rest of the film, in which King and Shriver fight each other, Burgess kills himself, and King ends up going back to war despite his earlier declaration to the

contrary: "I'm done with killing and I ain't leading any more men into a slaughter." A feeling of responsibility for the death of one of their men, Al "Preacher" Colson, played by Quay Terry, and the severe wounding of another, Rico Rodriguez, played by Victor Rasuk, suggest that King is deeply motivated by brotherly love.[199] But while King is conservative (he calls his father "sir") and does express brothers-at-arms sentiments, caring for his fellow soldiers and their families upon his return to the U.S., his decision to return to the military is (while seemingly prompted by Burgess's suicide), in the end, more motivated by his own personal code of honour; he doesn't want to have to give up his identity and hide in Canada (or, worse still he says, Mexico). Ultimately, he makes his decisions based on personal pride rather than brotherly love, linking this film more closely to the other films from this part of the period (mid-late 2000s), wherein soldiers are more strongly motivated by individual desire than soldierly duty or dedication to a military way of life.

The men's ambivalence about the military in this film is not just linked to the eponymous stop-loss policy, however; it is also related to the muddied reasons for the war and uncertainty about the nature and identity of the enemy, which are explicitly referenced in the film when King states:

> I signed up thinking I would go over there and protect my country, my
> family. We wanted payback for 9/11 but then you get there and you
> realize that the war's not even about that … The enemy ain't out in the
> desert; they're in the hallways and rooftops, living rooms, kitchens.
> Everybody's got a weapon – everybody – and nobody knows who's who.
> The only thing you can believe in is survival – protecting the guy to your
> left and the guy to your right. Side by side, willing to die for each other.

Here King explicitly links his disillusionment with the uncertainty of friend vs. foe, enemy vs. civilian, and suggests that his dedication to the 'brotherhood' results from a lack of other options, a 'kill or be killed' mentality. It's not that King is necessarily that devoted to the military, it's

just that when he's in it he doesn't have anything else to believe in ("the only thing you can believe in is survival"); the phrasing of King's statement, while expressing some degree of brotherly love, simultaneously carries a certain selfishness and suggests that self-preservation is the ultimate goal: one protects ones brothers-at-arms because that is the only way one protects oneself and survives.

The statistics at the end of *Stop Loss* about how many troops have been sent and how many have been stop-lossed imply that the government is the problem, not the individual soldiers (despite how fraught their relationships with one another and with their commanding officers might be). This emphasis reinforces these films' connection to post-Vietnam films of the 1970s and 1980s through Jeffords' contentions that such remasculinization films (e.g. the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* franchises) blame the government rather than the individual soldier for problems with war. In *Stop Loss* the government and the larger structure of the military are vilified when no one in the military really tries to help Shriver or Burgess with their PTSD-related alcohol abuse and depression. Instead of helping soldiers reintegrate, the government either allows (Shriver) or forces (King) them to redeploy; both King and Shriver, the only two surviving and able-bodied men of their military friend-group, are redeploying, willingly or not, at the film's end. This film goes as far as to suggest, as does Baudrillard in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, that even statistics about redeployment might be a new part of the fog of war (42); while Shriver and King do re-deploy, the film suggests that neither of them necessarily does so willingly or completely ably. Shriver is reenlisting because his PTSD is destroying his relationship with his girlfriend, his friends, and impairing his ability to reintegrate into society, and even his ability to soldier (he is repeatedly disciplined for drinking and fighting). King, on the other hand, is forced to redeploy and is therefore much less likely to function as a fully

willing and dedicated participant in the conflict. So while redeployment statistics might indicate a high level of satisfaction with and dedication to the military, narratives like the one presented in *Stop Loss* suggest an alternate reading of those numbers.

While *Stop Loss'* overall ideological message allows it to fit in with the later period films, rather than the regressive/middle-period films, it does have much deeper ties to the middle films than any of the other mid-late 2000s films discussed herein, such as its aforementioned nationalistic iconography, King's hints at slightly conservative military familial values, and the film's association of military action with 'cool' popular rock music and the closeness of its main characters. In contrast to the relative closeness of the men in *Stop Loss* who are young friends from a small town in Texas, the three lead characters in *The Hurt Locker*, Sergeant First Class William James, played by Jeremy Renner, Sergeant JT Sanborn, played by Anthony Mackie, and Specialist Owen Eldridge, played by Brian Geraghty, seem to barely know each other, and not necessarily like each other very much at that (recalling somewhat the relationships of chance/opportunity in *Three Kings*). Rather than being a 'band of brothers' (willing to die for one another in middle-period films like *Saving Private Ryan*), this trio is more likely to try to kill one another, linking these films to those post-Vietnam films like *Platoon* and *Casualties of War* in which threats and acts of military fratricide are much more common.

James enters Sanborn and Eldridge's unit only after the previous bomb tech, Staff Sergeant Matt Thompson, played by Guy Pearce, is killed in an explosion, clearly marking James' outsider status. James also continues to act as a lone wolf, constantly bucking authority and breaking rules. In one of their first missions together as a unit he takes his headset off, breaking his communication link with the other men. At this, Sanborn gets Eldridge to ask nicely if he'll put it back on, but he will not. This violation of policy, and lack of cooperation with his

team makes the other two men very uncomfortable, and prevents them from doing their jobs properly, but James doesn't seem to care. Later, in a previously mentioned scene, the two men, Sanborn and Eldridge, talk secretly about how easy it would be to "accidentally" kill James[200] while he's off in the distance below working on a diffusing a bomb by himself. This extreme level of hostility and potential violence toward a fellow soldier is certainly not displayed in any of the middle/regressive period films, and is much more common in post-Vietnam-era films like *Platoon, Full Metal Jacket* and *Casualties of War* than in WWII-era films.

The violence between men continues in a later scene, previously mentioned for its racially loaded nature, where the men 'wrestle' in James' room, and James proceeds to 'ride' Sanborn like a bull. The scene comes to an uneasy close when Sanborn gets upset and James says (or pretends) he's just kidding: "You're alright Sanborn. Owen, get this man a drink." James' lone wolf tendencies also get his men in trouble when he puts their lives in direct jeopardy by leading them off-base one night in a goose-chase pursuit of a bomb-maker and Eldridge ends up getting shot. While James does feel bad about this incident (as previously noted he cries alone and fully clothed in the shower afterward), it doesn't stop him from continuing to behave in a dangerous and selfish manner.

Along with the film's relative lack of brotherly love, *The Hurt Locker* also constructs the upper echelons of the military command as dishonourable when the US military kill a wounded Iraqi shooter with a "survivable wound" after an order to do so is issued by a commanding officer. The commanding officer who orders the murder of the wounded Iraqi insurgent later wants to shake James' hand after James successfully diffuses a bomb; he says James is "hot shit, a cowboy, a wild man," asking him questions like an over-eager child. James is visibly put-off by these questions and disgusted by the star-struck attitude of the senior officer, brushing off the

man's compliments, suggesting a complete lack of respect for this authority figure in line with his earlier disregard for military protocols (switching off his communications, going off-base without permission, etc.) and his peers/colleagues' wishes, further reinforcing James' complete selfishness. So while James is still a very competent soldier, as are all of the protagonists of the combat genre, his selfishness and lack of respect for his fellow soldiers and for the military chain of command in general set him apart from protagonists from the middle period whose devotion to their families (both military and biological) is complete and unwavering.

The disrespect of commanding officers that is a hallmark of this cycle of films is perhaps most evident in *Generation Kill*, where the miniseries' length and ensemble cast allows more room for such a theme to be more fully developed. The wisdom, actions, and decisions of the men in positions of authority are constantly questioned by the men of the unit from the very first episode; in an aforementioned scene, when a commanding officer gives a lecture about un-tucked shirts and non-regulation moustaches, main character Colbert (Alexander Skarsgård) muses: "We're about to invade a country and this is what our leader passes on? Moustaches?" The nicknames given to and used almost exclusively by the men to refer to their superiors (Captain America, the Godfather) are another strong indication of the men's disregard for the military hierarchy, illustrating that the men view their leaders as laughable caricatures rather than people to whom they aspire to be like or even admire. And the leaders in this cycle generally do not do much to inspire confidence; there is an almost total lack of communication from superior officers right from the beginning of *Generation Kill*, leading to a constant questioning of orders. The men's superiors neglect to mention, for example, that the Marines will no longer have an armoured escort when they cross the border into Iraq. This failure of communication quickly leads to dangerous situations, and some of the first casualties the audience is made aware of are

the direct result of a friendly fire incident. Rather than happening because of the fog of war, the chaos of battle, an enemy interception, etc., the miniseries implies that the upper echelons simply forgot to or didn't deem it necessary to pass along the change in plans to the soldiers spearheading the invasion. Any casualties or losses are therefore at least as attributable to the US military command itself as to the enemy Others with whom the soldiers engage.

Incompetence also reigns at the command level when the unit at the centre of the miniseries gets lost because the commander of the battalion can't read the map. He later blames his mistake on his subordinates in one of the "Humvees" even though Colbert earlier explicitly expressed concerns that they were about to make a wrong turn, warning him about his mistake and giving him a chance to correct it. Rather than take responsibility for his error, the officer tries to blame it on a failure of technology, using the fog of war as an excuse for his own ineptitude as both a basic soldier (map-reading) and leader (willingness to listen to others, and admit to and learn from one's mistakes). These faults are much like Sobel's from *Band of Brothers*, but where Sobel is quickly removed from active command, this officer is not. Rather than leaders who inspire trust and respect in those they lead, the men's commanding officers are almost all a constant object of scorn because of their inability to conduct themselves with what the men would view as soldierly professionalism ("I am so sick of Captain America spazzing out on our radio"), and the fact that the men are repeatedly put into unnecessarily dangerous situations because of their superior officers; for example, the second episode ends with the one of the officers stepping outside the camp perimeter to "take a shit" after dark and going missing, at which point Colbert and Ray must begrudgingly put themselves in harm's way to go out and find the missing soldier.

In fact, the disrespect for military higher-ups so pervades the miniseries that Part Three is almost exclusively about the mistakes of the upper echelon of military command, and the reasons the men have little to no respect for their superiors' authority. When Colbert tries to bring up the map-reading fiasco in a meeting of higher-ups, for example, his concerns are swept aside when he is told not to "live in the past." Mid-level commanding officers, especially well-respected and well-liked Lt. Nathanial Fick, played by Stark Sands,[201] sympathize with Colbert's unit about the failings of the people higher up the chain of command, but cannot do anything about it. Colbert reveals to Fick that his leadership is the only thing Colbert has absolute confidence in. Not only are those in control prone to making mistakes, they are also accused (by Colbert) of endangering their own lives and the lives of their men by deliberately calling in fire missions (aerial support) much too close to themselves – risking friendly fire injuries – in order to get medals and bravery commendations. This is a far cry from the WWII-nostalgic middle period films in which men are willing to die selflessly for one another and for their country (e.g. *Saving Private Ryan*). Here, as in early-period films like *The Thin Red Line*, the older generation of soldiers is largely represented as being out for personal gain and glory (e.g. Tall) at the expense (and possible sacrifice of the lives) of younger soldiers whereas the younger generation, while sometimes disrespecting the military chain of command, retain their devotion to ideals of hegemonic masculinity and the proficient performance of soldierly duties.

Colbert is not alone in his questioning of authority: Sgt. Rudy Reyes (played by himself), too, says everything they're doing feels "so random," and some of the answers to Colbert's questions about their mission suggest that it is (or at least that it's the result of yet another mistake). When Colbert asks: "How did this happen?" Fick responds: "You wouldn't believe me if I told you." Clearly the men are not shy about sharing their insubordinate thoughts and feelings

regarding their commanders with one another, one saying: "The business end of [General] Mattis' crack pipe must be hot to the touch!" Such brazen questioning of the mission and denigration of superior officers is virtually unheard of in films from the middle/regressive cycle of this period, and is much more common in the post-Vietnam films, suggesting that this pattern is related to a post-Vietnam and post-Gulf War loss of faith in the military institution generally as a result of the lack of clarity about the conflicts themselves.

An airfield reconnaissance mission that Godfather green-lights is a prime example of all of the mistakes and deliberately dangerous decisions made by the men in charge of this mission. First Godfather decides to give flashlights to local informants (so that they can show him where the "bad guys" are) without double-checking their intelligence or making sure that these sources are reliable and trustworthy. He then decides to have the unit drive 40 km off-road in the dark to an airfield guarded by Iraqi Royal Guard just to do reconnaissance on it, but the airfield mission then becomes an assault simply because the General is angry and impatient. In addition, the R.O.E. (rules of engagement) that have been constantly changing throughout the mission, from: "there's been a change in R.O.E. Anyone with a weapon is considered hostile. If a woman walks away from you with a rifle on her back – shoot her," to being allowed to shoot unarmed targets suspected of being spotters, and finally, on the airfield mission, the "new R.O.E. has all Iraqis on or near that airfield hostile." These frequent and sometimes radical changes imply that the R.O.E. simply shift at command's will, depending on what suits them at the moment.[202]

But men like Colbert are so disillusioned by their leadership that they don't even pass the final change in R.O.E. down the chain of command to their men, and Colbert even goes as far as to say: "Can you believe that fucking retard is in charge of people?" Cementing this decision, after their vehicle's gun jams as they're rolling onto the airfield and Ray fixes it, asking: "Should

I light them up?" Colbert responds: "No. We're not engaging. Those are not military buildings –
those are civilian huts." The miniseries reveals that, once again, Colbert was right. As he
predicted, there's no one at the airfield when they get there, but the General ('The Godfather')
calls command anyway to report that they've "over-run and seized the airfield with ZERO
casualties." While this report is technically true, it's a large overstatement of a mission which
essentially consisted of driving out onto (storming) an empty airfield. This type of representation
links the qualities of this invasion of Iraq to the first Gulf War in the complete technological (and
man-power) over-kill invested by the American military. As Patton puts it in his introduction to
The Gulf War did not Take Place, "the almost complete absence of any engagement by Iraqi
planes, and the fate of their technologically inferior tanks, testify to the one-sided nature of the
conflict" (18), and in fact, this scene from *Generation Kill* in which the unit steamrolls into an
empty airfield echoes many including those described from *Jarhead* and *Three Kings* herein
where U.S. soldiers so outnumber and outgun 'the enemy' to the extent that they (U.S. military)
mostly stand around doing nothing and getting bored. The resultant lack of clarity about the
purpose of the conflicts and the necessity of their role in them is arguably what leads the
characters in the early and late films of this period to behave with less conviction in their
relationship with the military machine as a whole (and, to a lesser extent, in their relationships
with one another).

Later in *Generation Kill*'s third installment, the lack of cohesion and stability in this
conflict are reinforced when the R.O.E. continue to change again and again; when a marine is
captured and crucified and the unit's sister company goes back for him, they are told: "You can
be as loose with the R.O.E. as you like – this whole city is declared hostile." Shortly thereafter,
however, the rules are changed once again: "Observe everything, fire at nothing," when just

previously it was 'fire at everything.' Shortly after the Godfather's airfield manoeuvre, as a result of the decision to 'move on' or attack the airfield, an unattended supply truck that was left behind in haste is blown up by enemy forces, meaning the men are rationed down to one meal a day. Ironically, when the commanders responsible for the loss of the truck find out that one of the gunners has lost his helmet during the airfield mission, they severely reprimand the gunner, whose understandable, under-his-breath retort is: "I'm not the fucking retard that lost a whole fucking supply truck." Again, here the commanders are represented as making uninformed and irresponsible decisions that endanger the lives of their men with the sole purpose of advancing their own military careers. There is a constant lack of information about who the enemy is, where the enemy is, what the mission is, what the rules are, and this confusion manifests in an extreme lack of trust on the part of the soldiers toward their commanding officers.

Higher-ups are not the only soldiers who come across looking bad in this miniseries. The men in Colbert's unit, including Colbert himself, have no respect for fellow soldiers who demonstrate similar lack of good judgment; when Lance Cpl. Harold James Trombley (Billy Lush) keeps insisting "We gotta shoot some of these dogs," Colbert replies "Trombley, I keep telling you, we don't shoot dogs; we shoot people, and even then, only if we have to." Disappointed, Trombley inappropriately responds by telling a disgusting story about his dad being bitten by a dog and then reaching down the dog's throat and ripping its stomach out. The other soldiers look on, revolted and clearly disturbed by Trombley's apparently psychopathic nature. Further, as if the events of the airfield weren't enough to completely dismantle the men's trust in their superiors' decisions, near the end of the third episode, some Iraqi civilians bring their wounded child to the Americans' location, revealing to the group's translator that the child was shot by a marine (someone mutters under their breath "fucking trigger happy mother

fuckers"). When the translator says: "these mistakes are unavoidable," the doctor replies:

"Bullshit! We're recon Marines; our job is to observe, not make these kinds of mistakes!"

Eventually it becomes clear that Trombley accidentally (?) shot and injured this civilian child while shooting at camels (which he was explicitly told not to do). The too-hardness of the old-school-military Godfather is revealed in his decision not to allow a medical evacuation for this wounded child, citing regulation: "The R.O.E. states that we have to give them the same medical treatment they would get locally. The standards here are fucking zero." The outraged doctor, who doesn't respect authority any more than Colbert and his men, forces the Godfather to watch the child die, which he does without appearing to regret his decision. Clearly neither superiors nor fellow officers are necessarily highly regarded, especially if they make poor, selfish decisions; the close 'band of brothers' from the middle regressive period of films is nowhere to be found in these later-period films.

More children die at the hands of the American unit in *Generation Kill*'s subsequent episode when the Americans shoot at a car that won't stop at their roadblock. The next morning Iraqi children look at the dead bodies by the truck that Bravo company shot down the night before, and 'Poke' Esperanza is very upset about the shooting, reinforcing the idea that this lack of clarity about who the enemy is, and what the rules are plays into the men's attitudes towards soldiering. These events, of course, only lead to further dissent among the soldiers and disrespect for authority: "Ain't the Hajji's gonna kill us. It's fucking command." At a meeting of the higher and mid-level commanders, Godfather says that this dissent cannot be allowed, that "back-channel grumbling is unacceptable," but command only continues to make the same ill-informed and dangerous decisions (like sending in a too-close air strike on nothing) that led to the dissent in the first place, and the dissent, therefore, continues: "11,000 pounds of bomb, now that's some

shock and awe!" Colbert facetiously declares. He also, rightly, predicts that the 'target' of this 'shock and awe' maneuver is actually a town, not a military objective, and that the officer calling in the air-strike is under-estimating its distance, and Colbert is right on both counts: the area hit with the explosives is a town, not enemy weapons, and it ends up being 30-40 "clicks" away, not the estimated 15 that was called in for the fire mission. As one soldier puts it, "We didn't destroy any targets, but we didn't destroy a village either; I guess that sort of goes in the win column, right?" Command only continues to lose the men's respect with repeated actions such as these as the miniseries goes on, making useless speeches full of 'wisdom' like Encino Man's rousing: "I'm here to remind you that the enemy stole your supplies" (actually, it was command's decision to leave the truck unattended that gave the enemy the opportunity to blow it up). He concludes: "I want you to know that the enemy is the enemy" – profound. Colbert's sarcastic response sums it up: "I'm in awe," and sensible mid-level-commander Fick walks away without saying anything, suggesting that while he might agree, he knows he cannot say anything because he is part of the military chain-of-command structure. So despite the increased technology of 'smart' bombs, the line between civilian and enemy Other is still as, if not more blurred than ever in the War on Terror, and fatal mistakes are made repeatedly; the fog of war is still in full effect. The massive ambiguity and uncertainty of the conflict itself is directly reflected in representations of diminished closeness in bonds between soldiers, and diminished respect for military authority.

In one of the final episodes of the miniseries, Colbert explains the constant and repeated let-downs from above: "The leaders of the war can fuck up all they want, but as long as we get lucky and keep coming out alive, they're just going to keep repeating the same mistakes" (Part 5). Echoing Baudrillard's sentiments regarding the outmatched nature of conflicts in the Gulf,

Colbert likens his unit to "perfectly tuned Ferraris in a demolition derby," contending that their superiors keep sending them in, unfairly, because they know his unit will get the job done. In his view, and in the way in which the miniseries represents the events, the commanding officers are misusing the unit, sending them in without enough information, without enough backup, without enough supplies, and without enough communication. This confusion and lack of preparation, coupled with command's pursuit of personal glory and commendation at the expense of the lower-level soldiers depicts the chain of command as deeply problematic and worthy of scorn rather than an essential part of a larger, Foucauldian system of discipline that needs to be respected and followed at all costs (as it appears in the middle period films).

These constant issues with command are, as with other films from this cycle of the period, compounded by a great deal of disorganization and technological and equipment failure from the outset. In the very first episode, the unit is besieged by a total lack of preparedness on the part of the Marine Corp.: one of the unit's tents almost blows away in a windstorm in the night, the men then become aware that there aren't enough batteries for their night vision equipment or enough maps for the soldiers, and are given "woodland camouflage" uniforms even though they're in the desert. In a flourish of irony, the embedded reporter, Evan "Scribe" Wright (Lee Tergesen), upon whose account the miniseries is based), is provided with the proper equipment, desert camouflage, and is allowed to purchase the batteries etc. that the Marines need, but are not allowed to buy for themselves. At the outset of their mission, too, there's a big hold-up when the American force is trying to invade because they're waiting for a translator. Later they are stymied by a military "traffic jam" on Saddam's highway and shortly afterward again, on a bridge. These failures are all elements of Clausewitz's 'friction,' part of the fog of

war, yet they all also seem like very easily avoidable problems with proper planning and communication, deepening the men's frustration.

In the third episode of the miniseries, Colbert reveals the stress these problems put on the men; when "Gunny" (Gunnery Sgt. Mike 'Gunny' Wynn, played by Marc Menchaca) wants to talk to the men about combat stress and Colbert says "We're fine Gunny, but we'd be a bit better if we had batteries" and lubricant for the weapons. Similarly, by the fifth episode, the men are down to a ten day supply of nothing but peanut butter (because of the aforementioned loss of the supply truck at the fault of command), and Colbert's gunner is allergic to peanuts! By part six some of the men are quite sick with diarrhea and vomiting because of the supply problems, all a direct result of the unit's poor leadership and the military's poor planning. These events lead to an unsurprising lack of respect for the military as a whole on the part of some of the soldiers, including one who quips: "to think I believed the judge when he said the Marine Corps. was a superior alternative to jail. I should've shut up and done my time." This sentiment is much like *Jarhead*'s "I got lost on the way to college" in that the military as an institution and an establishment is not afforded nearly as much respect as it is in films of the middle, regressive part of the period. In *Jarhead* and *Generation Kill*, college, and even prison are regarded as superior alternatives to military service, whereas in *We Were Soldiers*, the men throw a party when they learn they will be deployed (even to Vietnam, a less-popularly supported conflict). In each of these films from the beginning and the later part of the period studied herein, the lack of excitement about and faith in the military as compared to films of the middle/regressive part of the period is directly linked to the soldiers' uncertainty about the causes and reasons for the war and their missions, the rules of engagement (who the enemy is), and their own role in the conflicts. While these later-period films show little respect for the military establishment and

command, American military men who are good soldiers, like Fick and Colbert (generally the white protagonists), are still portrayed in a very favourable light; they are depicted as strong, competent, moral warriors who can and should lead in their military roles which, in the case of *Generation Kill*, involves them literally invading another country, bringing their morally righteous attitude and cultural values to the world.

Chapter 7

Fathers, Mothers, Sons and Brothers – Hegemonic Masculinity/Paternity as the Foundational Element for Nation-Building: *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Patriot*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Stop Loss*, *Jarhead*, and *The Hurt Locker*

Regardless of whether men are portrayed as cooperative brothers in arms and supportive father figures, or these relationships are slightly more fraught with tension as analyzed in the previous chapter, familial relations are vital in many combat films. Along with the aggressive, even violent heterosexualization explored in chapters two and five, Drill Sergeants telling recruits: "You're married to this piece," soldiers being forced to sleep with their weapons and give them women's names, etc., there is also an overwhelming focus on nuclear families, and in particular, relationships between fathers, sons, and brothers (both literal biological relations and more symbolic paternal/fraternal relations) in popular Hollywood combat films. Jeanine Basinger identifies the "father figure" (48) as a key element of the combat film genre from WWII through Korea and Vietnam, tracing this leading father figure to the 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan*. Because published in 2003, however, even the updated version of Basinger's work does not consider the most recent cycles of combat films (2005-present). Picking up where Basinger left off, this chapter builds on and develops an understanding of this paternal form through a close analysis of the fathers and father-figures in these newer films, revealing a crucial shift in the role of fatherhood both within and outside the military.

Soldiers' inability to maintain functional heterosexual relationships and fulfill paternal duties in films from the later part of the period (e.g. *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*) signals a sharp departure from the middle-period films of the late 1990s-mid 2000s (*We Were Soldiers*, *Saving Private Ryan*), where romantic and familial relationships are much less troubled. In both *Jarhead* and, to a larger extent, *The Hurt Locker,* for example, the protagonist's inability to be a part of a

'normal' nuclear family is explicitly linked to his experiences of war. This type of dysfunctional family relationship stands in stark contrast to the warm, loving, and all-important family relationships in films like *Saving Private Ryan*, whose entire plot is based around a mission to rescue a mother's son whose brothers have all been killed in the line of duty. The father-son-like relationships between older soldiers and younger soldiers that are all-important in middle-period films such as *We Were Soldiers* and *Saving Private Ryan* also suffer breakdowns and/or are largely absent from the later period cycle of combat films, mid-2000s-2010, which tend to be much more individual-centric. Despite these relatively large shifts in the representation of familial relationships (whether literal or metaphorical), a strong American masculinity is still always presented as the basis for the success (or failure) of the American nuclear family, and, therefore, the American nation.

In delineating the essential elements of the WWII combat genre, Jeanine Basinger identifies the "father figure" (48) as a central feature; he may not always be older, and may sometimes die, but, she finds, if this death is early on he is usually replaced by another paternal figure (50), indicating the centrality of this figure to the genre. Basinger's examination of the genre ends with 1999's *Saving Private Ryan*, which was, in "the common attitude," different than previous WWII combat films because more "visually honest" about the horrors of war (253), but Basinger argues that the film "nonetheless uses and incorporates the traditional elements of the World War II combat film genre" (254). In her final evaluation, Basinger argues that the film contains all of the basic elements of the WWII combat genre that she previously identifies: "*Ryan* maintains the three basics of the definition: hero, group, and objective" (258) and key to this group accomplishing their mission is the paternal figure, Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks. Not only is Hanks' Miller an effective leader to a rag-tag group of soldiers, he

also reveals, in a crucial and much-anticipated moment that he was (in his pre-military days) a school teacher and softball coach, more paternal leadership roles. Even his revelation of these details of his pre-war life are perfectly timed to lift the morale and refocus his boys' patriotic senses of duty (259), further reinforcing his paternal qualities; his well-timed speech also emphasizes that he wants to accomplish this mission so that he and all of his men, including the titular Ryan, can get home to their families, reinforcing the symbolic importance of the nuclear American family to the war and combat genre; even while war is tearing families apart, the men fighting are working towards a brighter future where they rebuild those families stronger than before, as evidenced by the final scenes of the film in which Ryan is revealed to have built a substantial nuclear and extended family who are at his side in the military cemetery to honour his fallen martial brethren.

While Basinger does examine *Saving Private Ryan*, the rest of her analysis is limited to much earlier WWII combat films. Susan Jeffords examines more contemporary, post-Vietnam narratives in *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. By looking at gendered roles and relationships within and surrounding the Vietnam War, Jeffords argues that

> Although war might at first seem to be a 'man's world' and therefore of little relevance to a discussion of relations between women and men, the arena of warfare and the Vietnam war in particular are not just fields of battle but fields of gender, in which enemies are depicted as feminine, wives and mothers and girlfriends are justifications for fighting, and vocabularies are sexually motivated. But more than this, the relations of the Vietnam War are structurally written through relations of gender, relations designed primarily to reinforce the interests of masculinity and patriarchy. (xi)

More specifically, in one chapter Jeffords argues that these films depict "masculine appropriation of reproduction, projecting men as necessary and sufficient parents and birth figures" (xiv). Jeffords goes further by arguing "in this way, the masculine bond can be carried over from war

to society, from the battlefield to the home, and the men who constitute it can survive and thrive without women," adding, "this is one of the ways in which Vietnam representation can be distinguished from narratives of earlier wars, in which the reinstallation of the heterosexual family unit was prioritized" (xiv). These claims are supported by the above reference to *Saving Private Ryan*, whose entire premise follows such an imperative: the reinstatement of Ryan to his role as son and protection of his future role as husband and father. Jeffords goes further by linking a focus on fatherhood to television shows contemporaneous with the publication of her book (e.g. "My Two Dads" "Full House" etc.),[203] which she sees as a testament to "a renewed interest in patriarchal figures as sources of security and guidance" (169). More recently, Hannah Hamad, author of *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary US Film: Framing Fatherhood*, argues that fatherhood is indeed becoming a central part of representations of masculinity in a postfeminist Hollywood. Indeed in "Reproducing Fathers: Gender and the Vietnam War in US Culture" in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, Jeffords' reading of the outcome of *Platoon*[204] sees this moment, the death of both the 'too hard' and 'too soft' fathers (Barnes and Elias respectively), as Taylor's 'birth' into his own middle-ground of masculinity, eliminating women from the birth/parental role altogether.[205]

Jeffords also examines the representation of hard bodies and fatherhood in the Reagan era in *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, arguing that: "while critiquing the more spectacular hard bodies of the 1980s, these films of 1992 [that she analyzes, *Unforgiven* (1992) and *Diggstown* (1992)][206] have not rejected that body so much as refigured it to incorporate a domestic component, one that acknowledges the family as the final justification for any foreign interventions" (191). Jeffords adds that this new focus on familial rhetoric helps reconstitute "internal structures of racism, rationalize class divisions" (192), and, crucially, "at

the center of this family and the nation it represents is [still] the hard body, a body that has shifted its constitution throughout the 1980s" (192) but still dominates, revealing the resiliency of hard body models, which are so dangerous precisely because "they appear to critique, at times even to reject, their earlier versions, only to renarrate them in ways more complex" (192), but no more progressive. Jeffords explicitly links the emergence of these hard bodies to Vietnam films like the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* franchises, and to "the kind of nationalism and militarism that brought the country [U.S.] to military actions in Panama, Grenada, and the Persian Gulf" (193), characterizing these hard body figures as dangerous because, they "seem now to represent the desperation of an aging superpower that is reluctant, under a conservative framework, to relinquish its international status and influence and may … be willing to punish harshly those who insist it do so" (193). In all then, these hard-body and even 'new man,' seemingly softer father figures, rather than acting as healthy depictions of balanced parenting, overwhelm if not blot out mothers altogether,[207] further reinforcing the 'masculine nature' of the American military, and the nation as a whole; as Captain Miller puts it to his men in *Saving Private Ryan*, "we all have orders, and we have to follow 'em. That supersedes everything, including your mothers."

Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald, authors of the relatively recent *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film* also recognize "The Father Figure" as a "prevalent male stereotype in war films" (51). Importantly, they identify this character type as not just one who has more military experience than other, younger soldiers, and therefore serves as a career mentor, but also as one who "provides role models of manliness for the younger troops" (51). These father figures then are not just military role models, but also act as guides to the art of performing masculinity more generally. Donald and MacDonald also identify a second, related

figure, that of "the rebellious son," (55) whom they describe as a "young, immature soldier who rebels against his father or father figure, but then realizes his error and amends his ways" (55). The most significant aspect of this figure to the findings of this study is that, they argue, "this real-life father-son melodrama usually ends by reinforcing the manly values of the older generation" (55). Just as Jeffords argues about the hard-body figures of the '80s and '90s, Donald and MacDonald argue that these war film father/son duos reinforce the patriarchal status-quo rather than undermining or undercutting it, further asserting: "as always … in war films, the dominant male ethic must overcome humanistic sentiment if the bloody job of war is to be performed successfully" (56). In a later note, the authors relate this depiction of the father-son relationship to "Freud's concept of the need for approval by the father" (107) which is "necessary for instilling self-assertion in the son" (107) arguing that through the father's approval, "the world is then rendered manageable for a male. Throughout the son's lifetime, the son-father relationship affects the son's self image, as well as his view of the world. A deep and lasting bond is established between a father and son as the son seeks the father's approval and praise" (107) and "eventually the child is pulled out of the 'symbiotic orbit' he inhabits with his mother" (107) which "is replaced with the shared maleness of his father later in the film" (107). In essence, the father-son relationships described by Donald and MacDonald and played out within the genre, whether symbolic or literal, always take precedence over maternal relationships, shaping the son's entire way of thinking about himself and everything else around him, effectively maintaining, rather than renegotiating or dismantling, masculine patriarchal dominance.

<u>Early Period Films: *The Thin Red Line*, *Three Kings*</u>

In the earliest part of the cycle, there is not as much of a focus on fatherhood as in films from the WWII-era that Basinger studies or the middle-period regressive films examined herein, but what little focus on fatherhood exists in these early-period films is relatively positive, and not too fraught with tension. In films like *The Thin Red Line*, older soldiers in positions of leadership repeatedly make familial references in relation to their troops. In a training sequence, for example, Clooney's character, Capt. Charles Bosche, declares that the military unit is a family: he is the father, his right-hand man, Sean Penn's character, 1st Sgt. Edward Welsh, is the mother, and the soldiers in the unit are the children. The insistence on a traditional nuclear family structure (father, mother, and children, in that order) reinforces the 'normalcy' or naturalness of heteronormative values. Importantly too, he declares that "a family can only have one father; the mother runs it," reinforcing the primacy of the father in the familial relationship, and, significantly, replacing the mother with another male figure, Welsh. Similarly, in the film Koteas' character, Capt. James "Bugger" Staros, tells his men they have been "like sons" before amending his statement in a later voiceover: "You are my sons. You live inside me now. I'll carry you wherever I go." In this way, Staros usurps the maternal role of carrying the child within the body, and this is not an atypical sentiment in the genre; American soldiers are repeatedly referred to as sons and the implication is that they are not just the symbolic sons of their older male leaders, but of the nation itself. These patriarchal-familial sentiments are further reinforced in the final scenes of the film, wherein groups of unnamed battle-weary young soldiers are transported by boat accompanied by a voiceover narration about friendship and brotherhood.

In the film *Three Kings*, too, fatherhood is a less-prominent feature than in middle period films like *The Patriot*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Flags of Our Fathers*, but references to fatherhood outweigh references to motherhood, and what references occur are not as rosy as references in middle period films, but not as fraught as in later period films. In *Three Kings*, for example, Troy Barlow (played by Mark Wahlberg) is both a symbolic father (or at least a big brother figure) to fellow soldier Conrad Vig (played by Spike Jonze) and a biological father to a baby girl back home. In fact, his role as a father is so significant that his character is introduced with onscreen text that reads: "TROY BARLOW, new father." His role as symbolic figure to Vig is quite pronounced as well: Vig looks up to Troy and aspires to be him, acting like him, following him around, and even getting the same haircut. The significance of this relationship, too, is foregrounded by Vig's introductory text which reads: "CONRAD VIG, wants to be Troy Barlow." When Vig is mortally wounded close to the end of the film, it is the also-wounded Troy who lies on the ground with him and holds his hand. Troy is Vig's paternal mentor and comforter throughout the film, even in death. Troy's role as a biological father is foregrounded throughout the film as well. During the scenes in which he is kidnapped and tortured by members of Saddam's army, his torturer, Captain Said, reveals that he, too, was a father to a young child until his son was killed by an American bomb. As Said describes the bombing he insists that Troy imagine it happening to his own family, and the imaginary scene is pictured onscreen with images of Troy's wife and infant daughter being killed in a bomb-blast in their suburban American home. In the end, however, Troy is able to plot his escape using a stolen cell-phone, and his wife and daughter remain unharmed, never in any real danger.

So while fatherhood, both symbolic and literal, is, in part, used in these early period films as a tool to critically question American foreign policy issues such as remote bombing and drone

strikes, it is also used to build and reinforce bonds between soldiers in these films largely at the expense of motherhood, the female role in reproduction and parenting effaced by statements such as Staros' and also largely erased in terms of representation (the scene in which they are imaginarily killed is one of the only scenes in which Barlow's wife and daughter appear in the film). Overall, where present, the theme of fatherhood in this cycle upholds the notion of male-headed American households and a solely male American military as the bedrock of the nation.

Middle Period Films: *Patriot, We Were Soldiers, Pearl Harbor, The Pacific*

Because the middle cycle of the period of films studied herein is the most traditional, reactionary, and conservative period in the cycle, literal and symbolic fathers are centrally important to films in this category, and while relationships are at times seemingly fraught, they are still deeply important and vital relationships: sons at fathers' deathbeds, older fathers mentoring newer ones, men sharing paternal duties and helping sons recover from the traumas of war, etc. The primacy of this paternal role aligns with the other more traditional, conservative values prevalent in the films of this post-9/11 period.

It's hard to talk about *The Patriot* without talking about fatherhood and its role in the American nation, because that's basically what the film is about; it strongly asserts that the America is founded by good, moral men and their sons, with a little help from the women (wives, sisters) on the sidelines. This particular film, like some others of the cycle, is also explicitly about the legacy and effects of fathers' wars on sons; Mel Gibson's character, Benjamin Martin's, voiceover opens the film: "I have long feared that my sins [in the American-Indian war] would return to visit me and the consequence [the death of two of his sons] is more than I can bear" and Martin returns to this sentiment (about his legacy of war being passed down to/through his sons) multiple times throughout the film.

Set during the American Revolution, the film is pervaded by strong traditional gender roles from its outset: Martin's sons work the fields as his eldest daughter teaches the youngest boy how to read and spell, and assures her youngest sister that their dead mother (further effacement of the maternal)[208] is looking down on them from the stars in the sky. Martin's eldest son, Gabriel, played by Heath Ledger, as the first-born, tells his younger brother, Thomas, to respect their father's authority (but then, against his own imperative, proceeds to buck his father's authority by joining the army against his father's wishes and express prohibition). Martin is against fighting and the war because of its disruption of family life. He declares himself a family man who refuses to fight because, although a stern patriot, his status as a widowed father of seven means that he doesn't "have the luxury" of committing himself to fighting in a war (again). He forbids Gabriel from enlisting for the same reason, maintaining that their responsibilities lay at home.

When Gabriel enlists anyway, despite his father's protests, his well-written letters serve as voiceovers to battle scenes in which many young men fall. Gabriel's next youngest brother, Thomas, who's also depicted as very invested in and excited to enlist and fight, reads Gabriel's letter aloud to the younger children, clearly rapt by the words, strongly suggesting that military service is viewed as desirable and honourable in this family, despite Martin Sr.'s reservations about it. Thomas later draws reprimand from his father when Martin Sr. catches Thomas playing with/trying on his father's old military uniform and weapons. Sadly, Thomas never gets a chance to join the army or the militia because he is shot trying in vain to save his older brother Gabriel from being hanged as a spy.

Thomas's brutal murder by a callous British Redcoat (who becomes one of the central villains of the film) and the impending death of his eldest son Gabriel (at the hands of the same

man), are the final motivators for Martin Sr. to finally join the fight; only when the war begins to interfere with and threaten his family – his sons specifically – does Martin, somewhat reluctantly, take up arms. When he sets of in pursuit of the caravan carting Gabriel off to his death, Martin Sr. gives his next two eldest (but still very young) boys rifles and the responsibility of backing up their father in battle. In what ends up being a horrifically bloody slaughter, Martin Sr., almost as if in a fugue state, ruthlessly and efficiently murders all of the redcoats in the caravan and rescues his wounded son, Gabriel, from the British. While the men of the family are out on this mission, Martin's eldest daughter is left in charge of the youngest son (William) and youngest daughter (Susan); they are instructed to hide in the bushes and go to their Aunt (Charlotte Selton played by Joely Richardson) if the men aren't back by dark. As throughout the rest of the film, the gender roles in this arrangement are very conventional with the men taking part in the action of fighting, and the women being left in charge of the family, told to hide and wait for the men to come back. The only minimal exception to the film's very traditional gender roles is Gabriel's love interest, and eventual wife, Anne, who pursues Gabriel romantically, however chastely (rather than waiting passively for him to pursue her), and is quite outspoken in her patriotism, shaming her church congregation (including the Reverend!) into wartime action, joining the militia to fight the British.

The connection between paternity and war is continuously and repeatedly reinforced throughout the film including in a heavily symbolic gesture when Martin melts down toy soldiers that belonged to his murdered son to make bullets for battle. While Martin Sr. and Gabriel are away, and since Thomas is dead, the next oldest Martin son, Samuel (played by Bryan Chafin), is explicitly charged with the responsibility of being the "man of the house," the protector; this responsibility only falls to him because his father and older brother are away fighting the war. He

is the one sleeping outside in later scenes to warn the family that the soldiers are coming, and makes sure the rest of the family gets down into the cellar to hide, while he stays aboveground with a rifle to protect them. Again, this young son's bravery (while an adult woman and children hide below) reinforces the gender hierarchy that the film actively works to construct and maintain: men, even when they are still boys, are more active, strong, and brave than women, and are leaders of the family, arms-bearers, and protectors of the house, even when adult women and older female children are present.

Indeed, paternal and fraternal responsibilities pervade the film to its core; in later scenes Gabriel, in his dying moments, tells his father that he's sorry for Thomas' death, but Martin Sr. counters that it was his own fault that Thomas died, reinforcing the idea that his own sins in the American-Indian war were visited upon his sons. These personal losses, particularly the death of his two eldest sons, help to construct Martin Sr. as an emblem or icon of patriotic war whose victories and losses are shared by "more than he can know," according to Martin's friend Col. Harry Burwell (played by Chris Cooper). Indeed, it is at least partly his status as a family man, a reluctant warrior who doesn't want to fight but will for his family that appeals to the masses and causes them to rally behind him. By the end of the film, others are so wholeheartedly supportive of him that a former slave, Occam (played by Jay Arlen Jones), who only joined the militia to win his freedom, follows Martin Sr. into battle, helping to lead others, even though he's already won his freedom and is no longer required to fight. This level of devotion underscores the primacy and effectuality of Martin's breed of military masculinity and leadership. At the film's close, Occam even works alongside a formerly ignorant/racist white militiaman who bullied him throughout the film (Dan Scott, played by Donal Logue) to build the Martins a new home, telling Martin Sr.: "Gabriel said if we won the war we could build a whole new world – just figured

we'd start right here with your home." Again, Martin's ability to sway others to his worldview, getting men to overcome their racial differences to band together to fight for their country, is a testament to the film's strong support of his particular embodiment of hegemonic masculinity.

These scenes suggest that the leadership of a righteous American family man can overcome barriers as strong as deep-seated racism and desire for freedom. Much like the union of the American North and South is literalized through a marriage in *Birth of a Nation* (with which example this project opens), this film about the American Revolution, *The Patriot*, ends neatly with the construction of a physical family home for a family that has been ripped apart by war, but, in true American-Dream fashion, picked itself up, dusted itself off, and started to put itself back together again through remarriage and new war-formed friendships and communities. This ending drives home the focus on the male-headed American nuclear family as the foundation of the American nation so central to the genre. This type of film and ending strongly suggests that war is little impediment to the American spirit, and that from the ashes of war rises a new, and stronger version of the American family, and the American nation; war is depicted not just as morally justified, but as necessary for the construction of a better, more unified family, and nation.

As with *The Patriot*, it's difficult to discuss *We Were Soldiers* without discussing family, because the film is so heavily focused upon it right from the outset. The opening scenes of the film, introducing main character Hal Moore, show him in his car with his wife and five kids happily singing together like the perfect family on a cheerful road trip. The next scene opens on one of his young daughters cutely marching up the steps of their new army home in her father's combat boots and one of his sons hanging a sign displaying Moore's name and military rank on the front door of their house on a military base. Later, in bed with his wife, he tells her: "When I

pray whatever I want, I thank God for you." Much like in *The Patriot*, Gibson's character in *We Were Soldiers* associates his role as a strong family man with his role as a strong military leader; for him the two are inextricably linked. When describing the qualities of a good leader to his men, many overlap with the qualities of a father (e.g. learning to overcome exhaustion and screams, although in battle they are of wounded men rather than children); he also tells his men that Crazy Horse[209] nursed from every woman in his tribe: "That's how the Sioux raised their children. Every woman in the tribe, they called her mother. Every older warrior, they called them grandfather. Now the point here is, they fought as a family. Take care of your men, and teach them to take care of each other." This inspiring speech to his men leaves no doubt that the military is like a family to Moore and that this mentality is required for the smooth operation of the military unit.

The wives too, as explored further in chapter two, play a traditional role in the American families at the centre of this film. When they arrive on the new base, Moore's wife organizes a gathering of the wives, saying: "I know some of you are new to the army, and all of us are new to this base, so I thought we could pool our resources and cover whatever questions we might have," but the questions, of course, are about grocery shopping and laundry. Moore's wife continues this leadership role throughout the film as discussed in chapter two, helping to distribute the telegrams notifying wives of husbands' deaths, and with straight cuts from her husband leading in battle to her vacuuming the carpet at home, their respective roles are clear. While the initial meeting of wives draws to a close when the young Barbara Geoghegan (Chris Klein's character, Jack Geoghegan's wife, played by Keri Russell) goes into labour, the film's focus is not on her as a mother, but on Jack's role as a father and its relationship to his military service.

Moore, being the father-figure leader that he is, meets Jack at the hospital when the latter's first (and only) child arrives. The scene opens on Moore looking at the newborn babies through the nursery window and cuts to Jack in the hospital chapel, staring at the stained-glass virgin mother and child. Geoghegan and Moore proceed to have a conversation about "being a soldier and a father," Geoghegan asking Moore what he thinks about it, and Moore responding, "I hope that being good at the one makes me better at the other," further underscoring the necessarily mutual relationship between the two in the film. Geoghegan tells Moore about building a school for orphans in Africa: "I know God has a plan for me, I just hope it's to help protect orphans, and not make any," again reinforcing the connection between war and families. These types of fatherly moments in the film reveal Moore's paternal relationship with the men under his command; in his prayer, he asks God: "I pray you watch over the young men like Jack Geoghegan that I lead into battle. You use me as your instrument in this awful hell of war to watch over 'em, especially if they are men like this one beside me, deserving of a future in your blessing and goodwill," suggesting that his views on fatherhood and soldierly duties are correct, that being good at the one makes him good at the other and that men like Jack who are starting young families of their own are particularly deserving of God's protection.

Moore is indeed depicted as both a good military father to his symbolic 'son' Jack, and a good biological father to his children: in a subsequent scene, Moore is reading his youngest daughter a bedtime story when she asks him what a war is. He gently tells her "it's something that shouldn't happen, but it does, and it's when some people in another country, or any country, try to take the lives of other people. And then soldiers like your daddy, have to, you know, it's my job to try to stop them." She asks if they're going to try to take his life and he tells her yes, they're going to try, but he's not going to let them. He hugs his daughter and then cradles his

wife in bed. In case viewers missed the connection between biological fatherhood and symbolic, military paternalism, in the subsequent scene, when his wife finds him reviewing military strategy in his study because he can't sleep, he tells her: "They sent me a new crop even greener, and when I look at them, I can't help but see our boys." Her comforting response is "Well then you're just the man to lead them," underlining her confidence in him as a father and therefore as a military leader. Before shipping out, too, parallel scenes reinforce the importance of the soldiers' biological families; Moore tucks in and kisses all of his sleeping children individually and then gets into bed with his wife, while in their own bed Chris Klein and his wife stare at each other over their sleeping newborn in her basinet.

As previously touched upon, unlike in films of the early and later cycles of this period, films from the middle regressive cycle are much more focused on the "leave no man behind" policy, strengthening the idea that the American military is a family that will do anything necessary to keep its members together. In this vein, when the men are about to ship out, Moore's rousing speech includes the strong finishing declaration: "They say we're leaving home. We're going to what home was always supposed to be" which begs the question – does he mean to imply that war is home? Or that the military is what home is supposed to be? This shot is accompanied and followed by a close up on his daughters and he continues:

> So let us understand the situation. We are going into battle against a tough and determined enemy. I can't promise you that I will bring you all home alive, but this, I swear, before you, and before almighty God that when we go into battle, I will be the first to set foot on the field, and I will be the last to step off, and I will leave no one behind. Dead, or alive, we will all come home together, so help me God.

And Moore sticks to his word. He objects to being air-lifted out on the first "chopper" so that he can brief General Westmoreland at Saigon: "I am in a fight … I'm not leaving my men behind" and repeatedly throughout the film displays concern for the whereabouts and well-being of all

the men, at one point declaring "Sir, I need a confirmed count of all my dead and wounded. I need to know where all my boys are," further reinforcing his paternal feelings towards the men under his command. When he later becomes aware that two men are missing (not realizing that one of them is Jack), he personally goes out to find the two missing men. Moore recognizes Jack from his hand alone, which bears his wedding ring and a bracelet with his baby's name on it.[210] Moore later expresses deep sadness (but not regret) when he realizes that Jack "died keeping my promise," carrying out his orders that no man be left behind (Jack's death is a result of his attempt to carry out a wounded fellow soldier).

This death is certainly intended to be felt keenly by the viewer, the film implying that the saddest deaths are those of family men; as if to reinforce this fact, Jack is not the only new father who dies in the film. During a friendly-fire air-strike incident, Jimmy, a Japanese-American soldier who previously told Joe Galloway (the embedded journalist/photographer upon whose account the film is partially based), that his wife is having a baby, is badly burnt and Joe must carry Jimmy's disintegrating body to the helicopter landing-zone; as Joe is putting him on the helicopter Jimmy winces "Tell my wife I love her – and my baby – you tell them." This character appears precisely twice in the film (once to excitedly spill the news about his impending fatherhood to anyone who will listen, namely Joe, whom he has just met, and again in a scene in which he dies and references the wife and baby he will be leaving behind) such that the only thing the audience knows about him is that he is a young father. In short, the character's main, if not sole, function is to reinforce the sadness of the death of young fathers in this conflict. Jack and Jimmy are the only two soldiers whose deaths the film dwells upon and whom the audience is actively encouraged to mourn (because they have back-stories and die horrifically and heroically), despite the deaths of so many others.

Family is even depicted as important to the enemy in *We Were Soldiers*; at points, one of the Vietnamese soldiers writes in what looks like a diary or a notebook with a picture of a woman, presumably his wife, in it, and the Vietnamese leader, who is a strong double for Moore, also prays for and cares paternally for his men as Moore does for his. In the final scenes, too, these parallels continue in an aforementioned scene in which Moore's voiceover narration of his letter to Jack's widow accompanies the image of Barbara Geoghegan reading the letter, the scene cutting to the Vietnamese woman whose picture was in the diary reading a presumably similar letter of her own. In echo of issues discussed in previous chapters (three and four), this scene has the women stand in symbolically to represent the loss of the male characters, and while it alludes to the grief of the Vietnamese woman, the fact that the scene is entirely narrated in voiceover by Gibson's character illustrates that it is primarily concerned with the grief of white America.

In the aftermath of the initial bloody battle of Ia Drang, upon which the film focuses, neither Galloway nor Moore has anything to say to the press who land after the "American victory" shouting innumerable questions: "Do you think America will take the North Vietnamese more seriously now?"; "How do you feel about your victory?"; "Have you notified the families?" Instead, they talk to each other: "I'm glad you made it, son," says Moore, again reinforcing his paternal relationship with the men by calling Galloway "son." Galloway respects his authority by calling Moore "Sir" in his response: "Thank you. Me too, Sir." Moore further underscores his fatherly feeling for the soldiers under his command when he confesses his feelings of survivor guilt to Galloway:

> Moore: "I'll never forgive myself"
> Galloway: "For what, sir?"
> Moore: "That my men [choked-up pause] that my men died, and I didn't" [choking up]
> Galloway: "Sir, I don't know how to tell this story"
> Moore: "Well, you've got to, son. You tell the American people what these men did here.
>   You tell 'em how my troopers died."

Galloway: "Yes, sir; thank you"

After Joe walks away, Moore weeps. Despite his devastating losses, and how personally he takes these losses, he keeps his promise to leave no man behind, and be the last man off the field. Only when the Sgt. Major tells Moore "All of our men, living and dead, are off the field, sir" does Moore get onto the helicopter accompanied by a bookend close-up of his boots being the last off the ground as the chopper takes off, paralleling a previous shot of his being the first boots on the ground as the first chopper landed.

Via Galloway's closing narration, the audience learns that Moore was sent back into the Ia Drang "valley of death" a second time. This revelation is accompanied by the visual of Moore's wife sewing at home, harshly telling the children to go to bed because there's a cab outside and the doorbell rings (the death notification telegrams have been delivered by taxi up to this point), but rather than a cab driver with a fatality telegram, Moore himself stands outside the door. The husband and wife embrace and she shouts: "Children, your daddy's home" and they all race down and hug him as a family. This overwhelming emphasis on family continues in Galloway's voice-over, extending to the other men who fought: "Some had families waiting. For others, the only family they would have would be the men they bled beside. There were no bands, no flags, no honor guards to welcome them home. They went to war because their country ordered them to, but in the end, they fought not for their country, or their flag. They fought for each other." Just like Moore's insistence on the leave-no-man-behind policy, the film upholds the depiction of a strong military brotherhood, a military family (despite the lack of popular support for the war and the controversial draft policy). This focus is emphasized by shots of one veteran wheeling another out of the hospital during Galloway's voiceover. This very strong familial ideology helps set this film apart from early and later films of the period, whose

'brotherly' and familial relationships are much more fraught with tension, potential and actualized violence, and ambivalence. This film's repeated emphasis on biological and martial familial relations leaves no doubt that the family is the most important unit in the military and in the nation, and at the centre of these familial units is a strong, moral (usually white) military man like Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore.

Pearl Harbor's focus on family is similarly prominent, akin to that in *The Patriot* and *We Were Soldiers*, with the extremely (brotherly) close protagonists literally sharing a woman and child, almost co-fathering. The film about the eponymous attack on the American military base at Pearl Harbor opens with the onscreen title "Tennessee 1923" and the child versions of the two protagonists, Capt. Rafe McCawley, played by Ben Affleck, and Capt. Danny Walker, played by Josh Hartnett as boys pretending to be fighter pilots together in a farm airplane/crop-duster in the barn and watching one of their fathers land a plane/crop-duster; the boys accidentally start the plane they're playing in and drive/fly down the farm "runway," having their first (albeit accidental) experience as pilots together. The focus on fatherhood and the legacy of war being passed down from fathers to sons arises early in the film when Danny's father is abusive towards his son, and Rafe defends his friend by smacking the abusive father with a wooden two-by-four, shouting: "I will bust you up, you dirty German!" (an obvious WWII reference). At this, the father slumps, and responds by talking about his experience fighting the Germans in the trenches: "I pray to God no one has to see the things I saw," suggesting that his domestic violence stems from his combat trauma, or PTSD. The film then skips forward to the period where the boys are now young men and qualified military pilots, one of whom, Rafe, has been selected for special Eagle Squadron training in England.

Because the two have clearly been very close since boyhood, Danny is upset that Rafe is going without him, imploring: "How could you do this?" While obviously feeling guilty about leaving his best friend/brother behind, Rafe is plainly excited about the opportunity: "Well, Doolittle assigned me; he wanted me to get some real, real combat training." Part of Danny's negative reaction is motivated by worry for Rafe's safety, "Yeah? Well guess what; it's not training over there. It's war, where the losers die and their ain't no winners, just guys who turn into broken-down wrecks like my father." Another part of Danny's reaction is clearly related to their relationship, and Danny's concern that Rafe will be changed, and end up an abusive "broken-down wreck" like his own father. Despite their disagreement over Rafe's decision, the men remain close friends and before he leaves, Rafe introduces Danny to his love-interest Evelyn, an army nurse played by Kate Beckinsale: "Danny seems kinda shy around the girls," but "he's like my brother, my best friend, my right hand." Recognizing the closeness of both of their relationships, Danny's tells Rafe to make sure he comes home "for the both of us," implying that both he and Evelyn are equally important in Rafe's life. While Rafe is away, Danny and Evelyn grow closer, bonding over their love of Rafe; Danny reveals that Rafe taught him how to fight (presumably to defend himself against his father's war-demon-fuelled abusive bouts), and Evelyn accidentally reveals that Rafe volunteered himself for the Eagle Squadron mission. Danny is upset because Rafe implied that he was assigned but Danny recognizes "He was always trying to protect me," recalling the initial boyhood scenes of the film and reinforcing the longstanding closeness of their relationship and Rafe's vaguely paternal attitude towards Danny.

The importance of fatherhood and the legacy of war as passed down from father to son are deeply embedded in the film's love-triangle.[211] After Rafe's plane is shot down and he is

presumed dead, Danny and Evelyn begin a slow, awkward courtship. During one evening together, Danny takes her on a sunset cruise over Pearl Harbor, telling her "You know I could get kicked out of the military for this," suggesting that she is important enough to him for him to risk his entire military career just to make her happy for an evening. In this scene, she reveals that her father used to be a pilot, again reinforcing the legacy of war from fathers to their children: sons of pilots become pilots themselves and daughters of pilots end up dating pilots. Clearly the sunset flight has the intended effect, for Evelyn ends up sleeping with Danny in the parachute hangar when they land. While this was exactly what Danny wanted ("Last night was crazy, I know that, but I don't regret it – do you?"), Evelyn clearly regrets or at least feels incredibly uncomfortable about the encounter: "I don't know [pause] it's just all too fast." Despite her misgivings, Danny is determined to move forward, convinced "Everything's going to be alright," continuously telling her so, ignoring and overriding her concerns.

Unfortunately, everything is not alright because Rafe turns up alive and is understandably upset when he finds out that his best friend has started a sexual relationship with his girlfriend while he's been struggling to get home to the two of them as he promised. The two get into a fist fight at a bar, but band together to run and hide when the military police show up to avoid being thrown in the brig; clearly their military careers are at least as important to them as their friendship, if not more so. This reconnection of the brotherly love between the two men is reignited during the attack on Pearl Harbor itself the next morning, with Rafe shouting: "Danny, start that thing up and get it in the air – I'm not much good without my wingman!" Their team-work and partnership here suggest that the men's friendship, and their military teamwork and defence of their country are more important than their dispute over Evelyn. The drama of the love triangle continues, however, as Evelyn is relieved to see both her men alive in the wake of

the chaos of the initial attack, and must choose between them, knowing that she's pregnant with Danny's child.

Rafe reveals to Evelyn that while he was in fear for his life in Europe, he "made a deal with God that I'd never ask for anything again if I could just see you alive one more time" and she responds in kind, telling him: "All I ever wanted was for us to have a home and grow old together, but life never asked me what I wanted. Now I'm going to give Danny my whole heart, but I don't think I'll ever look at another sunset without thinking of you. I'll love you my whole life." While Danny knows he's second-fiddle to Rafe, always the side-kick, he inexplicably agrees to the situation, telling Evelyn, "The only thing that scares me is that you love him more than you love me," but Evelyn assures him: "I love you Danny and I'll be here waiting when you come back."

An upset Rafe burns all of Evelyn's letters from while he was on his mission, and tries to talk to Danny out of going on their next mission, saying that "she's already lost one man she loves," but Danny will not be moved, saying "You've been trying to protect me since we were kids" and telling him to stop. Rafe, in one of many moments of foreshadowing retorts: "Yeah well, you do tend to need it sometimes." Yet another moment of foreshadowing comes right on the heels of the first when they are about to deploy and their commanding officer declares: "Take a look at the man next to you. There's a good chance in the next six weeks, one of your will be dead." And unfortunately, this proves to be true for Danny and Rafe when Danny is shot on their mission. As Rafe cradles his friend's dying body, he coaxes: "You're going to be a father" in an attempt to persuade Danny to fight for his life, but in his dying moments, Danny breathes: "No, you are," giving Rafe tacit permission to reignite his relationship with Evelyn and raise their son as his own; the two men tenderly touch faces as Danny dies, reassuring the viewer of the primacy

of their fraternal/paternal relationship and reinforcing the close bonds between men
(characteristic of this cycle particularly and) only sanctioned in wartime, as discussed by
Easthope.

The film's focus on the legacy of war being passed from father to son doesn't die with
this generation, however, and in fact, it is reinforced by the film's ending. In one of the final
scenes, Rafe and his son Danny (named after his biological father, of course) visit Danny Sr.'s
grave/memorial before Rafe takes his/Danny's son flying. This closing sequence strongly
reinforces the brotherly love and connection between Rafe and Danny, and the healthy bond
between Rafe and his/Danny's son (setting to rest Danny's fears that war would make Rafe an
abusive, "broken down wreck" like his father); it also illustrates that Rafe is potentially passing
on the legacy of war to his/Danny's son by teaching him how to fly. Significantly, Evelyn is
absent from this scene, underscoring the fact that her role is trivial; she is the most negligible
aspect of this scenario, almost simply a passive vessel to carry Rafe and Danny's love child. The
importance of the bond between father and son and its connection to a military legacy is
unquestionably underscored throughout this middle-period film, most notably in its first and final
moments.

Another WWII-centered text, popular H.B.O. miniseries, *The Pacific* is about the U.S.
military's campaign in the region during WWII, and is much like its sister series, *Band of
Brothers*, in tenor and form but has a slightly stronger focus on the home front. The miniseries
begins with each of the men's home and family situations before they leave for the military.
There are big, family going-away dinners where multiple sons, including Sgt. John Basilone,
played by Jon Seda, are leaving for war. In these scenes family members toast to being together
again the following year for another family dinner; one soldier here clasps the hand of an upset-

looking older gentleman at the head of the table, the young soldiers' father. Another main

character, the young PFC Eugene Sledge, played by Joseph Mazzello, is denied permission to

enlist by his father, a doctor, who tells the boy/young man that he can't go to war because of a

heart murmur. Eugene's mother, who clearly didn't want him to go to war, is relieved at the

diagnosis. When her husband tells her "he's [Eugene's] disappointed" she responds, "I'm his

mother," as if by way of explanation and apology for being glad that their son cannot go to war.

All of these familial relationships introduced at the outset of the series – particularly those

between fathers and sons – are returned to repeatedly throughout the miniseries, underlining the

importance of home and family to the war stories told therein.

In the second episode, the legacy of war being passed down from father to son crops up

when the doctor tries to console his son, Eugene, and explain why he and the young man's

mother don't want him going to war by telling him about his own experiences treating soldiers

and veterans: "The worst part of treating those combat boys wasn't that their flesh was torn; it

was that their soul was torn out. I don't want to look into your eyes one day and see no spark, no

love." This fatherly concern reinforces the legacy of war that fathers are concerned about passing

on to their sons (such Martin Sr.'s concerns that the consequences for his immoral actions in the

American Indian War will be visited upon his sons in *The Patriot*). In Part Five of *The Pacific*,

John Basilone, who has become famous at home, a 'hero' who sells war bonds (against his

wishes - he'd rather go back and fight), reconnects with his family when his younger brother

comes to visit him before shipping out. Protective older brother John tells his younger brother

very gravely, almost angrily, not to feel like he has to prove anything, asking him instead to keep

himself safe. These are clearly very intimate, loving relationships between fathers, sons, and

brothers that are structured around war, combat, and one's feelings of masculine duty.

In the same episode in which Basilone reconnects with his brother, Eugene finally gets

permission from his doctor/father to enlist and arrives in the Pacific; but instead of reconnecting

with his best friend from home, PFC Sidney Phillips (played by Ashton Holmes) with whom he

was excited to fight alongside, Eugene discovers that Sid has been in the Pacific so long already

that he's about to rotate home, meaning that Eugene will have to adjust to deployed military life

on his own. During a conversation between the two young friends before Phillips is shipped back

to the U.S., Eugene reveals that he's still a virgin, emphasizing the innocence his father is afraid

he'll lose during war. And Eugene does get a strong dose of the reality of the violence and

brutality of war that his father warned him about right away when his deployment boat

experiences a very 'hot' landing, with his unit experiencing many casualties, Eugene must

literally stare death in the face (in the form of floating dead soldiers) as he exits the boat. In the

following episode, Eugene's close relationship with his family is again reinforced when his

friend, Sid Phillips, upon returning home to Alabama, goes to visit Eugene's parents and

reassures them: "He's a mortar man, like me. Us mortar men tend to be a little bit behind the hot

stuff … I can't say this about every Marine I know, but I'm not worried about Eugene." But

while Sid's words to Eugene's parents are kind and reassuring, the look on his face betrays that

they might not be entirely true, and that he is in fact worried about Eugene. This worry is

legitimate, for Eugene is soon exposed to terrible sights such as fellow soldiers cutting the gold

teeth out of dead Japanese soldiers' mouths and even more death and dismemberment as he

becomes a stretcher-bearer. Just as his father feared, Eugene becomes increasingly scared,

frustrated, and then numb, his "soul torn out."

Other *Pacific* main characters, too, like John Basilone, become increasingly disenchanted

and frustrated, in his case with promoting the war effort and being seen as a hero: "I don't want

the world to know me." After begrudgingly selling war bonds stateside for a time, Basilone requests instead to be reassigned to "train the new kids. Let me help them the way I know how." His description of the new recruits as "kids" underscores the paternal relationships within the military structure, echoing films like *The Thin Red Line* from the early period, *The Patriot* from the middle of the period, and particularly *We Were Soldiers* (also from the middle part of the period) as discussed herein. Basilone eventually decides to re-enlist and ship out with his "kids," his new trainees, to the Pacific warfront. Before he does, however, he and his girlfriend Lena get married and talk about having kids of their own; she tells him, "You should've come around ten years ago," suggesting that they are (or at least she is) getting too old to have kids but that the desire is there. Unfortunately, Basilone dies in battle at Iwo Jima, and they never get the chance. Reinforcing the strength of Basilone's nuclear family bonds as established throughout the miniseries, after his death Lena goes to Basilone's house to see his parents; his mother doesn't exactly give her a warm welcome, but his little brother George, another military man, does: "You're beautiful. Last time I saw him [John] in Honolulu, he couldn't stop talking about you. He was just about to ship out." George kindly asks if she needs anything, and they take heart in the fact that John is buried on Iwo Jima "with a lot of fine Marines on either side." Lena admits that she really just came to bring his medal of honour to his parents, underscoring the primacy and importance of nuclear familial relationships and their relationship to martial honour.

Back in Mobile, Alabama, the emphasis on family continues when Eugene returns home at the end of the war; his brother and best friend Sid, both fellow soldiers, are moving on with their lives; Sid is getting married and his brother has a job as a manager at the local bank, but Eugene has "no job, no girl, no plans," foreshadowing the difficulty reintegrating into civilian lives that is at the heart of the problems of later period films (discussed further herein). Instead of

a job, a girl, or plans, Eugene has nightmares. His father stands helplessly outside his bedroom door during one, upset because exactly what he didn't want to happen to his son has happened: his son's soul has been "torn up." On Eugene's first night back, the family has dinner, and he and his older brother (who was deployed in Europe) are both in uniform, acutely connecting this traditional family meal time with military service. Soon after, Eugene's dad takes him hunting, telling Eugene he's been "looking forward to this morning for a long time, just the two of us and the grand morning." But before they get started with their father/son bonding, Eugene breaks down sobbing and tells his father: "I'm sorry, I can't." His father, who understands what his son is going through from his own experience treating veteran soldiers, reassures him: "It's ok; you don't have to apologize to me. I reckon the dove population's going to be mighty happy this morning." Rather than hunting, or working, or finding a 'girl' (a heterosexual mate with whom he can start a family of his own), Eugene spends many days sitting outside under a tree in the front lawn and this behaviour frustrates his mother.

His brother (and fellow soldier) tries to commiserate with him and cheer him up with the prospect of how easy it will be for him to meet women now that he's a veteran, but to no avail. On the other hand, his mother, frustrated by his inactivity, prods Eugene to get a starting position at the bank where his brother now works as manager. When Eugene refuses, his father, who has been protective of him from the beginning, defends him against his mother's suggestion that he move on with his life: "Leave him alone – he's not a boy." When she counters, "he's acting like one," Eugene's father uses his experience as a military doctor to bolster his argument, telling her that she has "no idea what men like him have been through" and ordering her around: "Now leave him alone – go on!" shooing her, almost like an animal. Overall then, Eugene's father is depicted as having a much keener understanding of what his son is going through than his wife

(Eugene's mother), or even Eugene's brother (who actually fought in the same conflict), reinforcing the primacy of the father/son bond, but more importantly, of the law of the father. While Eugene's mother is constructed as over-protective and over-bearing, his father appears rightly protective and insightful; Eugene opens up to his father much more than to his mother, brother, or even his friend Sid Phillips, further underscoring the importance of paternity over maternity especially in military matters. It is the father who can deny or grant permission for the son to enlist, and it is the father who consoles and manages the psychological care of the son upon his return; the mother's contributions and wishes are largely ignored or pushed to the side.

Yet another middle-period film concerned with WWII, *Flags of our Fathers* was released after *Jarhead* and therefore theoretically fits into the later cycle of combat films (especially when paired with its twin project, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, as examined in chapter four). Its representational politics (particularly to do with the American nuclear family), however, align it more closely with the traditional, conservative middle period of war films examined herein. The film, like many of the middle WWII-nostalgic part of the period, is also explicitly (from the title) about fatherhood and the generational legacy of war. The main characters, Rene Gagnon (Jesse Bradford), Ira (Adam Beach), and Doc (Ryan Phillippe) were present at Iwo Jima, and, like Basilone from *The Pacific*, have a difficult time selling war bonds, and being called heroes "for putting up a pole." Their discomfort stems partially from the fact that they are forced by the military to lie about who was there at the flag-raising, and the fact that the iconic image is of a second, staged flag-raising necessitated by the fact that "some politician wanted the first one so they had to take it down" reinforcing Jeffords' argument that combat films often scapegoat unseen military command or governmental figures for military problems, rarely faulting the soldiers themselves.

Military legacy is incredibly important to the three protagonists who feel that their fallen

brothers-in-arms are the real heroes and that some of these fallen fellows (e.g. their friend Mike)

might be ashamed of these lies the government/upper military echelons are asking them to

promote. Ira, the stereotypically alcoholic Native American character (discussed in greater detail

chapter four), literally cries on the shoulder of one of the mothers of the dead men, Harlan (to

whom they are lying about Harlan not being at the flag raising), and years later seeks out and

finds Harlan's father in Texas to tell the man the truth about the photograph: that his son Harlan

was there, not someone else. Doc, too, seeks out and speaks to a fallen comrade's family, telling

Iggy's mother about how her son (whom, it's implied, was tortured and killed by the Japanese)

died, but seemingly lies to her to make her feel better and to protect her memory of her son.

Much of the guilt that these men carry, therefore, has to do with military legacy and the memory

of fallen soldiers in the minds of their families.

Trying to make up for all of the lies he has told and was forced to tell about the war, Doc

spends his post-war life working in the family business "and raising his family." At the close of

the film, the importance of family and particularly the relationship between fathers and sons

from which the film's title is drawn is reinforced when a dying Doc wants to confess to his son,

telling him he's sorry he wasn't a better father. Of course, his son assures him on his deathbed

that he's "the best father a man could have" and in closing voiceover narrates: "maybe there are

no such things as heroes, maybe there are just people like my dad – I finally understood why

they were so uncomfortable being called heroes ... they may have fought for their country but

they fought for their buddies, the man in front and the man behind," reinforcing not just the

importance of (military) brotherly and (biological) fatherly love, but also the true heroic modesty

of the American military man and the centrality of his military experience to his family life and to his son's understanding of him as a person and as a father.

Later-period films: *Stop-Loss, Jarhead, The Hurt Locker*

Unlike these middle-period films that are so focused on the primacy father-son relationships, in the later cycle of the period, fewer, if any, characters talk about their fathers or their children or the legacy of war at all; characters seem more concerned about themselves and the impact of this type of war going forward, potentially negatively impacting their abilities to have family lives untainted by their experience of war. Their experiences are represented as somehow more isolating than those of men involved in previous wars because of the smaller scale of participation in these wars (not 'world' wars); not as many people know what it's like "over there," so few, with the possible exception of Vietnam veterans, understand, empathize, or even sympathize with characters' experiences because of the somewhat smaller scale and ambiguous nature of the conflict.[212] The films' emphasis then is not so much that war is bad in and of itself, but that war is bad because of its interference in the American nuclear families headed or potentially headed by these men in the future.

The pervasive focus on brotherhood in combat films is certainly not lost in Kimberly Pierce's *Stop Loss*, a film about small-town Texas friends and returning soldiers King (played by Ryan Phillippe), Shriver (played by Channing Tatum), and Burgess (played by Joseph Gordon Levitt). Helmet-cam videos made by the soldiers and edited like music videos include sentiments such as the dedication: "In loving memory of our fallen brothers" and end with: "we will not forget." Much like the attitude of the main characters in *Flags of Our Fathers*, some of the men who come home are uncomfortable with their 'hero' status; protagonist King, upon receiving a purple heart and bronze star with honour, looks pained and tells the crowd awkwardly: "I was

just over there trying to do my job like everyone else; trying to bring my men back safe." His speech reinforces yet again the brotherly relationships and feelings of paternal responsibility felt by military leaders in war. The men's heroic welcome wears off quickly, however, as they attempt to readjust to civilian life. The first element of their lives that begins to fall apart is their heterosexual relationships;[213] Steve Shriver, apparently having some form of PTSD and/or drinking-induced hallucination or flashback digs a trench on his fiancée's front lawn, and Tommy Burgess, who clearly has a drinking problem, drives drunk and breaks a shop window because his wife has left him until he can "get his shit together." The collective implication of these events is that these men's heterosexual relationships are falling apart because of their experiences at war.

While none of these men have children of their own, much like Staros in *The Thin Red Line*, King is haunted by the responsibility of protecting his men: "I'm done with killing and I ain't leading any more men into a slaughter." In his vision, war, rather than about destruction, is about protection; it's about protecting family, whether one's biological family 'back home,' or one's military family, "the guy to your left and the guy to your right" (and it's always a "guy") or both one's biological and military families. When King gets 'Stop Lossed,' forced into another tour of duty against his will, his mother and female friend (Shriver's ex-fiancée Michelle, played by Abby Cornish) support his decision to go AWOL, but his father and male best friend, Steve Shriver, repeatedly encourage him to return. Ultimately it is the death of his other friend and fellow soldier, Tommy Burgess, that cements his decision to return home and embark on his next mandated tour of duty, spurred by his masculine military sense of honour. Upon his return, he shakes his father's hand and calls him "Sir," implying, along with an earlier reference to 'this family' fighting wars, that his father is also a military man, and reinforcing the dominance of the

male, and specifically paternal authority and concerns undergirding his decision. In this way, *Stop Loss* is linked to and contains elements of the films of the middle/regressive cycle period, but begins to show the problems with and the cracks in the paternal legacy of war, one man passing down the familial duty to fight to the next generation and men's experiences of war preventing them from 'properly' undertaking biological fatherly duties by starting their own families.

This paternal connection to and legacy of war is more explicit in *Jarhead* where one of the first things the audience learns about *Jarhead*'s main character Anthony Swofford is that his father served in Vietnam; Swofford declares at the outset of the film that there's no place for him but the Marines because he was made (conceived) during a war, on his dad's "R&R" leave from Vietnam. This paternal message is questioned, even undermined, however, because when the drill sergeant questions Swofford's motives for joining the Marines Swofford reveals that he ended up in the Marines not because he was meant to be there because of familial duty or responsibility or divine intervention, but rather because he "got lost on the way to college." So, more significant in these later-period films than the paternal legacy flowing backwards (pressure on sons to be good military men because their fathers and grandfathers were), is the concern about the effect the men's military service will have on their own future sons.

As examined in more detail in chapter three, concern about the fidelity of women and therefore the failure of heterosexual relationships and nuclear families is planted and nurtured within the military community; the drill sergeant tells Swofford that his girlfriend is "getting fucked by Jody" and when later the soldiers share pictures of their girlfriends back home a fellow soldier repeats that "Jody is going to be all over her" (in reference to a picture of Swofford's girlfriend, Christina). Swofford is not the only soldier harangued about the fidelity of his female

mate; Cortez, another soldier in their unit, gets a letter from his wife with pictures of his newborn son and a fellow soldier tells him he'd "better check the mailman" exclaiming "it's a gringo baby!" (jokingly implying that Cortez, a Latino man, is not the father). These repeated references to women's lack of fidelity while men are at war throw doubts on the trustworthiness of women left at home and troubles the notion of legitimate fatherhood.

The problem with war here then, is that it interferes with the male soldiers' abilities to participate in 'normal' heteronuclear families. Like in *Stop-Loss*, there is a breakdown of heterosexual relationships because of soldiers' experience of, and participation in, war, but in this case, it's seemingly more because of their absence than because of any PTSD or other struggles (e.g. being stop lossed) upon return. By the time Swofford returns home, his worst fears have come true: Christina has moved on with someone else. In his closing voiceover narration Swofford airs his true concerns, that no matter what a man does with his hands after war, "love a woman, build a house, change his son's diaper," his hands remember the rifle; this statement expresses concern that his experiences as a soldier will hamper or at least colour whatever other life experiences he might have, but importantly, all of the life experiences he lists relate to a heteronuclear family life. Too, the fact that Swofford's imaginary future child is male is not simply an insignificant word choice. These closing sentiments reiterate the concerns that permeate the film as a whole and the others from the period: that war is bad not necessarily in itself or in its effects on the world, but in its interference with the male psyche, and therefore the functioning of a 'normal,' male-headed household, dooming future children to be touched/tainted by their fathers' martial pasts.

The theme and topic of fatherhood is no less prevalent or troubled in Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* where protagonist Sergeant First Class William James joins a bomb unit in Iraq,

irking his fellow soldiers with his risky behaviours. In a conversation with fellow soldier

Sergeant JT Sanborn about fatherhood, James reinforces typical gender roles contending that his

infant son is a "tough little bastard." Sanborn reveals that his "woman" wants to have babies but

that he's not ready; he doesn't understand how James can have a child and still do what he does,

putting himself at risk diffusing bombs in another country in a wartime situation. Sanborn's

concerns, in stark contrast to a character like Lt. Col. Hal Moore from middle period film *We*

Were Soldiers (who thinks that soldiering and fathering are inextricably linked, that being good

at one makes someone good at the other), suggest that Sanborn believes the role of soldier is

incompatible with that of father.

In a later scene from *The Hurt Locker* all of the men (chiefly James) are upset by a "body

bomb" in which an explosive device is rigged-up inside a familiar local young boy's body. In

light of their previous conversation, this incident is perhaps intended to reveal their paternal

instincts, particularly since James had been playful with and protective of the boy up to this

point. James goes rogue after the boy's death, putting his men in danger to try to find the boy's

killer. His anguish over indirectly (through his unsanctioned maverick off-base 'mission' to

avenge the young boy's death) causing injury to youngest fellow-soldier Specialist Owen

Eldridge (played by Brian Geraghty) further reinforces his feelings of paternal failure to protect

these two younger males. Finally, in a scene closely echoing their first conversation about

fatherhood, in the vehicle on their return to base from their last diffusion together an emotional

Sanborn tells James he wants a son, and wonders again how James takes the risk of being a

bomb-tech, doing such a high-risk job with a child at home. They both agree that they don't

know why he "is the way he is" and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight to this problem.

At home, much like the soldiers in other later-period films *Stop Loss* and *Jarhead*, James has difficulty readjusting to the 'normal,' mundane tasks of civilian life like grocery shopping, cleaning out the eaves, and preparing meals. He quickly becomes overwhelmed with the routine nature of life at home, and talks about protecting kids when trying to rationalize going back for another tour of duty to his ex-wife. While preparing a family meal with her, he explains, "Some guy drove his truck into the middle of an Iraqi market, and starts passing out free candies, all the kids coming around with their families and stuff [pause] he detonates; they're saying 59 are dead." James pauses and looks at his ex-wife as she continues to scrape carrots without responding or looking up before he concludes "You know they're looking for more bomb techs." She responds by completely ignoring his story and its implication(s), handing him the carrots, smiling, and asking "You wanna chop those up for me?" Her response suggests, in concert with James' earlier conversations with Sanborn about his relationship with her, that they've already had similar conversations and she's resigned to the fact that, regardless of what she might say, he's already made his decision to go back.

These implications are reinforced when, immediately after this conversation with his ex-wife, the film cuts to James having a cynical talk with his infant son about how while he (the son) loves everything, his toys, his mom and dad, and his pajamas, but that "as you get older, some of the things that you love might not seem so special anymore," and "by the time you get to my age maybe it's only one or two things" that you really love, and that "for me, I think it's only one," leaving the viewer to wonder whether the one thing he loves is his son, or his job. The following scene, however, leaves no doubt that the one thing he loves is his job, as it reveals that he has rotated back to active duty in the Middle East. The film ends with a scene much like one from its beginning depicting his first day on the job with Bravo Company, begging the question:

how many times has he done this? Enough times to diffuse 800-some-odd bombs (a number he quotes when asked by a superior). In the final analysis then, while the film may seem to be 'anti-war,' one of its most significant focuses is the ways in which war is fun and addictive but bad because it interferes with the ability of its (mostly white) American male soldiers' to engage in fatherhood and parenting.

While paternal themes are present in each cycle of this period, the degree to which the theme is present and the fraughtness of the paternal relations varies significantly from early to middle to later films in concert with the political tenor of the times each group of films was produced and released. In the earliest films, such as *The Thin Red Line* and *Three Kings*, fatherhood is not as strong a theme as in the middle period films, but what emphasis does exist is largely uncomplicated and positive; father-figures in positions of military leadership mostly bond with the soldiers under their command and view them as sons, even usurping and effacing the maternal role altogether. In the most conservative/traditional/WWII-nostalgic middle-period films, unsurprisingly, the emphasis on fatherhood is much more apparent than in either the period preceding it or following it. In these middle-period films the relationships between fathers and sons (whether biological or symbolic) are depicted as being not just the bedrock of the military chain of command, but of the American nation as a whole, and one is depicted as being deeply rooted in and connected to the other. Finally, in the later cycle of films from the period (2005-2010), while fatherly relations are again not at the forefront, they are significantly more fraught than in the middle period and even the early period, with multiple films' (such as *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker*) leaving the impression that war is bad not necessarily in and of itself, but because of its interference in the 'proper' functioning of the traditional American nuclear family. Taken together these films reinforce the idea that American families are or at

least should be headed by strong American men and in some cases, like that of *The Thin Red Line*, that male military leadership can even replace the maternal role, Staros' narration affirming: "You are my sons. You live inside me now. I'll carry you wherever I go" and George Clooney's character, Capt. Charles Bosche, declaring himself the unit's father and Sean Penn's character, 1st Sgt. Edward Welsh, the unit's mother, negating the need for women altogether. Coupled with the suggestion from the later cycle of films that participating in war often leaves men hampered in their ability to act as fathers – "A story: A man fires a rifle for many years, and he goes to war, and afterwards he comes home, and he sees that whatever else he might do with his life, build a house, love a woman, change his son's diaper, he will always remain a Jarhead, and all the Jarheads out there, killing and dying, they will always be me; we are still in the desert" (*Jarhead*) – these films paint a bleak picture of a future of American families headed by war-damaged men.

Chapter 8

Fighting the Inevitable: *The Thin Red Line*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *We Were Soldiers*, *The Patriot*, *Stop-Loss*, *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*

A final and related trend that warrants further investigation across these post Gulf-War combat films, perhaps the most significant and also the most troubling, is the repeated assertion or suggestion that war is somehow natural, inevitable or unending. The paternal legacy of war explored in the previous chapter feeds deeply into this ideological message, and like most of the other representational patterns explored herein, this trend carries across films from the early part of the period such as Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, to films of the later part of the period such as Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* and Kimberley Pierce's *Stop Loss*, seeming to largely skip over films of the middle, regressive cycle of the period with the exception of Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down*. There are significant differences, however, in the ways in which this message is transmitted across these films. In early-period film *The Thin Red Line*, the question is metaphysical; war is constructed as a naturally destructive force in man's environment (and it is constructed as a man's environment). In *The Hurt Locker*, war is represented as an ongoing destructive force at a more individual level, having different effects on different people: death for Staff Sergeant Matt Thompson played by Guy Pearce and Colonel John Cambridge played by Christian Camargo, a crisis of masculinity and military duty for Specialist Owen Eldridge played by Brian Geraghty (after the deaths of the aforementioned men), and opposed familial epiphanies for Sergeant JT Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner), who abandons his family in favour of returning to active duty combat. Finally, in *Stop-Loss*, war is constructed as being ongoing as a direct result of unfair government decisions. While these films may seem to critique the ongoing nature of the conflicts and the government

policies enabling them, they ultimately ideologically support the message that ongoing war is unavoidable or somehow 'natural,' and therefore destined to be unending. Perhaps simultaneously the most exciting and dangerous of the trends exhibited by this group of films, the suggestion that war is inevitable and/or never-ending is particularly poignant and contemporarily pertinent to a world that is, if not in a state of total war, in a state of constant war.

The Death Drive, Clashing Civilizations, Invented Enemies, and Total War Machines

Many theorists have made arguments that suggest that there is something 'natural' or 'innate' or inevitable about war-making. Freud discusses his controversial 'death drive' theory in *Civilization and its Discontents* as elsewhere. Within this text he clearly states: "In all that follows I take up the standpoint that the tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man [sic], and I come back now to the statement that it constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture" (102). So in Freud's formulation, the death drive is inborn and unavoidable, and therefore a threat to civilization because it works against the bonds between people. He argues that in order to keep this instinct (death drive) in check, "the aggressiveness is introjected, 'internalized'" (105), that the super-ego, in the form of a conscience or guilt, "exercises the same propensity to harsh aggressiveness against the ego that the ego would have liked to enjoy against others" (105). In other words, the ego takes the aggression that the self wants to direct outward, and directs it inward in the form of guilt or conscience. This guilt (separate from remorse, which happens after an action is taken), Freud argues, is the "dread of losing love," or "'social' anxiety" (107) created because if the individual "loses the love of others on whom he [sic] is independent, he [sic] will forfeit also their protection against many dangers" (107). In essence, Freud contends that there is a constant struggle between eros, or love for others, and the death drive, a constant struggle between

wanting to create social bonds with others for protection and love, and innate aggression and a tendency towards destruction of these social bonds. Finally Freud argues that "If civilization is an inevitable course of development from the group of the family to the group of humanity as a whole, then an intensification of the sense of guilt – resulting from the innate conflict of ambivalence, from the eternal struggle between the love and the death trends – will be inextricably bound up with it" (121-2). Perhaps this explains the intimate connection between familial narratives and military narratives so central to the combat genre (as explored in the previous chapter).

Samuel P. Huntington, too, argues in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*[214] that clashes between different groups of people are likely to continue into the post-Cold War future. While not as dogmatic and seemingly cynical as Freud's argument, Huntington, too suggests that there are certain long-standing, large and basic differences between certain groups of people around the world (history, culture, tradition, language, and religion), including but not limited to the now well-known binary of "The West and the Rest" (Huntington 183), that make continuing conflict likely if not inevitable. Instead, Huntington hopes and calls for "cross-civilizational coalitions based on reciprocal rationality, respect and restraint in order to manage the relations between nations" (6) and to avoid ongoing and future conflict. This hope and call has obviously largely gone unheeded as ongoing global conflicts attest.

Umberto Eco goes further by arguing in the titular essay from his collection *Inventing the Enemy*, that humans must always have someone to fight against or at least to position themselves against. This argument harkens back to the concept of the self-consolidating Other (and the racialized enemy Other and the internal enemy Other) explored in further depth in chapters four and five. Eco posits that "having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to

provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to

overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there's no enemy, we have to invent one"

(2). In so saying, he implies that there will never be an end to conflict because as soon as there is

no one with whom to fight, we will create a new conflict by inventing an enemy. He, like

Huntington and others, argues that this Other out of whom we make an enemy is necessarily

"*different*" in some way, and observes "customs that are not our own" (3). He returns toward the

pessimism of Freud, however, when he writes about how inherent this inclination is in society:

"it seems we cannot manage without an enemy. The figure of the enemy cannot be abolished

from the process of civilization" (17). He also makes an almost-Bakhtinian[215] argument about the

ways in which war can be beneficial to societies as a whole and their rulers (if not necessarily the

individuals of a society) and is therefore more likely to continue to happen than not when he

notes "Only war provides the basis for the harmonious development of human societies. Its

organized wastage provides a valve that regulates the effective running of society" (18) by

eliminating excess people and lessening the demand for resources. He further argues for war's

nation-galvanizing effects noting that war "is a driving force. War enables a community to

recognize itself as a 'nation'; a government cannot even establish its own sphere of legitimacy

without the contrasting presence of war" (18). Finally, in concluding, Eco refers to Sartre and the

(admittedly) pessimistic idea that this problem is universal and unavoidable because "we

recognize ourselves only in the presence of an Other" and it is "likely that we find this Other

intolerable because to some degree he [sic] is not us" (21) and we, therefore, create out of

him/her an enemy, and restart the cycle of war. In this formulation, war is inevitable not just at

the level of larger civilizations, but right down to the distinction between one individual and the

next, making war not just constantly possible, but necessary for the definition and maintenance of one's own self/Other boundaries.

Others, have, like Eco, traced the functionality of war as a regulatory and organizational strategy at the level of governments to a trending increase in militarization not just in media and entertainment,[216] but in all aspects of our lives. In a popular and relatively well-known text, *The Complex*, Nick Turse reveals the ways in which products made by Department of Defense contractors are in regular household use, from iPods to sneakers, to furniture and food. Taking it a step further, Roger Stahl, in *Militainment Inc., War, Media, and Popular Culture*, details the ways in which war is no longer presented simply as entertainment to be consumed, and instead reveals the ways in which the audience is now "recruited" as citizen soldiers to play and participate vicariously. Drawing from Judith Butler and Caren Kaplan, Stahl notes that in order to bring an end to war, we need to recognize its "subject-making potential" (Stahl 4). Stahl emphasizes too, in line with Eco and others, that this process of interpolating citizens as soldiers serves national interests in many ways (Stahl 4). While the book deals with many facets of culture including sports, reality television, games, and toys, not just film, Stahl devotes particular attention to documenting the relationship between Hollywood and this increasing confluence between the military and media/entertainment (8-9) harkening back to Jenkins' concept of convergence culture as explored in chapter two.

This pattern or theme of the 'innate' or 'inevitable' and/or encompassing 'nature' of war is not lost in the journalistic coverage of the most recent conflicts either. Several popular and widely read texts touch on the idea in different ways. The idea is most directly and strongly articulated in *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning* by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Chris Hedges,[217] award-winning *The Forever War* by Dexter Filkins, and *War* published by Sebastian

Junger.[218] What all of these authors, academic and non-academic alike are getting at and illustrating with painstakingly detailed and well-researched examples is that popular culture is deeply infused not just with military money (Department of Defense contracts),[219] but with military ideologies, messages, and sentiment, affecting non-military citizens/civilians and causing them to be primed by and for ongoing conflict at all times.

Deleuze and Guattari also argue, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that "the war machine is exterior to the State apparatus" and that "this exteriority is first attested to in mythology, epic, drama, and games" (351). So while the war machine is almost always co-opted by the state, it originates outside the state and is represented within culture ("mythology, epic, drama, and games"). This is certainly attested to in the combat films studied herein, which are part of popular cultural mythology as dramas if not epics. Deleuze and Guattari also argue that "war maintains the dispersal and segmentarity of groups" (357) and therefore creates nomads. Indeed they note "the warrior himself is caught in a process of accumulating exploits leading him to solitude" (357). These films (especially from the earlier and later parts of the period) certainly depict the creation of nomads and solitary men in the sense that these men returning from war now feel separate from the people around them, from the society, or the state to which they return after war. Writing in 1980, roughly a decade before the first Gulf War, Deleuze and Guatarri's sentiments are eerily applicable to present conflicts:

> Doubtless the present situation is highly discouraging. We have watched the war machine grow stronger and stronger, as in a science fiction story; we have seen it assign as its objective a peace still more terrifying than fascist death; we have seen it maintain or instigate the most terrible of local wars as parts of itself; we have seen it set its sights on a new type of enemy, no longer another State, or even another regime, but the 'unspecified enemy.' (422)

Perhaps it is this unspecified enemy that so readily lends itself to unending, constant war. Like Eco suggests, there must always be an enemy, so such an amorphous, stateless, boundless enemy as 'terrorism' is very convenient in that the enemy can be anyone, anywhere, at any time, and can shift as soon as it seems it's been defeated, such that there is never an end to the conflict. In this way, there is always (and always will be) an enemy Other against whom to define ourselves, and against whom we can band together.

Martin Barker in *Toxic Genre* traces the films that deal explicitly with these most recent conflicts and notes the ways in which this genre has been relatively unpopular. While a few films such as *The Hurt Locker* and *Generation Kill* have won awards and acclaim, many more have failed and sunk into obscurity.[220] And yet, at the completion of this project, films on the subject continue to be made, and even rocket to popularity: *Lone Survivor*, *Fury*, and *American Sniper*, (to be discussed at greater length in the concluding chapter). What is ironic about this 'inevitability' element to combat films is that the films that are most 'progressive' in other regards are the least progressive in this regard; while the early and later cycles of the period are less traditional/reactionary in their representation of women, people of colour, war's destructiveness, PTSD, and the challenges of reintegration into civilian life, stop-loss policies, etc., they are the ones that most portray war as endless and inevitable. While the middle-period films are the most conservative in other regards (focusing on traditional nuclear heteronormative family values, religiosity, American heroism and extreme patriotism), at least there is a definitive end to conflict in those films. In contrast, the earliest and later films of the period see war as a bad thing, but also depict it as something that we are doomed to repeat, or something that follows soldiers home in a way that renders them unable to filter their lives through anything other than the lens of war; these representations reinforce, if not the necessity of war, its inevitability,

dooming the world to a history full of war that repeats itself ad infinitum. The ways in which this theme is portrayed shifts form, however, from the earliest films in the period to the most recent ones.

Early Period: *The Thin Red Line*

In a sprawling style typical of Terrence Malick, *The Thin Red Line* depicts war's perpetuity as more a quality of nature than something to do with man or any specific society. There are repeated metaphysical and philosophical comments in voiceover accompanied by sweepingly beautiful shots of nature and sepia-tinted images presumably of the narrator's memories. The shifting time and place and the less-linear narrative of this particular war film (compared to most others of the genre) adds to its more contemplative nature and enhances the sense that this meditation on conflict and war could belong to any time and place; this quality stands in contrast to many other films of the genre whose audiences are constantly reminded of the 'reality' of the depictions and grounded in a specific time and place through the use of maps and the provision of dates and names of places.[221] *The Thin Red Line*'s unmoored approach only furthers the suggestion that war is timeless and that this depiction could be of almost any war, nearly any place in the world.

The film opens with just such a metaphorical bent: sounds of nature, including birds chirping accompany the title screen which fades to black as the music becomes more ominous and a predatory crocodile slithers toward and then slowly sinks under the surface of a body of water. The next shot switches back to the silent forest, with images of massive, heavily-rooted trees with sunlight filtering through their upper branches to the ground and a voiceover narrative in what sounds like a slightly accented white Southern vernacular, asking "What's this war in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself? … Is there an avenging power in Nature? Not

one power, but two?" This voiceover is followed shortly thereafter by images of shirtless and

grass-skirted black "natives" on a beach somewhere and beautiful, but somewhat mournful,

choral sounds. Eventually a tanned shirtless white man in dog-tags, Private Witt (presumably the

source of the voiceover), appears onscreen interacting with the others, canoeing, playing with

children, talking, and helping to build housing as the voiceover muses about life, death, and

immortality. It is seemingly this experience of immersing himself in "native" culture in this

natural setting[222] that allows this white American soldier to have these philosophical reflections

on life, death, subjectivity, and spirituality.

These opening metaphorical shots of the conflicts in nature that mirror the conflicts of

life/death in the human experience are repeated throughout the film (e.g. a shot of a baby bird

that can't fly floundering on the ground which pulls at the viewers heartstrings), and are used as

pathetic fallacy, nature mirroring human experiences of suffering and loss in the film. This tactic

is particularly used during death scenes. In one such scene, a soldier compares his fellow

wounded and dying soldiers to ripped up blades of grass, and later, when men die, there are

several shots of the sun shining through the trees/leaves as in the beginning scenes of the film;

again, such scenes reinforce the idea that human struggles are reflected in, or a part of nature,

that deaths in war are just a part of the larger natural cycle of life. Whether this force that propels

life and death is something divine or not, the narrator repeatedly makes statements that assert it

as a certainty, such as: "This great evil – where does it come from? How did it steal into the

world? What seed, what root did it grow from? Who's doing this, killing us? Robbing us of light

and life?" For him it is not a question of whether this malevolent force exists, and, if so, how to

stop it, but rather, where it comes from and why; the existence and ongoing nature of this

maliciousness are taken as a given, and this attitude is reinforced with the shots of "natural" predators (crocodiles) and prey (helpless baby birds).

While the film is certainly not pro-war, with characters expressing sentiments such as "We're just runnin' into a burning house where no one can be saved ... what difference do you think you can make, one man in all this madness ... There's no world out there where everything's going to be ok – there's just this one. Just this rock" (Welsh to Witt) and "War don't ennoble men. It turns them into dogs... poisons the soul" (Witt narrating) and "War is blood filth and noise that twists your insides" (narrator). The sentiment behind all of these anti-war statements, however, is that war, terrible as it may be, is inevitable; no one can make a difference, no one can be saved. This attitude is largely confirmed by Witt's death at the close of the film (foreshadowed by his musings on death and immortality in the opening scenes) wherein he is alone, surrounded and killed by Japanese soldiers in the forest. The finality of this scene, however, is tempered because (after the scenes wherein his fellow soldiers and superiors mourn him), scenes and sounds of Witt back in his tropical paradise from the opening of the film reappear; he's shown canoeing with native children as the tropical birds he was playing with at the beginning look on, and a palm frond floats gently in the water, supported by a military helmet, and finally, the "native" choral theme song from Witt's time AWOL builds as the film fades to black. This evocative ending intimates that Witt is now at peace, in a better place, and that his death was somehow a foregone conclusion, one he'd been coming to terms with since the beginning of the film, all a part of the natural cycle of life deep at the heart of the film's imagery and narrative, that perhaps this was the (life and death) Witt was meant for all along. Yet, because of the philosophical and atypical style of the film with its non-linear narrative and ensemble cast, viewers do not necessarily identify closely with Witt, and therefore do not

necessarily feel his death keenly. The rifle and helmet that mark his resting place could belong to anyone, and the rest of the soldiers in his unit do, inevitably, move on without him, underlining that war-time deaths are simply a part of nature and that the war itself carries on without the dead.

Middle-Period/Regressive Films: *Black Hawk Down*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *We Were Soldiers*, *The Patriot*

Interestingly the philosophical/existential approach to war exemplified in early-period film *The Thin Red Line* is faintly echoed by a middle-period film, *Black Hawk Down*, but *Black Hawk Down*'s approach is still much more traditional and conservative given its belonging to the middle cycle of this period of films. The film opens with a Plato quotation: "Only the dead have seen the end of war" which reinforces the inevitability of human conflict by implying the inverse, that all of living beings will always experience war. In the final minutes of the film, almost as soon as the military men upon whom the film focuses all return safely to their base, the film's soldiers are mostly ready and willing to return to battle, even those that are gravely wounded and therefore physically unable; Ruiz (played by Enrique Murciano), for example, tells his commanding officer firmly and repeatedly "Don't go back out there without me. I can still do my job. Don't go back out there without me." Similarly, protagonist Eversmann's (played by Josh Hartnett) final conversation with older and more experienced soldier Hoot (played by Eric Bana) towards the end of the film, and Eversmann's voiceover at the film's close about fighting and heroes both suggest that men will just keep fighting and that the civilian public just can't understand; in a previously examined conversation, Hoot tells Eversmann that when he goes home people ask him why he does what he does (continue to return to war), that they think he's some kind of "war junkie" and that no one understands that "it's about the men next to you" and

nothing else.[223] Before he goes back out, Hoot tells Eversmann almost cheerfully, "Hey, we started a new week; it's Monday," a statement that dreadfully reinforces that this war is just normal part of life, a new work day/week has started for him, and the days and weeks have and will continue to go on; for Hoot, war is just another day at the office.

While this attitude towards war links the film to the others in terms of its portrayal of war as inevitable and ongoing, its depiction of military fraternity and Americans as unquestionably brave and heroic keep it in line with the middle-regressive period of which it's a part. Even for a conflict that was relatively short (and certainly not the American military establishment's finest hour), the film firmly underlines American heroics and modesty – as Eversmann puts it in closing, no one asks to be a hero "it just sometimes turns out that way" – and suggests that despite failures and losses, the American military should keep doing what they do, acting as world police/saviour. In a somewhat anomalous existentialist scene towards the end of the film, Eversmann is revealed to be speaking to one of his dead comrades; he tells the dead man: "I was talking to Blackburn [a fellow soldier] the other day and he asked me why we're going home, 'what's changed' and I told him 'nothing' but I think everything's changed. I know I've changed." In this scene and in the other ways in which *Black Hawk Down* portrays war as ongoing, it is more closely aligned with the earlier and later cycles of films from this period than the middle cycle of the period with which it is more temporally aligned and in which it belongs in many other respects, as examined throughout the other chapters herein.

Unlike *Black Hawk Down*, the rest of the middle period films such as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *The Patriot*, while conservative and traditional in many other ways and attuned to the generational legacy of war, at least give the wars they depict a more definitive end, rather than emphasizing the "naturalness" or inevitability of war. This type

of ending might be attributable to the fact that each of these films is about WWII, a war which did, more definitively 'end' with the signing of an armistice, or peace treaty (though no such signing is pictured in any of the films). In *Saving Private Ryan*, while Ryan clearly carries his experiences of war with him throughout life, the frame narrative suggests that he went home from war and "earned" his recue the way Captain Miller (played by Tom Hanks) suggested he do, by creating a loving nuclear family. Similarly, at the end of *Pearl Harbor*, Rafe and Evelyn live happily ever after with their son, Danny, so named after his biological father, Evelyn's lover and Rafe's best friend and wingman; while Rafe teaching his son Danny to fly a plane might suggest potential military service in Danny's future (as suggested in chapter seven), the gesture, which takes place in a farm field, also speaks to Danny Jr.'s continuation of his two fathers' passions (flying planes) and a return to one's roots in a rural American community, not necessarily to the inevitability of war.

More definitively, in *We Were Soldiers*, the book-end shots of Colonel Moore's boots hitting the ground in Vietnam and being the last pair of boots off the field when the battle is over[224] strongly delineate and reinforce the beginning and the end of the conflict pictured (despite the fact that this was a relatively early battle in the Vietnam War and the war itself dragged on for a long number of years after the end of this particular battle). While the viewer does learn that Moore was sent back into battle, the final scenes depict his eventual return home to his loving wife and children; the war does end for him. In much the same vein, there is a clear victory both morally and in terms of the cessation of conflict in *The Patriot*, and only the suggestion of a fresh start for the Martin family and a new American nation, no hint of the future conflicts in which the country would participate. While these middle-period films still certainly glorify or at least celebrate military life (for men) and suggest the necessity of war with their

endings (so that American families are protected and can be renewed), they do at least depict a definitive end to the wars they represent. Perhaps it is because since 9/11 the conflicts in which the American military has participated haven't really clearly ended that the later period films (which were all made and released during/after these events) seem to depict war as an all-encompassing, never-ending force.

Later Period Cycle: *Stop Loss*, *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*

While the later period films are, at the surface, seemingly the most antiwar in their ideological messages, the idea that war is somehow inevitable or something that we are doomed to be trapped in forever or to repeat endlessly permeates each of these most recent films to the core, particularly *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker*, where the final words and images drive home the idea that war and American warriors (soldiers) are on a constant loop, forever reliving, if not literally repeating, their tours of duty.[225]

In perhaps the most obvious and literal example of soldiers repeating their tours of duty, Kimberly Pierce's film *Stop Loss* follows the return of three friends (Brandon King, Steve Shriver, and Tommy Burgess) from Iraq, and deals with an eponymous and controversial piece of legislation that can force experienced soldiers to redeploy against their wishes if not enough experienced soldiers and new recruits have enlisted of their own accord. The fallacy of this policy is revealed when Shriver (Channing Tatum), a supposedly experienced and reliable soldier who might be targeted by the policy, steals the microphone at an awards ceremony held in their honour upon their return and declares "We're over there killing them in Iraq so we don't have to kill 'em in Texas," revealing confused, racist sentiments rather than the nuanced understanding of the war and its politics that might be expected of a veteran soldier who has

returned with first-hand knowledge and experience of the conflict. Shriver, however, is not the one who needs to be stop-lossed, or involuntarily called back; of course, he reenlists on his own.

Tommy Burgess (Joseph Gordon Levitt), too, before committing suicide, expresses an interest in going back to "kill that Hajji bastard who got preacher" (one of their fallen fellow soldiers). Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe), on the other hand, the only one of the three friends to return home seemingly without complication,[226] is stop-lossed, and contemplates fleeing the country to avoid re-deployment. Potential for underlying racism on his part too is suggested when he is presented with the options for his relocation and declares that Mexico is out of the question: "I ain't draggin' my ass to Mexico" but considers Canada as a more viable option. When consulting his family about what to do, it becomes clear that his father thinks he should return while his mother doesn't want him to.[227] King eventually decides to return home and face redeployment, at least partially out of guilt about Tommy's suicide; Shriver points out that, as their squad leader and friend, King was supposed to be there to help Tommy out, but was instead AWOL (Away Without Leave). As explored in the previous chapter, when he returns home for Tommy's funeral, King gets a handshake from his father, and King, in return, greets his father as "Sir," reinforcing a previously implied familial military legacy (earlier reference is made to "this family fighting wars" in the film). While the *Stop Loss*'s aim is undoubtedly to draw attention to and critique the stop-loss policy, Shriver's voluntary re-enlistment and constant cajoling of King to quit fighting being stop-lossed, and both Shriver's and Burgess' willingness to re-enlist work to suggest that even if the stop-loss policy were no longer an issue, there would be plenty of willing (if not necessarily the best and most able) soldiers re-enlisting for a continued conflict. So while the film's aim may be to critique the stop-loss policy, it still subtly suggests that even without the policy war would find a way to perpetuate itself.

Sam Mendes' *Jarhead*, while perhaps not quite as explicit as *Stop Loss* in its preoccupation with the ongoing nature of war, is still quite focused on the indelible effect that war has on its participants. Too, while the book and film are about Swofford's experiences during the first Gulf War, both the book at the film rely heavily on references to the Vietnam War and, the film, released during the War on Terror, can easily be read as an allegory for the latter conflict (War on Terror) to the point that when Kruger shouts joyfully at the close of the conflict, "We never have to come back to this shithole ever again!", the irony is quite clear to contemporary viewers. These parallels between conflicts continue when, towards the end of the film, upon the men's return home, a grizzled, haggard old Vietnam veteran staggers onto the bus to welcome them home shouting, "Semper Fi Marines!" and "You did it. You did it clean. You made us proud." But, when unmatched, the interloper's enthusiasm and energy quickly fade, and he has to sit down (seemingly to avoid falling down); the men all eye him warily. This experience prompts Swofford's subsequent voiceover: "Every war is different. Every war is the same." The film's ending montage (Fowler's consorting with – presumably – a prostitute in a bar, Swofford's confirmation of his suspicion that his girlfriend has moved on without him, and Troy's suicide), too, suggests that these returning Marines have a great deal in common with the veterans who came home from Vietnam and perhaps those returning from this most recent and ongoing conflict. This blending of past (Vietnam) and filmic present (first Gulf War) as an allegory for the conflict contemporaneous with the film's release (the War on Terror) does not bode well for the future, implying as it does that conflict is cyclical and repetitive in nature and representations of it are interchangeable.

In addition, the more nature-focused existential elements of a film like *The Thin Red Line* that leave the impression that war is somehow "natural" are also faintly echoed by scenes of a

similar tenor in *Jarhead*. In one such scene, oil seems to literally rain from the sky (from oil-well fires in Kuwait) and Swofford observes that "The earth is bleeding." His commanding officer's (Sykes played by Jaime Foxx) response is "Yeah, well you'd better get used to it, because we gon' be living in it," underscoring the inevitability and inescapability of the situation. When Swofford encounters an oil-slicked horse, too, this natural or existential theme is buttressed with the additional suggestion that not even animals and nature are safe from the destruction of man's wars. These scenes, like the aforementioned nature scenes from *The Thin Red Line*, can even be read as pathetic fallacy, the earth's response to or endurance through the conflicts of man (and again, they are portrayed as exclusively the conflicts of man). In this sequence Swofford uselessly soothes the horse which he describes as "covered in this fucking oil," impotently petting it and telling it "You're going to be okay" (even though it might not be, since, as one of his fellow soldiers points out, the oil falling from the sky is poison: "shut your trap that shit's poison"). Even so, despite the film's denunciation of the Gulf War and its associated waste and damage,[228] the oil fires themselves, shot in semi-darkness as they are for most of the scenes, are almost beautiful, the way they illuminate the night sky having an almost-otherworldly quality that is quite aesthetically pleasing. As Sykes puts it in a serious conversation with Swofford about the privileges of being in the Marines: "who else gets to see shit like this?" The film therefore reinforces the idea that while, yes, war is terrible and violent and wasteful and environmentally unfriendly, look how sublimely beautiful it is!

Jarhead the film, like the eponymous memoir upon which it is based, is open about how war films, no matter how "anti-war" they are, serve as borderline pornographic material to the young soldiers watching. To illustrate, the film shows Swofford and his fellow Marines whooping and cheering and shouting come-ons while watching a helicopter napalming a

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Vietnamese village to the sounds "Ride of the Valkyries" in *Apocalypse Now* before they ship

out to Iraq.[229] Swofford yells "shoot that motherfucker" and the rest shout and pump their fists as

the American aircraft's aggression causes chaos on the ground. References to Vietnam are not

always greeted with such enthusiasm from the soldiers, however; once deployed, Swofford

becomes irritated with Vietnam-era music, complaining: "That's Vietnam music, man. Can't we

even get our own fuckin' music?" when "Break on Through (The Other Side)" by the Doors is

played over loudspeakers from a passing helicopter. Whether greeted with enthusiasm or

hostility, repeated references to other conflicts, especially notoriously long, seemingly never-

ending conflicts like Vietnam, only serve to reinforce the similarity of all American-involved

conflicts and their repetitive nature.

Jarhead is also cognizant of the never-ending nature of conflict in other popular mediums

such as videogames; Troy (played by Peter Sarsgaard) makes a reference to the videogame

metroid, rhetorically asking: "What happens when you pass the 9th level? You just start all over

again." Given how self aware and intertextual the memoir/film is, it is safe to assume that the

repeated references to other wars, and other war films within the filmic version of *Jarhead* are

deliberate.[230] For example, there is a very similar scene to *Platoon* in *Jarhead*, where the

Marines get drunk and jam (dance and lip synch) to an O.P.P. song in a red-lit tent, much like the

scene in *Platoon* where Dafoe's crew smoke dope and jam to Smokey Robinson together. This

scene also recalls the opening scene from *Three Kings* wherein the soldiers are partying in their

tent to very similar music (another O.P.P. song "Can't Do Nuttin' For Ya Man"). These

similarities reinforce the connections between Vietnam, the first Gulf War, and the War on

Terror (concurrent with the release of *Jarhead*). Not only are the party scenes in these films very

similar, the punishments are also very similar; in both *Platoon* and *Jarhead*, the respective

protagonists are punished for violating military protocol by having to clean out the latrines. While it could be argued that these scenes simply illustrate that not much has changed in the military, the memoir's explicitness about the influence of other conflicts upon the ways in which earlier war films influenced the soldiers of this war suggests that this film, too, is aware of its own potential influence and yet is still reiterating the same patterns. One of the film's final scenes is a case in point: the shirtless men wield their phallic weapons shooting gleefully into the air around their bonfire in an orgiastic send-off to the war once they find out they will be going home.

Not everyone is so ebullient about going home, however; Troy's implied suicide at the end of the film is linked to his involuntary discharge. The unbreakable link between man and military that persists throughout the film is established right at its outset with protagonist Swofford telling viewers in the film's opening voiceover that there's no place for him but the Marines because he was made (conceived) during a war – his dad's R&R[231] from Vietnam. Too, the soldiers are trained to think of themselves as inextricably linked to their weapons by memorizing the rifleman's creed: "This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. Without my rifle, I am nothing. Without me, my rifle is nothing." Learning the rifleman's creed teaches them that there is no alternative, no person without weapon. This creed recalls Foucault's discussions of docility and Jeffords' concept of the hard body as inextricably linked with weapons. Many, like Troy, take this idea very seriously. Troy is one of the soldiers most able to keep calm during the war, telling Fowler to "stay sharp" when Fowler is caught collecting, as he calls them "dead rag-heads" or "crispy critters" (the burned dead bodies of Arab men) in the desert during the oil fires, and forcing Swofford to apologize to Fergus after Swofford's mini-meltdown. But, ironically, Troy is the one who loses his cool when his military skills are made

redundant during the war and when the war is over and he is ejected from the military. So while Troy keeps his head during the early part of the war and admonishes others for not doing the same, he is the one to kill himself (implied) when they return from the war, presumably because he can't handle having been discharged and denied re-enlistment. This inability to carry on living without one's military affiliation strongly reinforces the significance of this military identity to men's senses of self.

Swofford finds out about Troy's ejection from the service when pulled aside by their commanding officer, Sykes: "Your boy Troy got turned down for re-enlistment." Swofford is shocked because he knows that for Troy, "That's all he wants is to be in the Suck."[232] But Troy's dedication to military life doesn't matter because as Sykes tells Swofford, "the Suck doesn't want him … so when we get back home, he's out … and the reason I'm telling you is so that you can keep him from fucking up. You think you can handle that?" Sykes knows that Troy will not take the news of his discharge well, and can empathize with Troy not wanting a life outside the Marines; Sykes, too, is a 'lifer,' taking his commitment to the military very seriously and telling Swofford that while he could be a working partner in his brother's drywall business, doing comparatively cushy air-conditioned jobs, "making 100 K a year," "sleeping with my wife every night" and "taking my kids to school every morning," he chooses to stay in the military. Why? Because, he tells Swofford: "I love this job. I thank God for every day He gives me in the corp. Hoorah." The fact that this scene features prominently in the film's trailer evidences its importance to the film as a whole and underscores the film's attitude towards the Marines and the military generally: Hoorah.

As predicted, Troy has a very difficult time adjusting to the news that he will be ejected from the military. In a scene examined in chapter six (as an example of fairly extreme

insubordination of the military chain of command and of the growing technological inertness of ground soldiers/snipers as compared to aerial assault technology), after being denied permission to take a shot on their only solo mission as a sniper team, Swofford must physically restrain a hysterically sobbing Troy who lunges at the militarily superior officer who is denying them the shot. Knowing that this outburst is related to his friend's imminent discharge, Swofford calms Troy down and, after the altercation, asks "When they gonna kick you out?" and if he has "any ideas" about what he's going to do after the military. Troy responds that he's out "two weeks after we get back," noting "I already have my separation papers." As far as what he's going to do, he says, jokingly, "sell some crack, sling some dope?" revealing that he cannot seriously consider a life outside the military, and feels he has very few viable options for such a non-military life. As his friends and superiors predict, Troy cannot handle being discharged; it is his funeral for which the Marines reunite at the end of the film, and which prompts Swofford's final existential musings at the film's close.

Indeed, Swofford's final account suggests that the men returning home from this conflict will always carry the baggage of their experiences at war with them, and that these experiences will colour the rest of their lives. After attending Troy's funeral, a solitary Swofford sits at home near a television showing images of military action and in closing voiceover declares solemnly: "A story: A man fires a rifle for many years. And he goes to war. And afterwards he comes home. And he sees that whatever else he might do with his life, build a house, love a woman, change his son's diaper; he will always remain a Jarhead. And all the Jarheads, killing and dying, they will always be me. We are still in the desert" as he looks out the window of his house and the view of suburban America changes to one of far-off Marines in a hazy desert. These words are both literal in that the American military was in Iraq and Afghanistan at the time of the film's

release (perhaps what the images on the television Swofford watches allude to), and metaphorical in the sense that these men carry their experiences in the military with them for the rest of their lives. In both ways, the military is unquestionably a continual presence in American life and particularly the lives of those American military men who have had direct experience with it.

Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* contains many echoes of *Jarhead*'s sentiments about war, particularly in its effects on American soldiers, and yet still, like *Jarhead*, and perhaps to an even greater degree, *The Hurt Locker* manages to send the message that war is inevitable, always cycling on repeat. The film opens with a quotation from Chris Hedges' book *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning*: "War is a drug," implying that the film will address the ways in which war is addictive for those who participate in it. The scene in which protagonist Sergeant First Class William James (played by Jeremy Renner) is introduced is entitled "Welcome to Bravo Company." Like in many Vietnam war films, soldiers count down the number of days left in their rotation and shortly after James joins it, a title appears reading: "Days Left in Bravo Company's Rotation: 38" But for the protagonist, the audience later discovers, the return home is more like impending doom than a return back to rotation would be. Within the first fifteen minutes of the film, and within ten minutes of making his onscreen debut, James reveals that he was also in Afghanistan, and viewers later find out that he is a former Ranger who has been in the service long enough to have diffused 800-plus bombs, introducing the idea that he is no stranger to conflict.

Upon his return home, at the end of Bravo Company's rotation, it becomes clear that James cannot handle the mundane nature of every day activities such as grocery shopping and house-work (cooking and cleaning). In a significant scene explored in more depth in the previous

chapter, James has a depressingly cynical conversation with his infant son, declaring that as we get older, the number of things we really love gets smaller and smaller, and that for him, he thinks it's only one thing that he really loves. When, in the next scene (which echoes James' first scene in the film) entitled "Welcome to Delta Company," he is revealed to have reenlisted and 'rotated back' into active duty, it is clear that the one thing James "really loves" is not his son, but his job as a bomb-tech in the military. The title over this scene reads: "Days left in Bravo Company's Rotation: 365," begging the question of how many times James has re-enlisted (obviously enough to diffuse over 800 bombs), and how many more times he will re-enlist. In this final scene, which is a significant echo of *Jarhead*'s final scene (in which American military men also walk off into a hazy desert), James, wearing "the suit" (armored for diffusing bombs), confidently strides alone down an empty road into the heat-hazed indefinite future, leaving the audience with the impression that not only is James a willing participant or an 'addict,' but, more importantly, with the notion that the war, like the road he's walking, will just go on, and there is no end in sight. The most noteworthy and seemingly unquestioned element of this formulation is that there will always be a war for such men to participate in, to feed this addiction.

The Hurt Locker also suggests that ongoing war is inevitable is in the fact that the American military's way of comporting itself in handling the conflict is only breeding more hostility which will lead to further violence in the future. In an early scene, one of the soldiers declares of a taxi driver who has a gun put to his head and is forcibly removed from his vehicle and pushed to the ground, "Well if he wasn't an insurgent [before] he sure the hell is now," suggesting that the war itself and the way it is being conducted is only leading to more animosity and the perpetuation and proliferation of conflict. This echoes scenes of American military misbehaviour from other films of the period such as Trombley shooting locals' camels (and

children!) in *Generation Kill*, and Fowler verbally harassing women and desecrating the bodies of Arab men in *Jarhead*, and a similar traffic-stop scene in *Generation Kill*, implying that this kind of conduct was present in previous wars, and persists into present conflicts, breeding more ill will and creating yet more conflict.

A final, and perhaps most telling argument that war films, no matter their aim, only perpetuate war and conflict appears in the book version of Swofford's memoir when he asserts: "There is talk that many Vietnam films are antiwar, that the message is war is inhumane and look what happens when you train young American men to fight and kill, they turn their fighting and killing everywhere, ... But actually," Swofford argues, "Vietnam war films are all pro-war, no matter what the supposed message" (6). The scenes from the film version of *Jarhead* that show the Marines in Swofford's unit cheering at Vietnam films reinforce this argument. Swofford thinks that civilian viewers, "Mr. and Mrs. Johnson in Omaha or San Francisco or Manhattan will watch the film and decide once and for all that war is inhumane and terrible, and they will tell their friends at church and their families this, but" (6), Swofford attests from personal experience, military men "watch the same films and are excited by them, because the magic brutality of the films celebrates the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills. … Filmic images of death and carnage are [therefore] pornography for the military man; with film you are stroking his cock, tickling his balls with the pink feather of history, getting him ready for his real First Fuck" (Swofford 6-7). And so, Swofford contends, "It doesn't matter how many Mr. and Mrs. Johnsons are antiwar – the actual killers who know how to use the weapons are not" (Swofford 7).

I take this argument a step further than Swofford to argue that war films are not just pornographic for the military man or future military man, that not all Mr. and Mrs. Johnsons

watch war films and decide that war is bad, and that even those that do watch the films and decide on a cognitive level that war is bad can be, and often are, still excited by these films at the visceral level that Swofford describes. The physicality alone if not the violence of these films excites the body; the sounds and the spectacle, the aesthetic and kinesthetic pleasure of the explosions and fires so beautifully shot in these films is enough to undercut whatever antiwar messages they may contain. The very existence of this film and others like it is the signal of wars to come, the creation of these films preparation for some future time in which the next generation of military men (and perhaps women) will become aroused (sensorially if not sexually) watching the oil fires in Kuwait from *Jarhead* or the aerial bombardment of an air-field in *Generation Kill*, just like the men in Swofford's unit get their thrills watching *Apocalypse Now* and *Deer Hunter*.

But the more crucial and disturbing effect of these films, however, is the normalization of images and ideas of war in civilian life. When Sykes asks Swofford of the oil-well fires: "Who else gets to see this shit?" The answer now includes everyone who has seen *Jarhead*. So while, intellectually viewers may understand and think and feel that war is bad and it's a terrible thing that the conflicts stretch on and people keep going back, the simultaneous effect is seeing how exciting and beautiful war can be; scenes of sculpted glistening semi-nude military bodies at play with and without weapons accompanied by the sounds of popular, high-energy music, and artfully shot images of fires and explosions reflected in bullet-hole-ridden glass windows concurrent with the sounds of a beautiful piano score aggressively counter the intellectual message with a contradictorily pleasing aesthetic and bodily message. Even if (and it is an 'if') the mental message is that war is ugly and destroys men's souls, the visual and aural message is that war is beautiful, seductive, cool and fun, and that it stretches on invariably into the distant future.

Chapter 9

Consequences/Conclusions -- Back to *Birth of a Nation* with a new Cycle of Combat films: *Act of Valor*, *Lone Survivor*, *Fury*, and *American Sniper*

As the introduction indicates, Hollywood has been preoccupied with war from the very beginning, and, in many ways, the narrative and representational patterns established in D.W. Griffith's epically enduring 1915 film *Birth of A Nation* persist today, drawing a through-line across the genre and across the century; while it has ebbed and flowed, shifting in cycles, the genre still possesses many of the same gendered, sexualized, and racialized ideologies, and the seemingly indelible link between war, families, and nation-building established in the early blockbuster has remained at the heart or the genre. Like many of the combat films studied herein which variously stake claim to historical veracity by basing themselves upon actual events, including survivor testimony, journalistic coverage, and/or memoirs, *Birth of a Nation* too purports (via title card) to be a historical representation of the Civil War and Reconstruction era. Where women were left at home or victimized to serve largely as symbols of virtue and/or the righteousness of the war cause in the 1915 film (white woman Flora throws herself off a cliff rather than be violated by the lust-crazed black character, Gus, in *Birth of a Nation*), they are still largely depicted in such a manner (as symbolic stand-ins for larger issues), or absent from contemporary iterations of the combat genre altogether. Where enemy Others were portrayed through stereotypical tropes (Black Bucks, Tragic Mulattoes, and Mammy Figures,[233] some played by actors in blackface) and referred to by offensive slang (e.g. "black trash") in the genre's earliest popular film, more recent depictions haven't improved much; Orientalism largely still reigns supreme as Arab Others are often portrayed as sneaky, duplicitous, and terms like "Dune Coon" "Sand Nigger" "Rag-head" and "Hajji" predominate, even among "less-racist" characters in the period studied herein. In both the oldest and the most recent iterations of the

genre, American military men are depicted as needing to be strong, both physically and mentally, so that they can protect their brothers-in-arms, and this military bond is exceptional enough to allow the type of physical closeness and display of emotions otherwise restricted to women; for example, the pieta weeping scene from *Birth of a Nation* in which one Stoneman brother and one Cameron brother die arm-in-arm on the battle-field is echoed by innumerable scenes from contemporary combat films where men cradle dying comrades and weep over lost brothers, such as the previously mentioned scene from *Pearl Harbor* where Rafe and Danny tenderly touch faces in Danny's dying moments.

Most significant and enduring is the genre's focus on war and nation building, the American family and the paternal legacy of war; Civil War melodrama *Birth of a Nation* literalizes this connection with the marriage of a young couple uniting the American North and South at film's end, the war appearing a necessary evil to heal the country's fractures. While literal marriage may no longer be necessary in contemporary combat films – in fact, many of the later period films' protagonists are young and unmarried (*Jarhead*'s Swofford, *Stop Loss*' King) or divorced (*The Hurt Locker*'s James) – the American military man is still the head of household, most often a father (or soon to become one), and the paternal legacy of war is just as significant in today's combat films as in that first example from the early part of the last century. More importantly, however, where war was portrayed as something with a concrete end in the 1915 film (and in many of the films from the middle/nostalgic period of films from the late 1990s to mid-2000s), it is increasingly portrayed as a more "natural" and never-ending force in the most recent contemporary depictions. While *Birth of a Nation* ends happily ever after with a young couple in love and an America on the mend, films like *Jarhead*, *The Hurt Locker*, and the miniseries *Generation Kill* end with upset and unsettled young male soldiers literally walking off

into a seemingly endless desert, suggesting that they are destined to repeat or be mired in constant conflict, forever.

A New Cycle Begins:

During the writing of this dissertation, several more popular Hollywood combat films have been released including *Act of Valor* (2012), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *Fury* (2014), and *American Sniper* (2014). While not all of these films would have been included in the sample,[234] the continuing prevalence of the genre itself is a testament to the importance of the work in this dissertation and a reinforcement of the concluding argument that this genre functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more these films portray war as something natural and inevitable and necessary for the building/strengthening of a nation, the more war will continue to seem that way in the eyes of future soldiers, and of the viewing public, and the more it will continue to happen and be portrayed, and so on. While these recent films have not been included in the in-depth analysis within the preceding chapters, they remain part of the genre and fit many of the patterns explored therein. Their almost-jingoistic patriotism and focus on brotherhood, fatherhood and indefatigable American masculinity situate them squarely in-line with the foregoing analysis and perhaps even signal a new regressive cycle in the genre, more akin to the middle-period films studied herein than the later period films from the mid-late 2000s.

Act of Valor, for example, released in 2012 and starring actual Marines, is very active in promoting the rhetoric of fatherhood as the building-block of the nation and reinforcing masculine patriarchy's role in transferring the legacy of war from one generation to the next. The film both opens and closes with a focus on fatherhood, the opening voiceover also reinforcing masculine aggression, honour, bravery, and the importance of home and family: "Before my father died he said that the worst thing about growing old is that other men stopped seeing you as

dangerous … That being dangerous was sacred, a badge of honour. You live your life by a code, an ethos, every man does. It's your shoreline; it's what guides you home. And trust me, you're always trying to get home." This voiceover links this film to the tradition of combat films that come before it by accompanying the image of a letter (presumably from father to son) being hand-written with paper and pen as in many WWII-era or WWII-nostalgia films. Too, the film (like many of the genre and period studied herein), bolsters its authority with claims to verisimilitude, the opening title reading: "This film is based on real acts of valor." Additionally, the film's focus on fatherhood and the importance of the American nuclear family in passing down this honourable military tradition persists strongly throughout the film, the narrator expounding on the virtues of the letter-recipient's father's and great-grandfather's bravery and honour in battle, telling him: "That's the blood that courses through your veins," and thereby reinforcing the suggestion that this letter-recipient, too, will be a manly warrior. The boy's father carries around his grandfather's military funeral flag and tells his military mates: "My pop gave it to me and now I'm going to give it to my boy."

The focus on the familial fraternity between soldiers from middle-period, WWII-nostalgia films is also present in *Act of Valor*, the narrator telling the letter recipient, his brother-in-arms' son, "Your father was my boss and I was his chief. What we knew about each other strengthened our bond as operators. There was a brotherhood between us and we depended on each other more than a family." Here this military bond, while akin to a familial bond, is more important than family; the primacy of this military bond is reinforced in the scenes before the men ship out when the protagonist gives an explanatory speech to the viewers and his military unit: "That last night at home you think about how you could've been a better dad, a better husband, that bedtime story you should've read or that anniversary you forgot; you don't expect

your family to understand what you're doing, you just hope they can accept it, and when you get home, you hope you can pick up right where you left off," giving the men an imperative to "get right" with their families before they ship out so they can focus on their mission while they're on it. So while families are important here, they are what the men are fighting to get back to (as in the middle-period films), but families' acceptance of the men's military lives and commitments is not essential – the mission is more important.

Much like in WWII-nostalgic films from the middle cycle of the period, like *We Were Soldiers*, pregnant wives are left home alone, hoping (often in vain) that their husbands will be home for the birth of their babies in *Act of Valor*. Too, as in other combat films across the genre, including *The Hurt Locker* and *The Pacific*, enemy soldiers are demonized by being depicted as child-killers; in *Act of Valor* (much like the acts described by James in *The Hurt Locker* as an excuse for re-enlistment), the enemy Other uses an ice-cream truck to deliberately lure in and blow-up children. Additionally, like in many of the combat films analyzed herein (from each cycle of the period), African combatants are still referred to as "skinnys." As in the later cycle of combat films, the military assignments in *Act Of Valor* suggest that terrorism and conflict have no borders and are everywhere all the time – South/Central America, Ukraine, Africa – and must be fought with any means and as much technology as necessary: airplanes, helicopters, boats, trucks, submarines, displaying the full arsenal of military-assisted Hollywood spectacle and special-effects. The film's main villain, too, is symbolic of many of America's past and contemporaneous conflicts – he used to be Soviet and now he's Muslim – the villainous part of his character shifting from a nation-based characteristic to a religious/ethnically-based characteristic congruent with shifts in America's war foci. He's also constructed as evil by association with the 'bad guys' in America's 'war on drugs' – he uses non-white drug cartels to

achieve his terrorist aims. This sort of multi-ethnic, non-bordered conflict brings the film in line with military ventures contemporaneous with the film's release but also reinforces the ideological message that conflict/danger is everywhere, all the time, mostly in the guise of people of colour (though sometimes those people are led by a white person – perhaps a nod to 'home grown' domestic terrorist threats and/or the Cold War), and that Americans must continue to fight these terrorists with all of the weapons in their arsenal to protect women and children at home and abroad.

In the end, of course, in line with this dissertation's broader argument, the film's focus returns to the importance of brave and honourable military masculinity with the narrator (the dead father's best friend) telling his friend's son at the funeral: "Your father was a good man. … Remember you have warriors' blood in your veins. The code that made your father who he was is the same code that'll make you a man he would admire, respect." He presents the son with his great grandfather's military funeral flag (which the father carried with him on every mission). After each of the dead man's team members completes the military funeral ritual of smashing a gold pin into the man's casket, the narrator gives his dead friend's son a Tecumseh poem about dying like a hero, further reinforcing that this family is full of heroes destined to die a noble military-service related death, from great-grandfather to great-grandson. The past and future legacy of conflict is solidified in the film's end titles which read: "This film is dedicated to the following warriors of Naval Special Warfare who have made the ultimate sacrifice since 9/11" and on the next screen "and to all of the warriors heading downrange in the future" and finally: "In Valor there is hope." The only hope that this film offers, however, is that when conflict continues in the future (and, based on the end titles, there is no question that it will), there will be brave men like Brock's son willing to continue the legacy of war handed down to them by

several generations of martial patrilineage. The film's link to 'reality' in its association with so many actual members of the military only serves to reinforce the legitimacy or cultural authority of its message, ending as it does with "Special Thanks to: All members of the United States Military and Their Families" and "the Department of the Navy and the men and women of the Naval Special Warfare Command for their support with the production of Act of Valor."

This legitimacy or cultural authority is one claimed or aimed at by many of the films of the period studied herein including *Lone Survivor*, a film based on the memoir and true-life experiences of Marcus Luttrell. Much like *Jarhead*, based on the memoirs of Anthony Swofford, *Lone Survivor*'s ideological messages about war carry all the more weight because of their grounding in 'reality' and their ties to survivor testimony. The film follows Luttrell (Mark Wahlberg), Michael Murphy (Taylor Kitsch), Danny Dietz (Emile Hirsch), and Matt "Axe" Axelson (Ben Foster), a Navy Seal team tasked with a reconnaissance mission to track the whereabouts of deadly Taliban leader Ahmad Shah (Yousuf Azami). While on their mission in a mountainous region of Afghanistan the men are cut-off from communications with their base (much like the communications problems from the later period cycle of films detailed in chapter six) and encounter a small group of Afghan goat-herders/shepherds. They agree that their mission will be compromised if they release these men (with whom they also cannot communicate because of the language barrier), but no one is willing to kill them, so they decide to release the men and abort their mission. While aborting their mission, however, they come under attack by Taliban forces and, despite American-rescue efforts, all (including some of the would-be rescuers) but Luttrell are eventually killed. This scenario reinforces ideological status quos by establishing the American military men as morally righteous, unwilling to kill the Afghan men because they cannot be sure that these men are terrorists, and the Afghan men (and

boys) as duplicitous terrorists who, despite being shown mercy by the American military, immediately alert the Taliban forces to the Americans' location, causing a great deal of American casualties. The titular lone survivor, Luttrell, manages to make his way to a nearby village where the Mohammad Gulab (played in the film by Ali Suliman) hides him and the villagers help him by sending a runner to the nearest American base to alert them to Luttrell's whereabouts, and by fighting the Taliban who come to try to take Luttrell prisoner. After more fighting, Luttrell is eventually retrieved by American forces; the film's final montage reveals that the real Luttrell remained friends with the villagers who saved him (particularly Gulab).

As with the other films examined in brief in this conclusion, *Lone Survivor* fits in with many of the generic patterns identified within this dissertation, and suggests a new conservative cycle more akin to the middle-period films than any other. Like many combat films generally, and particularly those in the period of the foregoing analysis, there are basically no women in *Lone Survivor*. A few shots from the opening of the film serve to establish the men's heterosexual relationships (and impending marriages) with women back home, and there are women in the village in which Luttrell takes refuge, but otherwise the film is totally devoid of women. Too, the films enemy Others are portrayed according to fairly strict binary: the Taliban fighters and sympathizers are portrayed as sneaky, ruthless, and brutal, and the Pashtun villagers who help save Luttrell are archetypical noble savages. The Afghan shepherds that the Americans release, for example, an elderly man and two teenaged boys (their 'non-combatant' ages part of the reason that the Americans are reluctant to kill them and instead let them go), are portrayed as duplicitous and morally bankrupt when they immediately sic the Taliban forces on the Americans who have just granted them clemency. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Gulab and the villagers who help save Luttrell from the Taliban until the Americans can come rescue

him are revealed in the final scenes of the film to be operating according to a traditional code of honor or ethics, Pashtunwali, requiring them to help Luttrell and give him sanctuary because he is a guest in their village/home.

While there is certainly no infighting in *Lone Survivor* (the men remain military brothers to the end, willing to and actually dying to protect one another), there are definitely fog-of-war break-downs in communication with the men unable to radio their base for orders or help when they need it. Fatherhood, too, is a very strong theme in this film as in the middle-period films analyzed herein. The house that Luttrell shelters in while waiting for rescue is depicted as belonging to a man and his son, who helps protect Luttrell from the Taliban fighters by stabbing one.[235] True to genre, the film's overwhelming focus remains on the undying (even though almost everyone literally dies) heroism of American military men. The film's closing images are photos of the actual men who participated in "Operation Red Wing" (upon which the film is based) and the film is dedicated to them with a song called "Heroes." Many of the images in this closing montage show the men with their wives and children, reinforcing the connection between the American military and American families. While all of the films analyzed in this conclusion are most closely linked to the middle-period regressive/nostalgic films in their return to traditional conservative values, their overt focus on American heroism is even more aggressive than the films of the middle period whose underlining of American heroics is at least slightly more subtle (e.g. the protagonists from *Flags of Our Fathers* and Basilone from *The Pacific* who balk at being lauded as war heroes and Eversmann from *Black Hawk Down* narrating that no one sets out to be a hero, it just ends up that way).

American heroism is also the central thrust of *Fury*, a 2014 film about WWII tank-warfare starring Brad Pitt as Army sergeant Don "Wardaddy" Collier, and his team, Shia

LaBeouf as Boyd 'Bible' Swan, Michael Peña as Trini 'Gordo' Garcia, Jon Bernthal as Grady 'Coon-Ass' Travis, Jim Parrack as Sergeant Binkowski, and Logan Lerman as Norman Ellison, the newest, youngest member of the tank team that the rest pick on because he's replacing a fallen member (for whose death the team's leader, Wardaddy, blames himself).[236] Wardaddy's nickname nearly says it all: he is both the father of war-making in that he is depicted as almost preternaturally good at his military job, and he is also the leader and symbolic 'father' of the unit, taking paternal responsibility for all of the soldiers under his command, but particularly newbie Norman, whom he guides under his wing and tries to train/toughen up. Like most of the combat films studied herein, and particularly those depicting WWII, there are almost no women in the film and those that do appear are romantic/sexual interests. In another striking resemblance to *Lone Survivor*, Norman is the only man to survive the climactic tank battle when Wardaddy and the rest of the men refuse to abandon the tank and run for safety. The ideological message of war as natural home is reinforced, too, when Wardaddy is the first to refuse to leave the broken tank behind, declaring it "home;" the others follow his lead. American heroism, so central to the genre, is again explicitly reinforced when an American Red Cross rescuer later comes upon Norman in the tank and tells Norman "Hey you're a hero, buddy. You know that?" The film's final scenes also memorialize the tank, showing a sepia-toned image of it (recalling the credit sequence and DVD menus of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*), reinforcing a WWII-nostalgia typical of the middle-period films examined herein. Too, the film aims to enhance its credibility or verisimilitude like many of the other texts examined herein (particularly middle-period WWII-focused ones such as *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as explored in chapter two) by including archival WWII-images in its end-credit sequence.

All of these sentiments about American heroism and the links between American military life and American family life and the ongoing/inevitable nature of war come together in the most recent popular Hollywood combat film, Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper*, based on the life of actual American Navy SEAL sniper, Chris Kyle. Starring Bradley Cooper as Kyle and Sienna Miller as his wife, Taya, the film focuses on Kyle's four tours of duty as a deadly-successful sniper in Iraq and his subsequent struggle to return to civilian life as a husband and father, cope with his status as a hero, and desire to help other veterans with PTSD. In this film, like the others, the patterns established in the preceding chapters are reaffirmed, suggesting a new, more conservative cycle of combat films. Much like the middle-period films studied herein, there is minimal direct reflexivity about the intertextual pastiche-type layering within the genre of combat films (relative to earlier and later films of the period examined herein). Too, with the exception of Chris' wife, Taya, who functions as a symbol of the homefront and the American family that Kyle serves to protect, there are no female characters in the film.

Instead, *American Sniper* focuses on the brotherhood between soldiers, and Kyle's borderline-pathological need to kill enemy Others in order to protect his American military (and biological) family. Like other conservative combat films, there is minimal infighting except for the PTSD-related homicide at the film's end which ties into the 'soft body' discussions from chapter five (significantly this intra-military homicide doesn't even appear onscreen and is instead stated by the title cards and reinforced by the film's closing scenes). Of course, fatherhood is the central reason for Kyle to come home; Taya repeatedly uses Kyle's parental and spousal duties to persuade her husband to come home and to fight to readjust to civilian life. His role as a family man – brother, husband, father – is also a large part of the memorializing done for him in the film's final scenes. This conclusion recalls the analysis in chapter eight in

that the film's ultimate ideological message, as with all of the other films studied herein, is that war is unending; it is bad only in that it follows soldiers home and interrupts American family life.

This ideological message plays into an extremely problematic feedback loop wherein war is depicted as variously negative (brutally violent, boring, senseless, unfair), but also as exciting (full of explosions, adventure, and sex, sexual innuendoes and language), beautiful (artfully aesthetically framed scenes and scored songs and sounds), patriotic/heroic (even if the heroes are reluctant), and, most importantly, unending and inevitable. And the more such representations of war exist, the more they draw and layer upon other such representations, conditioning not only the next generation of potential soldiers, but also the next generation of civilian viewers to expect nothing more than continuous conflict.

Genre and Beyond:

While significant in their own right as established herein, these combat films are not alone in their ideological operations. As the discussions on self-referentiality and intertextuality in the second chapter and throughout make clear, there are plenty of other ways in which a fascination with military conflict and culture increasingly pervades civilians' everyday lives that, unfortunately, fall outside the scope of this dissertation. Obviously there are many combat films made outside of Hollywood (e.g. international films like 2015's Canadian film *Hyena Road*), that fall outside the scope of this project, but even within the realm of the Hollywood war film, there are numerous films that bear on the themes analyzed and explored herein yet remain outside of the sample such as home-front melodramas like *Brothers*, the 2009 Hollywood take on Susanne Bier's 2004 Danish film *Brødre* (about the home-front toll taken when a marine is presumed dead in Afghanistan and his wife and brother begin a relationship, recalling *Pearl Harbor*'s

narrative), and recent home-front wartime romances like *Dear John* (2010), and *The Lucky One* (2012); films centered solely on military basic training camps such as 2000's *Tigerland* about an infamous Vietnam-era military training facility;[237] films about soldiers' return home and associated issues (injuries/amputations, PTSD, etc.), such as 2006's *Home of the Brave*, which focuses on soldiers returning from Iraq, and *In The Valley of Elah*, a film about the disappearance of a soldier after his return from a tour in Iraq; war-related political thrillers like *Syriana* (2005), *Rendition* (2007), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012); films about rogue individuals such as *Green Zone* (2010), or POW/Rescue films such as *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), *Rescue Dawn* (2006), *Hart's War* (2002), and, most recently, *Unbroken* (2014); films about imaginary conflicts like 2003's Nigerian Special-Ops refuge/rescue film *Tears of the Sun*, and satires based on real conflicts like Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) are also not included; on the other hand, documentaries/reconstruction films such as Brian de Palma's *Redacted* (2007), and Sebastian Junger's 2010 *Restrepo,* based on his journalistic coverage in Afghanistan, are also not included; Hollywood films about specialized combat like *Crimson Tide* (1995), *U571* (2000), and *K19 The Widow-Maker* (2002), all about submarines, *Flyboys* (2006), about Americans flying planes for the French military, and *War Horse* (2011), about a boy and his cavalry horse, also fall outside the scope; Hollywood films centered on characters from other countries like the aforementioned *K19* and *Flyboys*, as well as *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), focused on a USSR submarine captain, *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), about a rivalry between a Russian and a German sniper, *Defiance* (2008), a film about two European Jewish brothers who escape Nazi occupation to join Russian resistance fighters and help save other Jewish refugees, also fall outside of the purview of this dissertation.

Too, film is certainly not the only audiovisual medium to be preoccupied by war stories in the period either; numerous television and videogame series tackle the war/combat genre. Aside from the three HBO miniseries studied herein there have also been a number of popular television shows from the period dealing with war such as *Over There* (2005), CBS's *The Unit* (2006-2009), Lifetime's *Army Wives* (2007-2013), ABC's *Last Resort* (2012-2013), and Cinemax's *Strikeback* (2010-2015). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there are also a vast number of war-based (non-science fiction) videogames that have been immensely popular in the 1990-2015 timeframe covered by this study including: the *Call of Duty* franchise (which is immensely popular and includes more than four different games), the *Medal of Honor* franchise (which has more than seven games), the *Men of War* franchise, the *Empire* (computer game) franchise, and *America's Army*, the official and original first-person-shooter videogame of the American military. Many of these have cross-platform franchise products associated with them including board games, comic books, and action figures as well as star branding and promotion. For example, the commercial "There's a Soldier in All of us" for *Call of Duty Black Ops* (one of many games in the franchise) features many celebrities including basketball phenomenon Kobe Bryant and late-night television personality Jimmy Kimmel, and the title alone reinforces the militarization of culture and everyday life. Commercials for other games in the franchise (e.g. *Call of Duty Black Ops 2*) also cross-promote/cross-brand by featuring *Iron Man* franchise star Robert Downey Jr. and capitalize on the recent cultural preoccupation with zombies.[238] While this list is not exhaustive, it is certainly suggestive of the vast number of films and television series outside the scope of the project but to which the foregoing discussions and analysis still pertain.

Indeed the arguments advanced herein with regard to the combat subgenre are not at all restricted to this genre. Arguments about the elision of women, the Othering of nonwhite characters (and even of non-traditional forms of masculinity), and the dominance of patriarchal father figures extends to other immensely popular forms and genres including the aforementioned zombie-genre (e.g. *Walking Dead*), police-procedurals/crime shows and movies (the *C.S.I.* and *Law and Order* franchises, for example), and the recent resurgence of Western-genre movies and television shows (e.g. *Deadwood*, *Hell on Wheels*, *Longmire* etc.), among others. Sure there are gun-toting and sometimes-powerful women and visible minorities on these shows (and they can shoot, too!) but many if not all of these extremely popular shows and films are still helmed by traditional, conservative patriarchal fathers (or father figures) at the head of households and often also in law-and-order-type positions of power (e.g. police officer, Sherriff) and therefore the head and representative of the nation. And while there are strong female and non-white characters who lead in many of these examples, they are easily killed off and/or subjugated by the white male lead. As an example, in weekly top-ten most watched/highest rated premium cable show,[239] ABC's the *Walking Dead*, while beautiful blonde Andrea quickly learns to shoot a gun and becomes quite a proficient fighter, she is depicted as someone who consistently falls for (and sleeps with) the wrong men, and is eventually killed as a result. Too, while *Walking Dead*'s Michonne, a black woman, is an independent character, proficient with her swords and quite capable of surviving on her own, she is still second-fiddle to the show's main protagonist, Sherriff Rick Grimes, yet another literal embodiment of the patriarchal law and order that predominates so much of today's most popular cultural forms. While some newer popular shows also ranking on Nielson's top-ten like ABC's *Scandal* (2012-present), and *How To Get Away With Murder* (2014-present) are beginning to feature powerful female leads, even

women of colour, these are the exception; in many other genre shows like the westerns *Deadwood* (HBO 2004-2006), *Justified* (FX 2010-2015), *Hell on Wheels* (AMC 2011-2016), even the more contemporarily-set *Longmire* (A&E/Netflix 2012-present), men predominate and women are mostly prostitutes, wives and daughters, and those women who are powerful are only so because of their (late) husbands' conferred wealth and status, and many of them must sleep with or marry rich and powerful men in order to maintain their wealth and status. Main male characters, anti-heroic as they may be, are still the most powerful and significant in most popular North American culture, especially in genre fiction and especially in terms of the creation (or re-creation) of the American nation.

Conclusions about the ideological significance of genre films (and television shows, and videogames and their convergent cultures, etc.) cannot be made without detailed close analysis of the cultural artifacts themselves. Scholars like Basinger paved the way for this analysis by watching and analyzing quite literally hundreds of films simply to stake a claim for the combat genre and to document its qualities and consistency despite the ebbs and flows and changes in the genre. Other genre scholars, like Altman, Neale, and Grindon, work to account for these ebbs and flows by arguing a case for ritual/ideological approaches which take into account cycles within periods of film, making room for flexibility within genres to account for changes in them over time. This project has built upon this strong scholarly framework of genre study by incorporating its methods and findings, picking up where others have left off by using close analysis of popular Hollywood films within the combat genre from 1990-2015, proving the continued importance of such a practice in genre study in order to get at the ideological implications of some of our most popular cultures. As Žižek has pointed out in much of his work on ideology, it is when we're in our dream worlds and relaxed (watching films and television and

playing games in our leisure time), that we think we're outside of ideology, but that, in those moments, we're actually the most deeply wrapped up in it and subject to its influence, interpolated as subjects by it.

As the preceding analysis and chapters have illustrated, the war/combat genre, among others, is of vital importance in terms of its ideological significance in contemporary culture not just in North America, but because of Hollywood's global influence, in the wider world as well. These films are crucial to understand in terms of their role in creating and reinforcing cultural scripts about gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, and war. The uncovering of these cultural scripts, those that have persevered largely unchanged over time and those that have shifted, reveals the continuing value of close analysis as a method for genre study, and the ongoing evolution of genre underlines the persistent importance and relevance of the field of genre study to cinema studies and cultural studies as a whole.

Like Altman's and Neale's works, the arguments advanced herein support the view that genres serve both a ritual and an ideological function – they are neither completely top-down nor completely bottom-up; instead, they are assembled and moulded by everyone involved in the process of production and consumption (creators, critics/reviewers/theorists, viewers etc.). They are not just stable, easily recognizable entities; not all films fit easily into one category, and these categories are subject to change over time, though not always in predictable ways. This approach leaves room for the hope that if we identify problematic features of a genre, the genre can shift and adapt to address/change such issues. For if we just keep telling ourselves the same story over and over again in the same ways, we doom history to repeat itself and we ensure that the future will look much like the past. Perhaps we need to envision a new and different future that doesn't involve conflict or that "shifts the frame" as Judith Butler might put it,[240] telling stories from

different perspectives or perhaps in different ways altogether, to, as Susan Sontag suggests at the close of *Regarding the Pain of Others*, put together a more complete picture and to break the cycle of representational violence. Perhaps the genre is already in the process of shifting because while these films' ideologies are still conservative and even potentially harmful, the almost-hysterical repetition of the same representations might eventually (or already?) mark their undoing, paving the way for more constructive future productions.

Endnotes

CHAPTER 1

[1] The Vietnam War was the first major conflict in which America was involved after the Second World War, the first War the U.S. didn't win decisively, the first war against an exclusively racially Other enemy, and the first 'television war'.

[2] See for example, Basinger *The WWII Combat Film*; Eberwein *The Hollywood War Film*; and Jeffords *Remasculinization*.

[3] See for example, Cohan and Hark eds., *Screening the Male*; Connell, *Masculinities*; Donald and MacDonald, *Reel Men at War, Masculinity and the American War Film*; Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do*; Eberwein, *Armed Forces*; Greven, *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush*; Jeffords, *Hard Bodies & The Remasculinization of America*; Moss, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Man*; Savran, *Taking it Like a Man*; and Suid, *Guts & Glory*;

[4] See for example: Griffin, *Hetero: Queering Representations of Straightness*.

[5] See Morris, ed., *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, which includes Spivak's original text and several contemporary re-examinations and applications of the concept of the subaltern.

[6] See Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*.

[7] See Said, *Orientalism*; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; and Said, *Covering Islam*.

[8] See Bernstein and Studlar eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*.

[9] See Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law & Politics*.

[10] See for example: Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Berlant, *Compassion*; Butler, *Precarious Life*; Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and particularly Butler, *Frames of War*.

[11] See Eberwein, *The War Film* and *The Hollywood War Film*.

[12] For example, the difference between a film such as *The Green Berets*, the only film about the Vietnam War to be made while American soldiers were still on the ground in Vietnam, and a film such as the immensely popular *Saving Private Ryan*, a film about the second world war but produced and released decades after the conflict ended.

[13] See for example: Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*, or Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*.

[14] See for example: Eberwein, *The Hollywood War Film*; McAdams, *The American War Film: History and Hollywood*.

[15] See for example: Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*; Chadwick, *The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film*; Dittmar & Michaud, eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*.

[16] See for example: Eberwein, *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film*; and Donald and Macdonald, *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film*.

[17] See Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*; and Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*.

[18] See Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* and Suid, *Guts & Glory*.

[19] See Neale *Genre and Hollywood* 209-213 for references.

[20] Ibid., 217.

[21] "Genre" Originally published in 1973.

[22] "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema," originally published in 1970.

[23] "Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis & Hollywood Genre History," originally published in 1997.

[24] In "Genre Films and the Status Quo," originally published in 1974.

[25] She, in fact, uses an Adorno quotation in her epigraph.

[26] "Genre Film: A Classical Experience," originally published in the summer of 1975.

[27] "Social Implications in the Hollywood Genres," originally published in April 1973.

[28] "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism Revisited – The Progressive Genre" originally published in winter 1984.

[29] "The Structural Influence: New Directions in Film Genre Study" originally published in August, 1977.

[30] "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," originally published in 1991.

[31] See Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film"

[32] "Ideology, Genre, Auteur," originally published 1977.

[33] As coined and developed by Henry Jenkins, see Jenkins *Convergence Culture*.

[34] See for example, Doherty's *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (whose updated edition includes discussions of *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*); and Basinger's *The WWII Combat Film*.

[35] See for example Dittmar & Michaud eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood*; Andregg, ed. *Inventing Vietnam*; and Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*.

[36] First edition originally published 2001, updated version published 2009.

[37] See for example, Yvonne Tasker's work on action films, "The Family in Action" and *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*; Linda Williams' and Carol Clover's works on horror films, Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" and Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film"; Sontag's work on disaster films: "The Imagination of Disaster", and Charles Ramirez Berg's work on "Immigrants, Aliens, and Extraterrestrials".

[38] See Spivak "Can the subaltern Speak"

[39] See for example, Studlar and Bernstein, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*; Bernardi, ed., *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*; and Richardson, *Otherness in Hollywood Cinema*.

CHAPTER 2

[40] For example, Tom Hanks who stars in *Saving Private Ryan*; Damian Lewis who plays one of *Band of Brothers*' main characters, Lt. Richard D. Winters and also plays a returning Iraq-POW in popular television show about domestic terrorism, *Homeland*; Scott Grimes, who plays central character TSgt. Donald Malarkey in *Band of Brothers* and also appears in military submarine movie *Crimson Tide*; Matthew Leitch, who plays SSgt. Floyd 'Tab' Talbert in the miniseries and also appears in the Cinemax military television series *Strikeback* as does Shane Taylor, who plays Cpl. Eugene Roe in *Band of Brothers;* Michael Cudlitz, who plays Sgt. Denver 'Bull' Randleman in the miniseries and appears in both *Over There* and *JAG* – two military television shows and also plays a former-military character in popular television show *The Walking Dead*; Neal McDonough who plays 1st Lt. Lynn 'Buck' Compton in *Band of Brothers* also appears in *Flags of Our Fathers* as Captain Severance; and, finally, among others, Jacob Pitts who plays PFC Bill 'Hoosier' Smith in *The Pacific* also plays Grigori in WWII submarine movie *K-19: The Widowmaker* and a former-military sniper on the more-recent hit show *Justified*.

[41] See HBO website 'About' The Pacific <http://www.hbo.com/the-pacific/index.html#/the-pacific/about/index.html>

[42] See Baudrillard *Simulations*.

[43] See Paget and Lipkin "Movie-of-the-Week"

[44] See Suid *Guts & Glory* for full reference.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] See Debord *Society of the Spectacle*

[48] See Baudrillard *Simulations*

[49] See Baudrillard *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*

[50] As Baudrillard admits ibid. p. 70.

[51] For example, *America's Army*, the United States Military's popular online gaming platform/recruitment and training tool that Jenkins devotes significant attention to in the second chapter of *Convergence Culture*

[52] See Zelizer, Barbie *Remembering to Forget*

[53] *Spanking the Monkey* (1994) and *Flirting with Disaster* (1996)

[54] Née O'Shea Jackson, who rose to fame as an anti-establishment rapper Ice Cube as part of the group N.W.A., and later went on to star and play in many Hollywood films, deepening this film's convergence and also the cross-over between popular music and combat films explored in greater depth throughout.

[55] Jonze is another Hollywood/independent filmmaker, further deepening the film's convergence.

[56] And, to a certain extent, the toll the war has taken on the soldiers of Saddam's army too, though this issue will be explored in greater depth in chapter four.

[57] This is a scene to be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

[58] For example, the song "Ride of the Valkyries" playing over the helicopter loudspeakers in the Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now* acts as a reference to Hitler's WWII.

[59] This reference also connects to an internet meme about said videogame.

[60] These increasing levels of convergence and changing communications technologies (e.g. video-messaging) follow shifts in the home/front dynamic as evidenced by the *Deer Hunter* scene from *Jarhead* (to be explored in greater

depth in chapter three and touched briefly upon by Eberwein in *The Hollywood War Film*) which brings a whole new level of humiliation to the 'Dear John' letter trope of earlier, WWII-era films.

[61] This scene is also briefly noted by Eberwein in *The Hollywood War Film*.

[62] Sykes is depicted as being quite complicit in the artificial press coverage of the conflict because he is very devoted to his military career, telling Swofford "I *love* this job. I thank God for every day He gives me in the Corps. Hoorah." in a scene significant enough to be used for the film's trailer which (in a further example of convergence generally and convergence between combat films and popular music) also uses incredibly popular/controversial rapper Kanye West's song "Jesus Walks" to stunning dramatic effect.

[63] For more on the connections between combat films and popular music see O'Brien, *Music in American Combat Films*.

[64] In further evidence of convergence, the song samples from Post-Vietnam-era song "ABC" by the Jackson 5. Too, the song is about infidelity, a concern central to Jarhead and explored in greater length in the following chapter.

[65] The Smokey Robinson song "Tracks of My Tears" that the men sing and dance to in *Platoon* is also about the failure of a heterosexual relationship, a man saddened after having been left by (presumably) his girlfriend. The homoeroticism of these scenes, discussed at further length in chapter five, is yet another element of similarity between them.

[66] Much like in the scene from *Jarhead*, the men in *Three Kings* sing and dance to a popular rap song, in this case Public Enemy's "Can't Do Nuttin' For Ya Man".

[67] A simple Google search for 'American Soldier Helmet Camera' yields tens of thousands of video results.

[68] The militarization and/or normalization of combat in everyday life is explored in greater depth in the final chapter.

[69] Scribe is the nickname given to him by the soldiers with whom he's embedded.

[70] The soldier/writer protagonist of *Full Metal Jacket* wears the phrase 'Born to Kill' on his helmet.

CHAPTER 3

[71] See Bumiller.

[72] See for example Basinger or Eberwein.

[73] An audio-clip of which phrase was later sampled for not one, but two popular hip hop songs, 2 Live Crew's chart-topping eponymous 1989 single "Me So Horny" and Sir Mixalot's even more well-known and enduring 1992 single "Baby Got Back" which was itself later sampled by Nikki Minaj in her popular 2014 single "Anaconda," demonstrating the persistence of the cultural scripts created and reinforced in combat films and recirculated in other forms of popular culture as explored in greater length with regard to convergence culture in the previous chapter.

[74] This recalls Jameson's notion of nostalgia films from the discussion of this middle period in the previous chapter.

[75] See chapter five for more on the difficulties arising because of differences between hard versus soft bodies in the American military as represented on screen in Hollywood.

[76] See Irigary *This Sex Which Is Not One*

[77] Ibid.

[78] Fathers, both literal and symbolic, are explored further in chapter seven.

[79] Over one hundred U.S. Navy and U.S.M.C. officers reportedly sexually assaulted an almost equivalent number of mostly women - a few men also reported being assaulted - at a military debrief in Las Vegas, Nevada; these events were dubbed the 'Tailhook scandal'.

[80] *The General's Daughter* is a 1999 film based on actual events surrounding the gang-rape and subsequent silencing of a woman in the military whose father was a high-ranking officer.

[81] See Broadwell, Paula "Women at War"

[82] *Rashomon* is a 1950 film by Akira Kurosawa which famously employs a plot device wherein each character gives a subjective and different (sometimes slightly, sometimes wildly) version of the same incident or set of events.

[83] A common trope within combat films, typically letters written by soldiers to their loved ones are given to a fellow soldier to pass along in the event of their death. See previous chapter for more on the changing culture of 'letters' and communications from the front-line.

[84] His decision fulfills the White House's PR-laden plans to present the medal of honour to Walden's fatherless (and now motherless) daughter at an awards ceremony in the rose garden, reducing Walden's life and death to a political show.

[85] Serling is battling what appears to be PTSD-related alcoholism stemming from the death of a close friend under his command during a friendly-fire incident which he accidentally ordered. As such, getting to the 'truth' of what happened to Walden is, for him, largely about getting to the 'truth' of his feelings about whether he's responsible for his fellow soldiers' death in the same way Monfriez and Ilario are responsible for Walden's.

[86] Though the representative remarks: "too bad it's posthumous," his breezy, off-hand manner betrays the insignificance he accords her fact of her death. In fact, his excitement about the weepy public sentiment he'll be able to arouse with the ceremony hinges upon her being dead.

[87] The fact that this letter is from a woman presents an interesting twist on a trope typical of middle-cycle WWII-nostalgic films in which letters home to family/loved-ones are read in voice-over (often after a soldier's death).

[88] See previous chapter for more on letters home and see chapter seven for more on fathers and families.

[89] See Butler *Gender Trouble*

[90] Women might therefore be equally if not more likely to support prohibitions against women in active combat roles than men.

[91] Much like the women in the middle-period WWII-nostalgia films discussed in the next section, Rady's wife's role in the film while extremely minor is still strictly limited to the realm of home.

[92] These anxieties are largely male, but female fears are also represented by Rady's wife's gendered concerns.

[93] The irony of this scene becomes painfully clear when we later learn that Monfriez accidentally shot Walden and had no problem leaving her or the other wounded man behind.

[94] It is later revealed that this accusation is true, but less egregious than Monfriez makes it seem because her tears are "just tension" release (as she puts it) and she remains focused, alert, and fully functional in her leadership/soldierly duties throughout.

[95] For example, the concept of women as sexual gatekeepers or the idea that women should not dress provocatively or walk alone at night or become too intoxicated in public for fear that they are inviting sexual assault by men who simply can't help themselves.

[96] See Bumiller.

[97] This respect for authority is particularly essential within the military structure of command as discussed in greater length with regard to Foucault's concept of docile bodies within chapter five.

[98] See chapter five for more on hard male bodies as weapons of war.

[99] For more on female masculinity see Halberstam *Female Masculinity*

[100] Awarded for 'extraordinary heroism', the Navy Cross is the second-highest medal awarded for valour in the U.S. military, second only to the Medal of Honour itself.

[101] Recent interviews suggest that strongly gendered attitudes still prevail when it comes to women in the military: "even some male military officers who say that women might be [physically] strong enough for the infantry acknowledged some psychological barriers. 'I think the infantry in me will have a very hard time ever accepting that I'm going to rush against the enemy and there's going to be a female right next to me,' Capt. Scott A. Cuomo, a company commander of 270 Marines in Afghanistan and a strong supporter of women in the military, said in an interview in 2010. 'Can she do it? Some might. I don't know if this sounds bad, but I kind of look at everything through my wife. Is that my wife's job? No. My job is to make sure my wife is safe.' See Bumiller.

[102] See Tasker, "Soldiers' Stories"

[103] A phenomenon that doesn't stop at combat films - recall stunningly beautiful model/actress Charlize Theron's Oscar-winning transformation into the titular *Monster*, Aileen Wuornos, in the 2003 film, for example.

[104] See Laplanche, and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*.

[105] See Barthes *Camera Lucida*

[106] See Žižek *The Plague of Fantasies*

[107] This is not to say that viewers are mere extensions of or are the same as the characters simply that the ideology functions in the same way for each.

[108] See Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*

[109] For more on these real and symbolic familial relationships see chapter seven.

[110] With the exception of the opening scenes of the film wherein she is still in the domestic space of the family vehicle as the entire family is sings songs while they drive towards their new home on the military base.

[111] Again, for more on these allegiances and the relationship between family and nation see chapter seven.

[112] "Jody" is a derogatory term for non-military personnel/civilian men who sleep with military men's girlfriends while the military men are deployed/on duty.

[113] This type of behaviour stands in contrast to the behaviour of civilian wives from the earliest period like Rady's wife from *Courage* who is jealous and worried about her husband cheating and stands in even sharper contrast to the devoted and maternal wives of the middle-period films.

[114] For more on heteronormativity and homosexual panic see chapters five and seven.

[115] Echoing discussions from the previous chapter

CHAPTER 4

[116] See Basinger *The WWII Combat Film*

[117] See Desser "Charlie Don't Surf"

[118] See for example, Eberwein *The Hollywood War Film*

[119] "Can the subaltern speak" was originally published in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* in 1988; Spivak refines her ideas in the "History" chapter of her own book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, and the concept of the subaltern is further explored by various scholars in Morris, ed. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea.*

[121] Though some early period films like *Three Kings* and later period films like *The Hurt Locker* do have non-white characters in central, if not leading, roles protagonists in these films are still all white.

[122] his term for its transformation from story about the diamond trade in Africa to film about the Vietnam War

[123] As previously noted, a few films from the early and latest cycles of the period like *Three Kings* and *The Hurt Locker* have central black American military characters.

[124] See for example, Bernstein and Studlar, eds.

[125] See Basinger *The World War II Combat Film*

[126] Amir uses guilt and almost blackmail – he knows the Americans are stealing gold – to try to persuade the Americans to help him and the other resistance fighters escape the country as refugees. Except this blackmail is almost a bluff because these Others are still depicted as so powerless that any threats Amir might make about revealing the Americans' theft of the gold are idle because the resistance fighters have no resources with which to follow through on revealing the Americans' illegal and morally questionable behaviour (let alone a way of having the Americans disciplined for such behaviour) because they are so outside the larger American military/political discourse, so subaltern.

[127] For more on such issues see Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights*.

[128] Shooting racialized others from above is a frequently-repeated formal strategy used in *Black Hawk Down* specifically but also occurs in other films from the period as in *Three Kings* when the viewer looks down at a dying Iraqi man from the perspective of American soldier, Barlow, who towers above the supine man he shot feeling sad yet totally morally righteous about this 'kill'.

[129] This depiction echoes that of the Iraqi soldiers who shoot the milk truck in *Three Kings* to try to starve out the civilian resistance fighters.

[130] Captured 'warlord' Osman Ali Atto (or Ato) from the aforementioned scene comes the closest to a fleshed-out character because he actually has a small speaking role.

[131] See Galloway *We Were Soldiers Once, and Young*

[132] Discussed in greater length in chapter two

[133] See Basinger *The World War II Combat Film*

[134] See Bush "Address"

[135] See Galloway *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young*; this sentiment reinforces arguments about the convergence of Hollywood combat films and their impact on real soldiers from chapter two.

[136] Ironically, in the film's closing scenes, Kruger appears to have the most 'corporate'-type job.

[137] Where the aforementioned aerial shots that dehumanize enemy Others are used even when no helicopters are present and even though those flying the helicopters are not main characters

[138] As Stuart Hall pointed out long ago, however, what audiences take from a scene is not always the same as what was intended to be taken from it. See Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"

[139] See for example, Desser "Charlie Don't Surf" and Jeffords *Remasculinization*.

[140] These types of troubles are also represented in characters from films of other cycles of the period such as Nate Serling from *Courage Under Fire* and Tommy Burgess from *Stop Loss*.

[141] For more on the importance of fatherhood to combat films see chapter seven.

[142] This scene echoes a scene from *Three Kings* in which Wahlberg's character, Barlow, is interrogated/tortured by an enemy Other soldier whose son was killed in an American bombing.

[143] Letters to be delivered to families back home upon a soldier's death are an archetype of the combat genre; see chapters two and three for further discussion.

[144] This is a hallmark of the WWII combat genre according to Basinger, strengthening the argument that this miniseries is more closely linked to the middle/regressive cycle of films and/or signals a resurgence in the most recent part of the period (2010-2015) toward more traditional/conservative/nostalgic qualities in the genre as explored further in the conclusion.

[145] The facelessness of the enemy is another of Basinger's hallmarks of the WWII combat film, further reinforcing this miniseries' links to the more regressive part of the period or as a marker of the beginning of a new, similarly regressive cycle comprised of the most recent films of the genre, from 2010-2015 (an idea to be explored in greater detail in the conclusion).

[146] This notion has been popularized and reinforced by many Hollywood Vietnam-focused films and analyzed by critics like Desser in "Charlie Don't Surf".

[147] See chapter two for further elaboration on the applicability of these concepts to combat films.

[148] See Basinger *The World War II Combat Film*

[149] Even more so than early period film *Three Kings* which has its own racial ambivalences as previously examined

[150] This fear has, of course, been established as based in fact by the film's opening sequence in which an Arab man lurking in the shadows waits until the lead American bomb-tech – Staff Sergeant Matt Thompson played by Guy Pearce – is within range to remotely detonate a bomb, killing Thompson.

[151] e.g. *Jarhead* based on Anthony Swofford's memoir

[152] For more on the significance of the interchangeability of wars/conflicts see the final two chapters.

CHAPTER 5

[153] See Razack *Casting Out* for more on such real life consequences.

[154] See for example, Anderegg ed., *Inventing Vietnam* and Dittmar and Michaud eds., *From Hanoi to Hollywood*.

[155] See for example Jeffords *Remasculinization* and Eberwein *Armed Forces*

[156] See Jeffords *Remasculinization* 12 on Rambo's body as weapon and Jeffords *Hard Bodies* which further develops the concept.

[157] See Jeffords *Remasculinization* and *Hard Bodies*

[158] See Foucault *Discipline and Punish* "Panopticism"

[159] This conception, in its discussion of inside/outside, recalls Kristeva's notion of the abject from chapter three.

[160] This formulation also calls to mind Connell's concept of the precariousness hegemonic masculinity as discussed at greater length herein.

[161] Connell cites Wetherell and Edley (1999) here; see Connell for citation.

[162] For Gittings (1996) and Nagel (1998) citations see Connell xvi.

[163] See Butler *Bodies that Matter* and *Gender Trouble* and de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*.

[164] Ibid.

[165] These concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of returning veterans are equally if not more applicable to the current period (almost all of the films from the most recent cycle of the period studied herein concern themselves with this topic, particularly the most recent, Eastwood's *American Sniper*), as they are to the Post-WWII period about which Cohan writes.

[166] See for example, Holmlund and Tasker.

[167] *Stop Loss* and *The Hurt Locker* were both directed by women, Kimberly Pierce and Kathryn Bigelow respectively.

[168] See Jeffords *Hard Bodies*.

[169] Jeffords offers a brief reading of the relationships between these two characters and protagonist Taylor in Remasculinization, p. 138-140 which is largely in line with the reading herein.

[170] Eberwein also briefly mentions this scene for the ways in which illustrates the differences between the two camps; see Eberwein, *Hollywood War Film*, p. 97-8.

[171] As in Jeffords, ibid. and in her contribution to *From Hannoi to Hollywood*, see Jeffords "Reproducing Fathers".

[172] See Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 24.

[173] The large and famous cast includes: Sean Penn, Jim Caviezel, Nick Nolte, Elias Koteas, Ben Chaplin, Adrien Brody, George Clooney, John Cusack, Woody Harrelson, Jared Leto, John C. Reilly and John Travolta.

[174] In a later scene there are again more 'native' people present to guide the white people when they land on the beach, reinforcing the connection between 'native' and/or 'primitive' people and nature as discussed in herein in reference to *Apocalypse Now* and in greater depth in the previous chapter.

[175] Think of the machinic precision of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator character, for example.

[176] This attitude stands in contrast to Poke's aforementioned concern about military-sanctioned killing as compared to killing in the civilian world (prison vs. medals) in *Generation Kill*.

[177] For further analysis on the role of Martin's sister-in-law-cum-wife see the third chapter and for more on the familial and father/son relationships in this film see the seventh chapter.

[178] Again, for more on the significance of fatherhood within this film and others of the period see chapter seven.

179 A similar situation occurs in another middle-period film, *Black Hawk Down*.

180 Harkening back to racialized stereotypes interrogated in further depth in the previous paragraph

181 For more on the significance of this implication see the final two chapters.

182 This blame-placing on the government traces back to Jeffords' argument about Vietnam-centred films, that it is not often individual soldiers who are represented as at fault, but some amorphous, unseen government forces.

183 Fergus falls asleep cooking sausages and accidentally setting a munitions tent on fire, accidentally exploding flares that shoot off into the sky like an impromptu fireworks display, further reinforcing arguments herein about the spectacular aesthetic beauty of many combat films.

184 James' reenlistment will be explored in further depth in the context of the perpetuity of war in the final two chapters.

185 Sgt. Rodolfo 'Rudy' Reyes, playing himself, for example.

186 'Get Some' is generally used as a colloquial expression for engaging in sexual practice with another person, but is here also used to mean engaging in direct combat.

187 The series leaves no ambiguity about Reyes' sexuality, however; he speaks about a girlfriend back home within the first few episodes.

CHAPTER 6

188 See Basinger *The World War II Combat Film* for an examination of paternal figures in WWII-era combat films.

189 Bracket films are the early cycle (roughly 1990-1997) and most recent cycle (roughly 2005-2010).

190 See Foucault *Discipline and Punish*.

191 Witt from *The Thin Red Line*, of the same, early-period cycle, also repeatedly goes AWOL.

192 FUBAR is military slang for 'Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition'

193 Particularly Private Reiben, played by Edward Burns, a soldier from Brooklyn, NY who is mouthy and has the most problems with authority of any of the soldiers.

194 And the enemy is always a he in these middle-period films unlike in more recent cycles where sometimes the enemy is a woman.

195 Again upholding Jeffords' argument (discussed in the previous chapter) that typically the government is blamed for military failures rather than the soldiers themselves; see Jeffords *Remasculinization*.

196 As discussed in the previous chapter, a man's respectability as a soldier in this regressive, middle-period cycle is tightly linked to his battlefield experience.

197 As promised, no one ever questions the authority of his commanding officer after the initial imitation/prank.

198 As noted previously, Troy, having lied about his criminal record to get into the military, looses it mentally when he finds out he is being discharged as a result and, it's implied, commits suicide after his discharge because he can't face life outside the military.

199 King visits Rodriguez in the hospital and risks getting caught AWOL to speak to Colson's family about the circumstances of their son's death.

200 This type of behaviour recalls 'fragging' from Vietnam films.

201 Fick is one of few commanding officers without a derogatory nickname.

202 These very flexible ROE also harken back to Vietnam; See for example, Turse, *Kill anything that Moves*.

CHAPTER 7

203 See Jeffords for references.

204 In this aforementioned scene main character Chris Taylor must kill one father-figure/leader Barnes, the 'hard,' too-masculine father in retaliation for Barnes' murder of Elias, the 'softer' father figure; see chapter five for more depth on hardness vs. softness in Vietnam films and their post-Gulf War counterparts.

205 For more on the absence/elimination of women see chapter three.

206 See Jeffords for references.

207 See Hamad, *Postfeminism* for more on these figures and the related erasure of women/mothers in other genres.

208 Again, see Hamad Postfeminism for more on the effacement of mothers to bring fathers to the fore.

209 Crazy Horse was a Lakota warrior who famously led and fought against Americans including having a pivotal role in their defeat at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in June 1876. These references to and respect for the cultural practices of war leaders of other races also links Gibson's character in this film to his character in the Patriot who respects and demands the freedom African Americans and bonds with French soldier Villeneuve over the fact that they are both fathers.

[210] The bracelet was shown in close-up and discussed during their previously-mentioned interaction in the hospital chapel after the baby's birth and these items remind the viewer that they should mourn Jack's death because he is a father and has left behind a wife and young daughter.

[211] This love-triangle is explored in greater depth for its depiction of women in chapter three.

[212] A phenomenon discussed at greater length in the previous chapter.

[213] Women's blame for the failure of heterosexual relationships in this cycle of films is explored further in chapter three.

CHAPTER 8

[214] Huntington wrote *Clash* in response to colleague Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*.

[215] Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin who's widely credited with popularizing the notion of the Carnivalesque

[216] See, for example Der Derian *Virtuous War*.

[217] Interestingly enough, a quote from this text opens *The Hurt Locker*.

[218] *War* was published in book form in 2010 but is based on reports for *Vanity Fair* published throughout 2008.

[219] See also Suid *Guts & Glory* for more on this subject.

[220] Barker asserts that "between 2005 and 2008, at least 23 such fiction films [about the Iraq War] emerged from in and around Hollywood, and most of them claimed a base in the real events and circumstances of the war" (1) but "all of them, until the very last one in the cycle [*The Hurt Locker*], bombed at the box office, if they made it there at all" (1). Barker's book, which is about these films, is separate from this dissertation which only studies popular combat films and with their wide-reaching ideological messages.

[221] Indeed, this is a key characteristic of the genre according to Basinger's study.

[222] Viewers later learn he had this experience while AWOL from his military unit – and not for the first time. For more on Witt's lack of discipline see chapter five. This lack of discipline/respect for military authority also relates to chapter six's discussions on the break-down of the chain of command.

[223] Hoot's comments strongly reinforce the type of brothers-at-arms sentiments common throughout the genre but most prevalent in the conservative/traditional/nostalgic middle-period films.

[224] These shots are also noted in chapter seven for their importance as proof of Moore's paternal dedication to his men and the leave-no-man policy so significant to this and other middle-period films like *Black Hawk Down*.

[225] Such a concept is not limited to the combat genre and examples of it in other popular genre films are easily located, see for example sci-fi film *Edge of Tomorrow* a.k.a. *Live, Die, Repeat* starring Tom Cruise and Emily Blunt. For more on the wide-ranging implications of the normalization of combat and militarization of everyday life see the concluding chapter herein.

[226] As explored in greater detail in previous chapters, Shriver and Burgess both develop or exhibit symptoms of alcohol abuse and/or depression and/or PTSD.

[227] This family dynamic mimic the Sledge family's feelings about their son Eugene going to war in *The Pacific* as explored in the previous chapter.

[228] Inclusion of these oil fires perhaps a nod to what some regard as the real reason behind conflicts in the Middle East (control of oil profits).

[229] For more on this scene and the convergence culture in combat films generally see chapter two.

[230] Again, the convergence of this film among others is explored in further depth in the second chapter.

[231] R&R is military short-form for rest and recuperation or rest and relaxation or rest and recreation.

[232] "The suck" is military parlance for being in the Marines, usually on active duty during wartime/combat.

CHAPTER 9

[233] See Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks* for more on these racialized archetypes.

[234] *Act of Valor*, for example, while starring real active-duty Marines instead of actors is largely fictional, not based on an actual war/conflict, and *Fury* is about a specific type of vehicle combat - WWII tank warfare.

[235] This element of the film is seemingly fictional, fabricated by Hollywood, given that it does not appear in Luttrell's memoir.

[236] For more on the phenomenon of older, more experienced soldiers giving newer recruits/replacements a hard time as a form of self-preservation see chapter six.

[237] *G.I. Jane* is similarly focused on training camp though it is included for its focus on women and inclusion of an active-duty assignment at the film's conclusion.

[238] See Mirrlees *How to Read Iron Man* for more on Iron Man's contribution to America's militaristic and Empire-like global influence.

[239] According to Nielsen research group, see Nielson.

[240] See Butler, *Frames of War*.

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