Myth and historical truth in the Hollywood WWII combat film

- The 1960s until the 1990s

Thesis dissertation
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Introduction

The aim of my thesis is threefold. First of all, I want to analyse which influence the American socio-economical situation has on the production of World War II combat films. I focus on Hollywood motion pictures in particular because of the special interaction between the production system and the audience who provides commercial feedback. A second goal is to examine the form of the combat film and whether it has an impact on the message the film tries to convey. More specifically, Melodramatic and the Western form are discussed before turning towards general characteristics of the WWII combat film. Thirdly, it is my purpose to uncover the myths surrounding the Second World War and how these are either enforced or debunked in specific movies.

In order to tackle these three tasks, I have divided my dissertation in two sections. Chapter I lays the theoretical foundation and entails a historical sketch with the most important developments, a description of the evolution of the WWII combat film in general, an outline of the functioning of the Hollywood studio system and Hollywood’s affinity with genre films such as Melodrama and the Western, and lastly, the first chapter also names the most important myths surrounding World War II.

The second chapter is more practically oriented with the inclusion of seven case studies, subdivided in the four major groups analogous to the four major periods in the WWII combat film evolution. In chapter II, I seek to position the individual film in the broader context with a discussion of their adherence to or a subversion of the World War II combat film conventions. Moreover, an analysis of Melodramatic elements is performed and whether the individual films expose or enforce the myths surrounding World War II.
CHAPTER I: Theoretical basis

1. Short sketch of the socio-political context: the 1960s until the 1990s

Our story starts in the 1960s. Howard Zinn (2005) defines this era as a period of fragmentation and national resistance. America might present itself as the melting pot, but there are still minority groups who now gain their own voice in the public forum; the black population under Martin Luther King fights against racial discrimination (Zinn, 2005: 443-468), the poor protest against the social divide with uprisings happening in prisons, women have sought equal rights ever since the suffrage in the 1920s (Zinn, 2005: 503-540), the Indians resist against exploitation, and last but not least, the anti-war movement reacted greatly against The Vietnam War (Zinn, 2005: 469-502). Moreover, many of the racial groups mentioned before had the idea that they were fighting a “white man’s war”, joining the forces of the anti-war movement.

The Vietnam War had already started in 1959 (some sources say 1958), but American involvement only became evident under John F. Kennedy’s reign of 1961 until 1963. However, it was only in 1965 that the ground war had fully expanded. Lyndon B. Johnson, Kennedy’s former vice president, had taken over the presidency after Kennedy’s assassination and wanted to invert the losing trend of the American army by sending more troops. By the end of the 1960s, the optimism towards the war effort had waned, and the protest groups had only grown stronger (Zinn, 2005: 469-502).

As explored by Zinn (2005: 541-562), this called for a stronger system of regulation and restoration in the 1970s because the people could no longer be held under the control. In addition to the dwindling Vietnam enthusiasm, the Watergate incident in 1974 undermined the trust the people had in their government. What is more, the Vietnam fiasco had convinced America that the established reputation of the U.S. military had been damaged. Supposedly, the world no longer
considered American military power as infallible, and as a consequence, the American authority had to be asserted which led to an increase of the military budget.

Like in the 1970s, the 1980s provided stagnation and a disillusioned public that turned more and more to entertainment. Ronald Reagan was elected, and an anti-nuclear movement emerged, but the national protest did not grow as strong as in the 1960s, neither did the press pay attention to them (Zinn, 2005: 601-630). Furthermore, nationalist feelings had never been as strong, and together with the cold war atmosphere, these feelings justified a further enlargement of military spending. In short, the 1970s and 1980s were a period of restoration in which America’s military power held a prominent place. Furthermore, the press portrayed many of the revolts as useless by spending as few broadcasting time on them as possible, and to guarantee America’s unity, the enemy was situated outside of the U.S.; until 1989, the communists were considered the biggest threat to national security.

Zinn (2005: 643-674) goes on by telling that after the fall of the Berlin wall a new reason for the high military expenses needed to be found, and America changed its aim towards the Middle East where dictator Saddam Hussein supplied a solid justification for foreign intervention. In 1991, the Gulf War started and the American public was convinced a reign of democracy was shipped towards the Middle East. In reality, all wars are encouraged by prospects of a larger fortune, and this war was no different: oil was the real reason for the emergence of the war, and despite the use of terms like ‘smart bombs’ and ‘surgical strike’, the war was not without casualties either. In the 1990s, more invasions followed such as, for instance, the intervention in Somalia or the war in Kosovo. However, two recurrent themes can be discovered if these interferences are analysed. First of all, the public is always more focused on the American casualties than on the other victims as if the lives of the American soldiers are somehow superior. A second theme is partiality; the American army did not interfere with countries befriended by the American government, regardless how dubious their stance towards human rights was. For example, the U.S. did not intervene in either Rwanda or Bosnia (Zinn, 2005: 655).

To sum up, it may be said that the sixties created a new consciousness which dared to critique the government and its decisions. Moreover, throughout the later ages, some of this
consciousness still shines through in certain works of art, certain films and other forms of entertainment. Nevertheless, after the sixties a restoration movement became clear, and the status-quo was reaffirmed. Also, a steady rise in military spending occurred, and by the end of 1997, ‘the US was selling more arms abroad than all other nations combined’ (Zinn, 2005: 656). The successive politicians were more interested in defending the interests of the establishment than of the public, and each one of them employed a tough foreign approach in which America’s stance as a world power had to be asserted over and over again.

2. The lure of the past

2.1 Going back to an earlier chapter: The Good War

Throughout the periods mentioned above, the production of the WWII film remained steady with the exception of the end of the 1970s and 1980s which saw a rise in Vietnam war movies which temporarily reduced the production of WWII motion pictures. The WWII genre was developed as early as 1939, with the beginning of WWII, and it underwent a lot of changes (which are discussed in 2.2 with the evolution of the genre). One might pose the question why WWII has more appeal than for instance the Civil War (1861-1865), the First World War (1914-1918), the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1959-1975).

For one, the civil war was seen as a family war over material resources. In that sense, the enemy was situated within America’s borders; it was a matter of us versus us and thus could not truly be glorified (Basinger, 2003: 74-75). The following war, WWI, was not suited for this purpose either since WWI is often seen as a failure. WWI was supposed to ‘make the world safe for democracy and it didn’t’ (Basinger, 2003: 77). Another war was needed in order to establish this goal: WWII. As argued by Basinger (2003: 82-83), WWI is often portrayed as the war in which youth was wasted and which led either to disillusionment or avid pacifism. WWII, by contrast, symbolizes unity and the need to fight a common enemy, the Nazis, in order to destroy fascism.
Once and for all. Another reason why WWI is unsuitable to be ‘The Good War’ is its focus. WWI is concerned with the role of Europe, and American interference is rarely depicted in WWI movies. Rather, WWI films mostly stage French and British soldiers instead of American troops. In contrast, WWII centres America and teaches us how the latter made order out of chaos.

Once the WWII genre was established, there was no need to make a new format for the Korean War; the two wars were largely compatible because both wars were ‘won’ by America. As Basinger (2003: 160) clarifies: ‘in many ways, the Korean combat film is the WWII combat film set in Korea’ which means that the pacifist undertone of WWI films is absent and that American victory is emphasised. Nonetheless, The Korean War is only a short interruption in the WWII genre process. After The Korean Conflict, the focus shifts to the production of WWII films once more, and The Korean War is largely forgotten. This Korean interruption, however, already hints towards the subversive attitude of the public, that was to emerge in the Vietnam War since WWII veterans were slightly discontent having to fight in another war so soon (Basinger, 2003: 167-170).

After the Korean War, the failure of Vietnam followed, captured by live-cameras and 24/7 broadcasting. This live footage made sure no Vietnam films appeared during the Vietnam War, because everyone already had a clear image of the war, and the films would have inevitably been exposed as pure fiction compared to the raw images on TV (Basinger, 2003: 182). The Vietnam War was also considered to be a war lost by the US, and, particularly with regard to WWII, the US army retained little of its former glory.

Despite the frequent portrayal of WWII as the Good War, one should not put all WWII films in the same category. WWII films often teach us what it means to be an American, but this can be a good or a bad thing. WWII films can be used to criticize certain political attitudes and often reflect a variety of different ideologies. This interplay between critique and affirmation of the American identity is closely related to the WWII genre evolution. As (2.2) will attempt to demonstrate, the genre is first established and then subverted. What is more, the subversion is closely connected to the change in attitudes towards Americanism.
2.2 The evolution of the WWII war film

Jeanine Basinger (2003: 111-198) distinguishes five different phases in the evolution of the WWII films.

In the first wave, from 1939 until 1943, the basic definition of the WWII film is established (Basinger, 2003: 111). In that period, people received weekly newsreels, but these were largely censored. The WWII movies would play along with this feed of images, and the audiences would have their imaginative picture of the war, created by motion pictures, verified by the newsreels. Through this mechanism of association a blurring of reality and the filmed version of reality occurred since the WWII image audiences constructed was based on both their experiences with real WWII footage and the portrayal of WWII in Hollywood films. Moreover, the first WWII movies already had a patriotic tint. Not unlike propaganda, they sought to make clear the necessity of this war.

The second wave coincides with the last two years of the war, from 1943 until 1945 (Basinger, 2003: 111-139). American citizens were already accustomed to the WWII conventions and now a visual shorthand could be used; this visual shorthand would mean certain elements would not need further explanation. For instance, the audience would already be familiar with the portrayal of the typical American unit as a melting pot, and they would not question its appearance. Already, a sort of self-consciousness is present which is necessary to turn the story of WWII into a myth or legend, but the war is still an every-day experience, and thus the historical truth of the material is not violated; the realism of the films is still based on what happened during the war.

Introduced by the end of the Second World War, the third wave is characterized by a glorification of the subject (Basinger, 2003: 140-170). WWII had to be closed off, and its justification had to be anchored within certain memorial artefacts such as WWII films. According to Thomas Elsaesser (cited by Poole, 2003: 215) cinema is a ‘memorial repository of history’ which implies that the creation of WWII films at the end of the way is a way to understand and justify WWII. By recording war in films, people have the feeling they can ‘resolve the war, finish it off once and for all.’ (Basinger, 2003: 140). This recording also generates a shift from WWII as part of the
individual memory to the cultural memory, two terms which will be explained in 4.1 (Assmann, 2008). As part of the cultural memory, WWII is now seen from a specific American perspective, and historical facts blur in favour of myth, a process which will also be explained in 4.1.

This recording of WWII was cut short with the beginning of the Korean War when WWII films were designed not to reflect upon the war just ended, but to instil patriotic fervour towards the Korean War yet to win. The WWII film was now to address certain contemporary concerns such as the threat of communism. Moreover, the Korean War made war movies more popular than ever, because cameras were still too unwieldy and could not be carried onto the battle field, and thus no live footage could be delivered. During the Korean War, the WWII movie became more down-to-earth. Instead of the justification of the ‘why we fight’ of the beginning of the third wave, we now learn the perils of common soldiers, fallible humans who learn how to survive. In portraying the WWII soldier as a fallible human, it is shown that ordinary men have what it takes to win a war. This transition from the glorification of the G.I. to the G.I. as a common citizen is closely connected with the different function of the WWII films. As mentioned before, after WWII people had the need to record their experiences in order to secure them in the cultural memory. With The Korean War emerging, however, American citizens needed to be motivated to fight for their country, and thus the characters of the WWII were fallible human beings instead of distant heroes because the former made identification between the fictional characters and the audience easier.

The third wave also had the challenge of forging an alliance between actual war veterans and those who have only experienced it through the mediation of television/film. As a consequence, the films became more and more a mix between reality, based on the real WWII news reels, and fiction, founded on the WWII films appearing during the war; the movies of the third wave both made an appeal to the experiences of the war veterans and to the knowledge of the genre conventions by those who stayed at home. This union allowed for a displacement of fact with myth as the real images are replaced by film images, even for the war veterans. This process is described by Assmann (2008) once more when he discusses the forming of identity which is concerned with cultural memory. Cultural memory implies a shared past and, in this case, a shared American past. This common American past is enforced by the community that depends on
processes of dissociation and association. On the one hand, the community wants to dissociate itself from other groups. On the other hand, it needs to have a shared identity on which members can rely to indicate they belong to that community. The latter dynamics can explain why even war veterans rely on the constructed past rather than on their own experiences; in accepting the images instilled in cultural memory, the veterans indicate they ‘belong’ to the group and adhere to its common identity.

The early 1960s is the beginning of the fourth wave in which this process is completed and reality is completely replaced by the community’s remembered past and thus common identity (Basinger, 2003: 170-181). This period is also the era of the epic combat films; key films appeared in the first half, but the epic mode continued until even the 1970s. The 1960s is also the period in which our journey starts since myth, the filmed replica of reality, is now present in the films, and we can begin to study the attitudes which gave rise to such depictions. Furthermore, the fourth wave is characterized by the introduction of the cinemascope, a technological advancement fitting the epic character of the movies perfectly. Another technological benefit of the 1960s is the use of colour, yet most epic movies continued to work with black and white for the sake of providing an air of authenticity. WWII had been mediated through black and white newsreels, and thus the use of black and white gives the audience a feeling of objectivity. Moreover, colour was mostly used in entertainment films, and thus films employing the colour spectrum unconsciously sent out the message ‘this is just a film’, whereas black and white movies breached the distance and closely involved the public with the events on screen by making them believe ‘this is real’.

Basinger’s (2003: 181-198) fifth wave has its climax in the 1970s with the end of the Vietnam War. Unlike the Korean War, no Vietnam Combat films emerge (because who needed it with 24/7 broadcasts?). Instead, the WWII film is used to offer critique on what happened during the Vietnam War. In this era, a genre inversion takes place in which the familiar characteristics of the WWII genre are either used in order to critique what used to constitute Americanism or they are completely destroyed. This inversion entails a questioning of former beliefs. For instance, America is shown to be just as ‘evil’ as the Nazis. This new view is not surprising since ‘the war in Vietnam
was present as a kind of insane combat film, running continuously night after night, on the evening news. The cast was always the same, and the events were endlessly repeated. There were heroes and villains, but they all seemed to be on the same side.’ (Basinger, 2003: 21)

The inversion started in the middle of the sixties, and in a way, epic films of the fourth wave were already accompanied by their completely opposite. This dynamic can be linked with the emergence of the anti-war movement, and thus, just like the birth of the WWII combat film, its inversion is linked to a historical event. The WWII genre was inspired by WWII, while its inversion was inspired by the countermovement of Vietnam.

Along with inversion, forms like parody, satire and comedy came to be associated with the WWII genre as well, culminating in the creation of a particular kind of ‘dirty group' movies, such as, for example, The Dirty Dozen (Aldrich, 1967) and Kelly's Heroes (Hutton, 1970). In these movies, an ambiguous world is presented in shades of grey. There is no longer a good and bad side. Moreover, the American government is often shown as corrupt. Nonetheless, these movies are still box-office-hits, and thus an entertainment value is also present.

Although Basinger (2003) stops her overview after the fifth wave, I would like to discern two more waves. After the Vietnam War in 1975, a rather conservative trend is setting in. No great protest groups emerge anymore, and this phase is characterized by pessimism in the wake of the oil crises. In such atmosphere, most films revived the myth of The Good War as a means of uniting the nation once more, and increasingly, with an eye to The Gulf War at the end of the 1980s, the WWII film began to be used as propaganda, which is reminiscent of the epic war movies in the 1960s. Thus, from mid-1970s until after The Gulf War, a sixth wave is evident in which most characteristics of the fourth wave are repeated. However, unlike the fourth wave which had a strong countermovement in the simultaneous fifth wave, the sixth wave remains as the main filmic discourse without a strong counter-reaction.

After The Gulf War, no strong disappointment was noticeable as was the case after Vietnam, even though once again there was no real winner. Even so, politicians such as George H.W. Bush senior believed that ‘the spectre of Vietnam [had] been buried forever in the desert sands of the Arabian peninsula’ (Bush Senior, 1991, as cited in Zinn, 2005: 600). Two reasons why
The Gulf War was not seen as a great fiasco are its short duration (a mere three weeks) and its few casualties on the American side (a few hundred) (Zinn, 2003: 2nd paragraph). Consequently, no genre inversion appeared such as during The Vietnam War which means the American values were not as thoroughly questioned and few variations on the traditional WWII genre features (discussed in 3.2.4) occur. We do see a new tendency of realistic violence in the movies of the 1990s and notably in Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998). While earlier movies did not pay as much attention to the realistic depiction of battle scenes and wounds as long as the overall mood of the war experience was depicted, *Saving Private Ryan* provides a very detailed depiction of its battles, in which no gore is spared.

To sum up, while Basinger (2003) identifies five waves, we will focus our analysis on wave four and five. Wave four stages epic films, and wave five inverts the values wave four presents. These waves are of main importance because both the genre conventions are already established and the fourth wave coincides with The Vietnam War, and I seek to investigate the influence of The Vietnam War on the evolution of the combat film. Moreover, in wave four, the creation of a common American identity is already completed with a replacement of reality with the ‘remembered past’. This remembered past is no longer founded on true experience, but on how the nation would like to portray itself, and thus it is situated in the area of myth. Another one of my aims will be to debunk certain myths which consistently appear in certain Hollywood films.

I have added two more waves to Basinger’s oversight. Wave six which is a repetition of wave four, but without its strong counteraction and wave seven, in which violence comes to be represented more realistically than before and because of the distance between The Second World War and the present, the films are even more glorious than those of the ‘60s. These waves will also play a role in the subsequent discussion because wave six ought to show similar characteristics as wave four, but with increased technological means to depict the glory of WWII and because wave seven takes place right after The Gulf War and it is thus interesting to see how a war not perceived as a failure (as with Vietnam) contributes to the depiction of The Good War.
3. The past and its portrayal

3.1 Myth and history

In order to explore how myths can arise, we ought to look at the relationship between memory and history first as described by Jan Assmann (2008: 109-118); history implies a certain progression of knowledge since historians try to unravel as much facts about the past, whereas memory always implies a forming of identity. History is reconstructed by archaeologists and historians who constantly discover new artefacts and sources to adjust their view of the past. As such, they gain a more thorough understanding and try to form a complete picture. This procedure is the opposite of the process of memory. The human mind is limited in its scope and thus memory always involves forgetting. The more distance from the facts, the more forgetting is entailed. What’s more, we forget the matters that lie ‘outside the horizon of the relevant’ (Assmann, 2008: 112), the relevant being everything which corresponds to the group’s values. Memory thus has a particular perspective and supports the forming of memory as certain historical events are used to fit the image the group wants to project. This characteristic of memory allows for myths to emerge since not the past as such is remembered, but only a certain vision of the past.

Assmann (2008: 109-110) claims that memory can be divided into three different categories: the individual memory, the communicative memory and the cultural memory. On the individual level, memory is merely ‘a matter of the neuro-mental system’ (Assmann, 2008: 109). It is the remembering of the specific events we experienced throughout our lifetime. The second level, the communicative, involves social interaction. The communicative memory is shared by a particular community or group and is revived in communication. The cultural memory is in a subcategory of the communicative memory, but distinguishes itself by its institutionalization. These institutions preserve the cultural memory shared by the group.

Memory can be objectified on the three afore-mentioned levels (Assmann, 2008: 110-112). This means that a material object is used as a reminder of a former event. The object itself does not ‘contain’ the specific event in se, but it serves as a trigger. For instance, Proust’s famous
Madeleine reminds him of the time he spent with his aunt in Combray, a village in France. On the cultural level, objects are especially important since groups create a particular memory for themselves and use images, monuments, libraries and many more as reminders. These objects help the cultural memory to persist through time, in contrast to the communicative memory, which has a life-span of approximately only three generations. The cultural memory is constantly revived in certain memorials, whereas the communicative memory only exists in daily discourse and dies when the people using this discourse depart.

In relation to this time-span, we can say that the individual and communicative memory concern themselves with both the recent past and the more remote past. The most remote past, however, the past regarding the foundational origins of a certain group, is captured in the cultural memory. Cultural memory is founded on fixed points in the past and because it deals with the most remote past, forgetting plays a part and the line between history and myth fades away (Assmann, 2008: 112-113).

Here we might want to distinguish between two senses of myth as specified by the Oxford dictionary (2005: 1164):

1. As a traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.
2. As a widely held but false belief or idea.

It is not a coincidence that the first definition focuses on the most remote past as a point of departure and identity formation, while the second definition posits the blurring of fact and fiction. After all, most myths concern matters explaining the origin of a group and its major achievements. These events belong to the most remote past which is mostly forgotten, and only those elements relevant to the forming of the group identity are remembered and embroidered. The truth of the events is no longer questioned, and thus the embellished version of the events is often not the historically correct one, yet it is held true by the members of the community.
Jan Assmann (2008: 112) also adds ‘Not the past as such, as is investigated and reconstructed by archaeologists and historians, counts for the cultural memory, but only the past as it is remembered’. I do not quite agree with this statement since I believe even historians cannot reconstruct ‘the past as such’. They, too, have a specific angle from which to explore the past, and sometimes historians omit important facts as well. For instance, the early history books designed for American school children failed to take into account the history of the Native Americans, exploring history only from the Western perspective. Nevertheless, I do support Assmann’s thesis that there is a crucial difference between knowledge and memory. Knowledge has an objective claim and is accumulative. Memory, on the other hand, is important in the construction of a group’s identity and is thus highly specific to that group and its values.
3.2 Form as a mould?

As mentioned before, material objects, of which images are a subcategory, can be used to revive a cultural memory and, as Paul Grainge (2003: 1) asserts ‘cinema is central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life’. With this statement, he refers to the fact that memory is never something static, but suggests a dialogic relationship between the past and the present. Each era reinterprets the past with respect to the events in the present. For instance, a WWII movie of the 1960s will emphasize different elements than a WWII film of the 1970s, as indicated in my earlier discussion of the different politics of the two periods.

With regard to memory mediations by film, it is particularly crucial to take a look at the Hollywood industry and its genre conventions, especially those of the Western and melodrama.

3.2.1 The studio system

In his book *Hollywood genres: formulas, filmmaking, and the studio system* (1981: 4), Thomas Schatz argues that Hollywood’s studio system is aimed at making profit and thus that a film’s quality only becomes of secondary importance. At the one hand, Hollywood tries to reach as massive an audience as possible. At the other hand, Hollywood tries to create ‘sociological events’, a term coined by François Truffaut (Schatz, 1981: 4) by which he means that a film tries to capitalize on the public’s desires in order to sell the product.

This influence of the audience’s desires demonstrates the reciprocal relationship which consists between the audience and the creation of a finished product. The audience wishes for a film to be sufficiently innovative, but it also wants a film to be recognisable and based upon previous conventions. They influence the creation of a movie because of the commercial feedback system; if a film has little or no success, it will not serve as a model for further films. As such, the audience decides which film types will be produced, even though the spectators cannot provide direct creative feedback (Schatz, 1981: 5-6).
Because of the reliance upon previous successes, the majority of Hollywood’s productions consists of genre films; motion pictures with familiar characters and patterns of action which have proved to produce box-office hits in the past and which formulas have been repeated. This is a cumulative process by which the public is familiarized with the conventions through recurrent exposure (Schatz, 1981: 6-7, 11-13).

Two of the major genres which will be important in our discussion are the Western and Melodrama. The Western, because of its insistence on indeterminate space, an impulse which we will find in war movies as well and Melodrama because of its tendency to present the world in black-and-white and its focus on the virtuous protagonist subjected to unjust social circumstances.

3.2.2 The Western

As well as the characters and storyline, conflict in genre films is conventionalized, and we can distinguish between two groups on the basis of their portrayal of this conflict. Certain genres depict conflict as a consequence of the clashing values or actions of the characters, whereas others depict conflict as inherent to the surroundings. The latter group are called genres of determinate space, of which the Western is one, while the former contain the genres of indeterminate space (Schatz, 1981: 26-29).

Determinate space entails that ‘fundamental values are in a state of sustained conflict’ (Schatz, 1981: 27). These values are determinate as is the environment in which the conflict takes place. For instance, a Western is typically situated in the era after the Civil War and its setting is the Wild West. The clashing values are usually savagery and civilization. Moreover, the struggle generally ensues from a want of control of a particular space.

By contrast, indeterminate space deals with conflict results from characters’ contrasting views, and the setting is mostly civilized so no struggle over the environment arises because it is ideologically stable and no contrasting views are inherent to the setting. An example of
indeterminate space is the family melodrama which draws upon the conflict of a virtuous individual and the larger society.

This distinction between determinate and indeterminate space shows why the combat movie is conceptualized in a similar way as the Western. Like the Western, two groups struggle for control over the environment. In the WWII combat film, Nazis and Allies battle over Europe. What is more, the value system is dependent on the environment. The war setting implies, for example, that a soldier can shoot an enemy at sight or that the death of a colleague needs to be revenged.

### 3.2.3 Melodrama

#### a) Popular entertainment and melodrama

Melodrama in its widest sense is a movie which is accompanied by music. Using this broad definition (Schatz, 1981: 221), any Hollywood movie can be described as melodramatic. Melodrama can also be defined more narrowly as a mode in which a Manichean plot, hyperbolic speeches, affective scenes and strong visual imagery is present (Poole and Saal, 2008). Concretely, this entails:

(a) A strong contrast between right and wrong. Melodrama typically starts with the depiction of a ‘locus of innocence’ (Poole & Saal, 2008:2) which is threatened by opposing social forces. These social forces need to be destroyed, and melodrama strives to restore the initial locus of innocence.

(b) Language and gestures characterized by exaggeration

(c) Scenes with an emotional impact, frequently foregrounding basic sentimental values such as home and family

(d) Visual images are used to play on the affect

With respect to feature (a), Melodrama always tries to solve the moral ambiguities in a straightforward way and thus democratic way because it is understandable for everyone. In solving
these contradictions, melodrama can either have a subversive or escapist aim. Elsaesser discusses these aims in *Tales of Sound and Fury* (1972: 70-72) in which he first traces the origins of Melodrama to the context of the French revolution and its aftermath when melodrama represented the values of the bourgeoisie in contrast with the ‘remnants of feudalism’ (Elsaesser, 1972: 70). These pre-revolutionary melodramas portray the bourgeoisie in its militant phase, and the idealism of the melodramatic protagonist is contrasted with the values of the feudal class which is superior economically and politically. The post-revolutionary, Restoration melodramas treat the same theme. However, the emphasis no longer lies on the suffering of the protagonist and his or her tragic ending, but on the happy ending in which good prevails over evil. Bearing this distinction in mind, the pre-revolutionary melodrama is notably subversive since it seeks to portray the corrupt social forces that lead to the fall of the protagonist, whereas the post-revolutionary melodrama is escapist entertainment which presents the audience with a feel-good ending. If we connect these melodramas with contemporary melodramas, we can see the same distinction. Melodramas which focus on the ‘mileage’ of the protagonist (Elsaesser, 1972:71) usually have a subversive aim since the protagonist fails to restore the initial locus of innocence and thus shows the destructiveness of the opposing social forces. Melodramas with a happy end, on the other hand, are usually escapist because they provide the public with a feel-good experience instead of investigating the structures which led to the initial downfall of the protagonist.

**b) Variation in the war film**

Melodrama is often seen as a purely feminine mode since melodrama plays on the affect and is often associated with women’s weepies, yet melodrama can also appear in war films, which have transformed the melodramatic characteristics to fit their setting. In adapting Linda Williams’s definition of melodramatic features to the war film, Soltysik (2008: 167-181) introduces these specific features to us:
(a) The locus of innocence is not the actual home of the soldiers, but the moments when the soldiers bond with each other. This ‘band of brothers’ is threatened by war violence. Closely connected to this tight bonding is the rite of passing in which the soldier needs to prove his virtue in combat (Soltysik, 2008: 170-172).

(b) The virtuous side needs to be situated with the soldiers (and thus the nation as a whole) in which the suffering is evidence of their virtue. The suffering is made visible to increase the solidarity with the character. The character remains sympathetic unless they do something cruel or unjust. Moreover, whenever melodrama is used in the war film the strong contrast between the American GI and their enemy is highlighted (Soltysik, 2008: 173-174).

(c) Often the main character dies and elicits change in the lives of the survivors. The protagonist’s death is redemptive for the survivors because the protagonist rarely dies without a cause. For instance, the protagonist might have died to save the life of a fellow soldier. As such, death is shown to be meaningful, and the meaningless of war is negated. More general, one might say that deaths are rarely meaningless in combat melodrama, and three main strategies deem deaths significant (Soltysik: 179-181) :

1. Death can be justified by abstract ideals such as, for example, to safeguard democracy. But since The Vietnam War this strategy has been the least popular.

2. A character can die to protect his home country and family, his ‘true’ safe haven. Paradoxically, whenever the home country is referred to, this also has an anti-war tint because the home country and family often prevents a soldier to sacrifice himself for the greater good.

3. Death can also be meaningful in terms of the aforementioned ‘band of brothers’. This method is mostly used in Vietnam War films because the home front is not unambiguously innocent. Nearing the end of The Vietnam War, a majority of the American citizens was critical towards their government, believing it to be corrupt and unreliable. Thus, the true
locus of innocence is no longer the home front, but the soldier unit, and a character might sacrifice himself to protect his comrades.

3.2.4 Recurring features of the WWII combat film

Before discussing the recurring traits, one should ask what constitutes a WWII combat film. To answer that question, I turned to Basinger (2003: 11-13) who excludes WWII films not involving active combat such as:

a. The wartime films which depict the non-combatant zone during WWII
b. The military background films which only use WWII as a décor, but the focus of the story is elsewhere
c. The training camp films in which the men never actually arrive at the front, but are prepared for combat.
d. The military bibliography in which the focus lies on a great figure of history and his personal sacrifices.

If we define the WWII combat film in positive terms, we can state that it should take place in the actual battle zones of WWII; it should focus on the individual soldiers rather than historical figures, and it should depict actual combat.

WWII films are all different, but we can make a general classification based on their scenery: land, sea and air (Basinger, 2003: 17-20). Films including the latter two, sea and air, show a mechanized war with planes and submarines, whereas WWII films focussing on the land troops portray the old war with soldiers still travelling by foot. Moreover, the WWII which is enacted on land displays more combat because the soldiers cannot simply return to a safe haven such as in aerial films nor do they have secluded domestic spaces such as on the boat or in the submarine. For this reason, we are almost going to analyse films enacted on land exclusively since we seek to investigate the American myths surrounding the war. The only exception to this selection is the film *Midway* (Smight, 1976) which is a typically naval film, but I wanted to include a WWII combat film which
narrated the conflict with Japan as well and *Midway* (Smight, 1976) was one of the only box-office-hits taking place in the Pacific.

Now that we have delineated the group of WWII films, we might wonder if they have any common traits, and indeed, Basinger (2003: 14-17) distinguishes a series of characteristics. However, one cannot assume that all of these features occur in the WWII movies, nor was there ever one quintessential WWII genre film which contained them all. Rather, most WWII films use a selection of the characteristics.

General features include the staging of the hero, the combat unit as a tight bond and a clear military objective. More particular features are situated in two main classes. First of all, the WWII combat film encompasses the reoccurring traits of the combat film before WWII, and secondly, the WWII combat film has specific characteristics of its own.

The 'old' reoccurring features (Basinger, 2003:26-27):

a. A juxtaposition between two characters. In earlier times, this was called the Quirt/Flagg relationship, named after the two characters that started the tradition of an adversary relationship. Usually, the two antagonists have an illegal fistfight which they both deny once the authorities call them to account for the disturbance.

b. In the opening scenes, the audience is shortly introduced to the historical events which inspired the film, and in the closing scenes, pictures of the participants appear along with their military function. This list gave credibility to the film and brought a certain homage to the characters (and thus the soldiers they represented).

c. A character who expresses his hostile feelings towards war and mentions he will not reenlist the next time.

d. A character (usually a pilot) who sacrifices himself for the greater good.

e. A new person in charge puts the soldiers through a tough inspection test.

f. The last stand which is the portrayal of a group of men who persevere despite the strong resistance of the enemy. The message of these last stands is clear: we might be on the losing side, but we hold on, and losers who never give up will win in the end.
g. An important character dies, and a poetic burial at night follows.

h. Sometimes a little mascot is introduced. This can be a child or a pet to which one of the characters becomes emotionally attached.

i. The final scene of the film which is depicted as Armageddon and in which all the characters die. This total destruction represents the battles lost by the Americans.

j. The military unit is rendered as a microcosm of the melting pot. The characters have different geographical, social and intellectual backgrounds and form a unity despite their differences. Moreover, because of their various backgrounds, they possess different qualities which all help in the acquisition of the military objective. Usually, archetypal roles appear in the military group as well (Basinger, 2003: 48-52):

- The dead father figure who represents the loss of the safe haven.
- The hero who is adapted perfectly to survive in combat and who can guide his fellow colleagues to safety as well.
- The hero’s antagonist who demonstrates the change-of-attitude which is necessary to win the war.
- The old man who might form a replacement for the dead father figure and the youngster who must undergo the rite of passage to be initiated in battle.
- The immigrant who represents the racial diversity of America.
- The pacifist who insists on the abandoning of combat. This figure rarely occurs in WWII films, because these films are mostly about the glorious fervour of military action.
- The comedy relief who performs unwarlike deeds.

Furthermore, these roles seem to have a fixed order of death (Basinger, 2003: 52). First the leader (and father figure) dies. Then the minorities follow before the weak and the mentally sensitive pass away.

In addition to these old traits, the WWII war film has innovations of its own. For one, WWII is seen as a total war. While the infantry action in World War I occurred in the clear designated
space of the trenches with the possibility of return to the non-combatant zone where one might find romance and food, World War II is ever present. To escape conflict, the soldier either has to return to his home country or he has to die. Consequently, war affects everyone: women, men and children alike.

Another feature is the educational aim of certain WWII movies. The audience learns how to act in combat. For instance, the spectators learn the importance of military training. Moreover, more than in the combat film before WWII, the pioneer spirit is present. The soldiers venture to strange territory, yet manage to conquer it.

### 3.3 The most important myths


#### 3.3.1 The reasons for the war were clear and straightforward

In a more simplified version of the war, one might say the war started because of the emergence of dictators who were out to destroy democracy and capitalism. In Europe, Hitler and Mussolini represented the image of ‘the strong man’ and in Japan, emperor Hirohito came forward. However, at that time, the imminent threat of these dictators was not at all clear. Neither was there a precise time to provide resistance.

To offer a more complete picture of WWII and more specifically of its onset, we need to go back as far as the French revolution. In 1789, a new way of governing emerged: the liberal democracy. This new structure collided with the old view that a nation needed strong men in order to thrive.

In the 19th century, Europe faced the emergence of several nations and the influence of social Darwinism. Even though luxury and well-being increased, nations feared for their existence
and applied the ‘survival of the fittest’ strategy in which national expansion was seen as the key to survival.

This national aggressiveness continued into the 20th century and the struggle between liberal democracy and authoritarianism remained open; people tended to choose the strong men in times of shortage and voted for democracy in the good times.

After World War I, Europe and the east were further destabilized. In the east, the Ottoman empire fell apart, and independent countries such as Iraq appeared. Furthermore, the Czarist Empire in Russia was replaced by the Bolshevik reign which isolated them from Western countries who distrusted communism. In Western Europe, the German empire ended, and Kaiser Wilhelm II was abdicated in 1917. WWI also had repercussions for Germany’s military; its armed forces were reduced, and it was forced to demilitarize the Rhineland, transforming the latter into a buffer zone. Versailles also forced Germany to sustain the loans that Britain and France had endured during WWI. Nonetheless, Germany remained strong. They still had their industrial resources in the Ruhr, and thanks to the Dawes plan, reparations had also started in Germany. Unfortunately, the military and administrative elite (the freikorps men) were unsatisfied with the consequences of Versailles and attempted to topple the democratic Weimar republic. They succeeded in 1933, when the confidence of ordinary Germans in the capitalist democracy had plummeted due to the devaluation of currency in 1922-1923 and the following depression in 1930. This led some of the Germans to believe that international conquest was the way to financial safety.

The Nazi movement did well in the elections of 1930. At first, Hitler came into power by democratic means. Once he had achieved that goal he demanded emergency dictatorial powers and transformed Germany into a one-party state. Hitler, a fierce nationalist, excelled in two areas. He was first of all a master politician who won over most of the audience, and he was a dedicated soldier. Moreover, he was a follower of Social Darwinism which preached that ‘life is war’ (Adams, 1994:32). He was convinced that Germany as a nation could be so much more and would definitely be the fittest were it ever to come to a fight.

Italy was another country dissatisfied with the outcome of Versailles. With its 600,000 casualties and depressed economy, it had expected a bigger share in the European cake. This
dissatisfaction combined with strikes within the country convinced most that communism would seize Italy. Partly because of these developments, a strong man was elected in Italy. In 1922, Mussolini, Il Duce, rose to power. He never had absolute power (king Victor Emmanuel III and pope Pius XI competed with him), but he managed to introduce fascism. Mussolini controlled the media and made many believe in Italy’s façade of collective strength and direction. In reality, many Italians were living in poverty. Nevertheless, fascism appeared successful to the other Europeans, and Hitler decided to copy many fascist techniques during his rise in Germany.

On the other side of the world, Japan was also dissatisfied. Earlier it had attempted to gather resources from neighbouring country China like all the other European countries, but the US strongly opposed to Japanese involvement in China. The US had always been an advocate of the Open Door policy which favoured equal marketing opportunities for all countries. In this perspective, the last thing the US wanted was China to become economically dependent on imperialist Japan.

In 1904-1905, Japan had gained the Chinese province Manchuria by defeating Russia, but after WWI, Versailles did not give them what they had hoped for, and Japanese involvement in China was further hindered. In addition, Japan had asked for a statement which supported racial equality, but this statement was rejected. Japan was not considered equal to the Western nations. In 1921-1922, the Japanese fleet was cut to three-fifths the size of the American and British. In a sense, this reduction was justified since Japan only needed ships in the Pacific. Japanese presence in other oceans was not necessary. Nevertheless, the reduction was experienced as a slap in the face. What is more, from 1922 to 1924, a series of acts were passed, declaring Japanese ineligible for American citizenship, denying the Japanese the right to own property and banning Asian immigration altogether. A stronger racial statement could not have been made. When in 1930 the Smooth-Hawley tariff (which raised the barriers on imported goods to 50 percent) was made active, Japan could not rely on export anymore to obtain their resources. Military conquest seemed to be the only way to self-sufficiency.

Ultimately, Japan engaged in an alliance with the other ‘victims’ of Versailles, Germany and Italy, forming the Axis. However, one may not see it as purely black and white. Neither of the Axis
are the embodiment of pure evil; most of its citizens chose the ‘strong man’ to guarantee economic welfare, but neither the German, Italian or Japanese citizens could have predicted the authoritarian regimes that unfolded in their countries.

3.3.2 Myth of appeasement: Europe failed to act which caused Hitler’s success

In the light of the evolution sketched above, one might ask why Europe (especially France and Britain) did not act sooner than 1939. In the folklore version of WWII, all too often the Europeans are portrayed as weak and unable to act. It is believed that they should have acted earlier, and maybe this is true. However, at that time Europe could not have acted sooner, and I will show that appeasement is not always a wrong approach to belligerent nations.

After WWI, France and Britain were severely weakened. France lost its key ally Russia and still had Germany on its borders. Britain’s economy had been terribly damaged; Britain had not factored in another war in its defence budget, and it had lost ally Japan. In these positions, it was not easy for them to act. Moreover, American fluctuating policy made it even harder to make a clear-cut decision.

At first, the American policy of isolationism was applied. There was a general air of disappointment in the country because the Americans had not been received as saviours during WWI. In WWI, Americans were too often seen as loud and vulgar intruders. This disillusion was even reinforced with the Wall Street crash of 1929:

*Americans had genuinely hoped for an era of peace and prosperity, but the unregulated free-marked system and their reluctance to be obligated abroad meant they couldn’t guide events in the direction they wanted.* (Adams, 1994:27)

The US policy was also guided by economic considerations. They were not always consistent towards aggressor nations which made it especially hard for France and Britain to decide whether to attack or not. For instance, in Europe the US continued to trade with dictators,
whereas the US urged for an embargo against Japan because the latter was seen as an economic threat, and after 1931, America was too preoccupied with the Pacific to be of any help to Britain and France.

Moreover, the impetus to act was stalled by a number of other factors. One of the factors was imperial Russia; Britain and France both feared Soviet ambitions. Some politicians were even sympathetic towards Hitler, hoping he would battle communism. Moreover, the stories of Nazi atrocities were hard to believe because Nazism had a façade of prosperity. In addition, Britain would be hypocritical to condemn the concentration camps in its beginning stages. These camps were originally detention centres for political prisoners. Britain too had used detention camps during the Boer War in South Africa. Only from 1942 onwards did the German concentration camps become loci of extermination.

Another gesture of hypocrisy would have been the hindering of Mussolini’s colonial interests in Africa. Italy attacked Abyssinia in 1934, but neither France nor Britain reacted since those countries had colonial interests in Africa too. Furthermore, France shared a border with Italy. Had it attacked Italy in 1934 the friendship between the two neighbouring countries would have ceased, and Italy would have attacked France (which happened later on in 1940 and only hastened France’s collapse). Britain and France did, however, issue economic sanctions against Italy. Unfortunately this had the unforeseen effect of driving Italy closer to Germany.

In 1936, Germany remilitarized the Rhineland, but neither the French nor the British generals felt they could win an offensive war. France still felt the repercussions of 1930’s Depression; there were no modern tanks or air force bombers present to launch an attack on Germany, and WWI was still so unpopular in France that draftees could not be kept in the military long enough to gain sufficient training. All these circumstances led to the concession during the Munich conference in September 1938. Both France and Britain felt they needed more time to prepare for an offensive war, and thus Hitler annexed the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia; the only other ally to guard Czechoslovakia’s borders was the Soviet Union, but as explained earlier, France and Britain were still distrustful towards communism.
In the light of the ‘passiveness’ of the 1930s, one can say the myth of appeasement is partly true. Partly, in the sense France and Britain did not fathom that Hitler needed the resources of conquered countries in order to continue his war, and thus they did not know the importance of immediate action. Partly also, because they did not act because they simply could not.

Moreover, the appeasement also had its limits. In 1939, France and Britain acted when Hitler invaded Poland, keeping their promise to guarantee the Polish borders. Furthermore, Hitler could only attack Poland because of the non-aggression act in 1939. Had Germany not been able to obtain neutrality from Soviet rival Russia, it would have never succeeded in its brute expansion, and British and French action might not have been necessary.

What is more, battle is not always the right course of action. When Japan attacked China and later on Pearl Harbour, America immediately reacted, assuming an Asian nation could be forced to back down only with violence. However, it was never Japan’s intention to attack America. It merely wanted racial equality and an opportunity to exploit China the way the Western nations had done for ages.

In short, the zero tolerance policy in Asia failed, and Japan fought back with increased strength just as appeasement had failed in Europe. With the benefit of hindsight we may judge the situation now, but at that time there were no easy formulas to prohibit a war on a world scale.

3.3.3 Myth of the clean and swift war

In contrast with WWI, the harm and suffering of WWII is often forgotten or pushed aside. One of the reasons for this conscious oblivion is the new method of Blitzkrieg or lightning attack that Hitler introduced in 1939 when he invaded Poland. This technique was soon imitated by the allies.

The Polish still had a traditional view on warfare, spreading out major groups of tanks in immobile defence positions. In contrast with these immovable mastodons, Hitler used the air defences of his Luftwaffe to quickly destroy the communication lines. After this first surge, he then
searched the Polish weak spots and concentrated his tank forces in one fast and effective cluster, breaking through Polish defences in record time and avoiding facing the bulk of the Polish troops head on. As such, the Germans managed to prohibit the massacre of WWI because the Polish troops were obliged to surrender after having been cut off from support.

Even though a war is never surgically clean, one might say that this use of technology and strategy is a progress in comparison to the massive man-to-man fights in the trenches of WWI. However, this mobile warfare only took place in the beginning stages of WWII. ‘Later the war transformed into a punishing grind-it-out war of attrition’ (Adams, 1994:44), which is not all that different from WWI.

The allies attempted to copy German techniques, and sometimes the allied forces managed to advance at a quick pace, avoiding mass slaughter. Nevertheless, these periods of fluid warfare were an exception, and WWII was largely a war of attrition in which many losses were suffered.

The ‘surgical thrust image’ of the war also needs to be modified because mass force was needed to break through German defensive positions (Adams, 1994:53). Some locations could simply not be conquered with the technique of the Blitzkrieg, and as the war progressed the worry about ‘collateral damage’ dwindled. A desensitization towards enemy suffering emerged, and sometimes the distinction between military and civilian targets was entirely erased.

Sometimes massive slaughter was purely a consequence of the inefficient material. For example, an area bombing only had a 50 percent chance of hitting ground within a quarter of a mile of the target under perfect conditions. If fog or rain hindered sight this was even less. Owing to this inaccurate aiming, at least 635,000 German civilians were killed in area bombings. Moreover, when planes hit military targets such as factories, docks, oil refineries, and so on, they destroyed the surrounding working-class houses (with inhabitants) as well.
3.3.4 Myth of disparity between British and German forces

Hitler had not anticipated a reaction from Britain in 1940, thinking the isle would employ a neutral stance. After the battle of Dunkirk, however, the British fully joined the continental war. At first they were outnumbered by the Luftwaffe, ‘and this led to the legend of ‘the few’ who supposedly saved Britain against enormous odds.’ (Adams, 1994:45). The reverse was true. After 1940, the British produced more fighter planes than Germany. What is more, they had technology far more sophisticated; The British had a radar warning system, managed to decipher the German enigma and had the benefit that the German planes were designed for close ground support. These planes were rather useless when fighting a country so far apart from the support bases. In terms of performance and range, the German air planes were no match for the British air force either.

Little truth lies in the myth of disparity, but the effort of British pilots should not be underestimated nonetheless; the forceful stance of Britain was one of the factors of Hitler’s defeat. Thanks to Britain’s reaction, Hitler now had a forceful enemy on the Western flank that received material assistance from America.

3.3.5 Myth of American heroism

From 1942 onwards, the US officially joined the war. Together with the invasion of Russia and the resistance of Britain, this is one of the factors that explains Hitler’s demise. In spite of this, we should not overrate America’s effort. One of the popular myths is the image of the American saviour and the American war as the only factor in Hitler’s defeat. This myth includes an overestimation of both the nature of the individual American private and the equipment the soldier used.
a) The American GI

American soldiers are sometimes seen as the best troops in the world. Allegedly, the GI had a clear ideological motivation and never gave up a fight. In juxtaposition with the Vietnam soldiers, WWII privates supposedly never had a mental break-down and could keep fighting without rest.

In reality, the American WWII soldier might have even been less motivated than the Vietnam soldier. One of the surveys showed that ‘only 5 percent of the enlisted men fought for idealistic reasons, such as a clear understanding of the threat to democracy posed by fascism.’ (Adams, 1994:88) In contrast, 15 percent of the Vietnam privates had an ideological dedication, fighting to destroy communism.

Nevertheless, the idea of the obedient and devoted WWII soldier might result from the lack of rebellion in the American army. Almost all GIs fought out of pragmatic reasons; the idea that ‘there was a job that needed to be done’ (Adams, 1994:88)

It is also a misunderstanding that nervous breakdowns are a phenomenon appearing only in Vietnam. The cruel nature of war always takes its toll on soldiers. The response to the atrocities they faced varied individually; some started ‘crying for their mothers, wetting and defecating themselves’ while others showed an ‘unreasonable jocularity’ (Adams, 1994: 101). Whatever their emotional response to the horror, the more they saw of it, the more likely they were to break down completely.

A number of influences caused these men to collapse. Army soldiers, for one, had feeling they were expendable. They were also stuck in a bureaucratic system which randomly transferred the soldiers to the places where they were needed, regardless of the soldier’s experience. Consequently, both rookies and veterans were disadvantaged. Rookies were thrown into combat without a decent preparation, and veterans could not return to the places where they had been previously stationed. Both ‘were thrown into a meat grinder, friendless and without time to adjust to their units.’ (Adams, 1994:98). Other soldiers were kept at the front too long. It is proven that 25 days is the maximum a soldier can bear. The private is then at the maximum of experience and
competence and should rest to avoid fatigue. In folklore myths, the cases of the ‘last stands’ are often glorified where GIs kept on fighting without rest, but no soldier can endure war that long without consequences.

Another factor which led to serious burnouts was the contradictions of army life. The privates faced a paradox; as an individual we are taught that killing is atrocious, but in war slaying the enemy is encouraged. Another contradiction was the conflict of loyalties; in order to be of use to their family, the GI had to stay alive. In order to be of use to their country they had be willing to die. All these doubts led to moral ambiguity; were they serving the right cause and whom should they be loyal to?

In addition, most of the above psychiatric casualties were seen as mommies’ boys due to the association between war and manhood. A popular view states that cowards break down and heroes do not, because while all feel fear, cowards are the ones that give in, and heroes are the ones that overcome it. Moreover, men who already had a stable mind were believed to become weathered veterans after their first contact with combat. Nothing could be less true, but these prejudices led most soldiers to hide their feelings, even after the war. They were afraid to be labelled as cowards or to be seen as ‘less a man’. This secrecy is partly the cause for the belief that nervous breakdowns only appeared in Vietnam because it was more foregrounded in that era.

The image of the US soldier was also moulded to fit a black-white view. GIs were juxtaposed with Germans, and thus everything the American private did had to be good and righteous compared to this reincarnation of evil. As with all Manichean beliefs, qualification is in order.

The Americans were by no means purely good. American privates were often sex depraved which led to rape, and the lack of sexual education caused the spread of venereal diseases. Furthermore, the American army wanted its troops sober and forbade alcohol. The result of this radical action was an overall obsession with obtaining liquor. Next to alcoholic abuse, consumption of pep pills occurred due to the lack of sleep some soldiers suffered.

American soldiers were also less respectful of the environment than European troops because they did not fight in their homeland. Moreover, some displayed ethnic aggression. 'Their
great loathing was for the Arabs, whom they met in Africa, and for Asians of the pacific region, but they even held the British and the French in contempt for their lack of consumer goods and modern gadgetry such as refrigerators.’ (Adams, 1994: 93). This aggressiveness might also be shown towards their own troops. Most officers, for instance, came out of special training schools and had less combat experience than the men they commanded. As a consequence, most of the GIs were enraged because they thought ‘their officers lacked leadership and fighting ability’ (Adams, 1994: 94)

As well as the conception good – evil, the antithesis Germany – America produced the idea of ‘the flexible and innovative American soldier’ versus the ‘hidebound Prussian fighting according to rigid heel-clicking dogmas’ (Adams, 1994:78). However, as already demonstrated, America’s bureaucratic system was not truly effective. America applied a top-down management which meant the higher levels handled matters that could have been best decided by subordinates and caused the individual soldier to be deprived of most of his initiative. Furthermore, the American methods were far from effective with their rigidity of categories. If a private was stationed in place A, it was hard to transfer them to spot B, even if there was a shortage in B and a profusion in A. In comparison, the Germans employed a more democratic system, including the private in decision-making so they felt more part of a team. Germany had also less red-tapeism, because their management was less centralized. Overall, the German system was more pliable with troops mobilized where they were needed.

b) The American war machine

The myth dictates that the entire American nation rallied to aid in the war against the Axis and that if citizens could not join the army, they helped in the production of arms. As such, the country was believed to be transformed into a unified beehive. The truth is less spectacular; not all the men fought and not all the women worked either. Only 25 percent of military personal has ever been in a battle zone. The other three-fourth were clerks, managers, workmen, and so on.
Moreover, only 8 percent of women were married to a militia man which meant that the most
sacrifices were made by unmarried (often young) Americans. The emancipation of women cannot
be overestimated as well. It is true that some women worked, but most of them were still
housewives; at no time did women represent more than two percent of the wartime machine.
Service for females was overall very unpopular because of some preconceptions; the media, for
example, patronized professional women and some Americans still thought among traditional
gender lines. These conservatives believed the only way females could contribute to the war was
by giving sexual favours to male militia personnel. Not only the preconceptions held women out of
the army office, but since women engaged mostly in clerical jobs, they filled vacancies otherwise
available to men. Woman were reluctant to fill those, because otherwise they would be sending a
male colleague to the battlefront.

Nevertheless the rallying exaggeration, the industrial wartime production remained
massive. However, the war machine did not always deliver ‘good’ gear. For instance, the cannon of
the Grant tank could only rotate 180 degrees, making half the battlefield inaccessible. Another
example is the use of sunglasses on GIs. The reflection of the sun made these soldiers extremely
visible to enemy snipers. In general, the American tanks were also weaker than the German ones
when it comes to throw power and armour thickness because, in harmony with the frontier spirit,
speed was emphasized at the expense of fire power and armour.

A last (and unforeseen) consequence of the war machine was a reliance on brute force
instead of finesse. Because of the profusion of guns and ammunition, soldiers were sometimes
encouraged to rely on shooting rather than on strategy.
3.3.6 Overestimation of the importance of D-day

Some Americans claim that D-day was an extraordinary display of American heroism and that the war could not have ended without this ‘American’ contribution, but one should see the larger picture when talking about the end of WWII.

First of all, Germany was already weakened. Great Britain had unexpectedly joined in the continental war and because of this bold move, Hitler had to take care of two fronts, West and East. This East front caused him considerable problems as well; Hitler had underestimated the massive distances he had to travel and the bitter weather circumstances. As a consequence, operation Barbarossa on June 22 1941 cost a lot of troops, and by June 1944, up to 70 percent of German troops was stationed in Russia.

On top of the heavy opposition in East and West, Hitler had already suffered great losses in the South as well, specifically in Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, while the Mediterranean resistance was building, British and American air raids diminished the industrial production of resources like oil and machine parts, destroyed part of Hitler’s defences and roused the Russian fighting spirit by displaying that democracies are far from powerless and can indeed riposte. All these campaigns show that the end of the war was not procured solely by American effort; in the East and South, Hitler had lost his stationary ground already.

Nonetheless, the Western front would indeed prove to be difficult to conquer, and we should acknowledge the American contribution. After all, a frontal attack would be needed in France, and without the American build-up of troops an invasion like D-day would have been doomed to fail. However, D-day cannot be considered the absolute end, because another battle took place in the Ardennes. During the Battle of the Bulge, Hitler spent the Wehrmacht’s last strength, and only then we can say Germany’s last defence was effectively destroyed.
3.3.7 Myth of equality

a) The myth of the fair draft

The WWII draft system is generally regarded to be more fair than the Vietnam draft system. This comparison is largely correct. Furthermore, most people think WWII inductees had less to lose after the Depression and sometimes the WWII draftee is seen as better adjusted, because they witnessed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Because of this assault, the threat was made more real compared to the Vietnamese communism which was a vaguer concept. Nonetheless, solemn belief in the fairness of the draft system and the view of the prepared soldier need to be revised.

The draft was established in 1940, but was criticized as too militarist. After Pearl Harbour, a different attitude emerged, and many men enrolled. This initial enthusiasm soon extinguished, and some men avoided draft by getting married. Moreover, of the enlisted men, only the lower class actually entered combat. The other classes had access to education and could thus obtain a technical or desk job. Draft discrimination also occurred towards Black Americans, who were forbidden (at first) to join in combat and who often received dangerous tasks such as carrying equipment in open fire. Homosexuals were also discriminated; they could not enter the army. This exclusion was a waste of highly ideologically dedicated troops since many homosexuals resented Hitler’s treatment of fellow gays. However, with the draft procedure many came to realize their own country was just as homophobic.
b) The myth of the happy family

In movies, the combat unit is often portrayed as a harmonious melting pot with the officer as the strong father-figure. There is no racial discrimination, and the intellectual in the group often sees the glory in military action and casts aside his books. Perhaps this picture would suit an idyll, but it certainly does not stroke with reality.

Enlisted intellectuals were often shocked by what they saw on the combat field and more often than not their anti-war feelings were fuelled. Similarly, African-Americans were also dissatisfied with the war because they were denied combat status to prohibit their demand for civil rights after the war. Only when the amount of troops was short, were they introduced into combat. Not surprisingly, they performed as well as white troops. However, they were segregated (just like the British colonial forces). No black officer could ever command a white unit, and Afro-American service men were forced to use different dining halls, post offices, clubs, and so on.

Even though the myth of the happy family does not include homosexuals or women in the combat unit, it is important to consider not only racial discrimination. Sexual discrimination or discrimination towards sexual orientation happened frequently as well. For instance, homosexuals who had avoided discovery in the induction were subject to witch hunts, and women who desired military practice were disdained by society. ‘The male establishment, civil and military, at first resented the female presence as implying that men alone could not protect America.’ (Adams, 1994:84)

These discriminations left aside, the GI was not as ‘happy-go-lucky’ (Adams, 1994:87) as some of his depictions in the movies. Men relinquished deserting because of two concerns; first of all, they did not want to abandon their fellow soldiers. In this perspective, the ‘band of brothers’ established in many an American film or series bears resemblance to reality. A second factor was the money their families received (even though militia troops earned less than most people at home).
3.3.8 Myth of the close-combat fights

In films, combat is often portrayed as a conflict between two concrete enemies. While this may be true for earlier battles such as the civil war, WWII was already by large a distance war. Soldiers employed long-range weapons and rarely saw the enemy close by. The opponent of the GI was often nothing more than a vague figure at the horizon, and sometimes only the flying bullets proved that another ‘presence’ was there.

Hollywood also mythologizes the importance of gunfire while studies show that ‘about 85 percent of physical casualties were caused by shells, bombs and grenades, only 10 percent or less by bullets.’ (Adams, 1994: 102). Moreover, film staging conveniently omits the amount of friendly fire during WWII. Because soldiers did not see much, they had to rely on sounds which could cause confusion and in certain situations led to the deaths of less fortunate team mates.

3.3.9 Myth of fulfilment

In movie productions, men fight for a cause and experience a certain fulfilment once they have achieved their goal. In reality, fire fights were less rosy and without a climax. Most of the soldiers did not even know what they were fighting for, and because of the poor living circumstances, many men were reduced to nothing more than animals.

*In civilian life we find many ways to transcend our basic animal origins. Natural functions are discreetly and hygienically handled, we smell sweat, and many of us are privileged to work with our minds, transcending the bodies that cage us. The combat soldier was forced daily to witness man as animal, scratching and gouging to live, dying and decaying.* (Adams, 1994: 103)
The GI was always tired as well. For them, war was without a beginning and without an end. On top of that, they had to endure malnutrition, the hostility of their rough environments and the death of their colleagues. Unlike Hollywood films, these men died without much glamour, and their deaths rarely had meaning.

Soldiers were faced with the unreason of war in which the etiquette did not make sense. For instance:

> You could slice off an opponent’s face with an entrenching tool but not shoot him with an exploding bullet; you might incinerate him with a flamethrower, but must spare the civilians who made the weapons. (Adams, 1994: 110)

These atrocities were condemned by the home front, but at the same time the dropping of the atom bombs had the same rationale as the killing on the field; the soldiers merely wanted to save as many friendly lives.

**3.3.10 Japan as almost supernatural enemy**

In the opening rounds, the West was amazed by Japan’s technological equipment. This led to the popular myth of the Japanese as almost indestructible opponents. However, this myth surfaced out of the sheer Western arrogance with which the Allies entered the Pacific war.

As mentioned before, the racial factor plays an important role in the treatment of Japan. Japan was often seen as inferior, and thus the speed with which Japan initially attacked took America by surprise. To gain understanding in these beginning phases of Japan’s lightning war, we need to look at the structure of their army; Japan was not as bureaucratized as America. This advantage allowed the Japanese soldier more freedom, and they could advance faster.

However, Japan was far from superhuman, and as with most myths, the legend of the undefeatable Japanese soldier proves to be false. After all, Japan did lose the war, and certain
facts might have contributed to that. First of all, Japan underestimated the will of America to stay. For Japan, WWII was never a war for total conquest. They merely wanted a piece of the Chinese pie of resources and fought for racial equality. They had hoped that the price of taking back vanquished land would deter the American army, but this was not the case. Another factor is the quick rebound of the allies. Before the Japanese had time to use the resources of the taken areas, the Allies had already conquered those again. On the long term, this rapid reaction led to a shortage of resources. Alongside this deficit, Japanese technology was not as advanced as the American technology (even though Japanese equipment had proved to be innovative in the beginning stages of war). For example, there were no radars present on Japanese ships.

Another misconception concerns the Japanese kamikaze attacks. Because of these suicide attacks launched on Allied warships, many American soldiers thought the Japanese had an absolute contempt for the value of human lives. These kamikaze attacks, however, were a desperation strategy which was not approved by the growing peace party in Japan. Nevertheless, the kamikaze attacks produced a growing insensitivity among American soldiers towards the killing of Japanese soldiers and citizens. They also made the Americans believe extreme measures would be needed in order to force Japan into surrendering, and thus once more appeasement was avoided. Consequently, America demanded an unconditional capitulation at the Casablanca conference of 1943. This strategy was a grave mistake as Japanese leaders believed this rigid demand also meant that the emperor (who has a semi-religious role in Japanese culture) would be removed. Owing to this fear, the Japanese army did not surrender, and a climax of violence ensued.
CHAPTER II: Case studies

In this chapter, we will look at seven films which are subdivided in the four waves of the genre evolution. The films are selected on the basis of IMDb (Top rated war titles), the top 10 list by ArmyTimes (Our top 10 best military movies of all time) and the top 100 list provided by channel 4 (100 Greatest War films). All the films were box-office-hits and were thus viewed by a large audience.

1. Early 1960s: glorification

1.1 The Guns of Navarone (Thompson, 1961)

Even though The Guns of Navarone (Thompson, 1961) was conceived by a British director, it is still constructed within the epic spirit of the 1960s, and this box-office hit gave him access to Hollywood (IMDb, 19th of May 2010). I chose to include this film because a combat unit of both British and American soldiers is present, and many American themes recur.

The movie narrates the following story. Two-thousand British soldiers are trapped on the Island of Keros without supplies. In order to save those men, the rescue boats have to be able to attain Keros without serious damage. The only threat along the road comes from two guns that are placed in a cave on Navarone and guard the strait with ultimate precision. Without the destruction of these guns, the rescue mission has little to no use. Destroying the guns proves not to be easy, and a combat unit of special men is composed, each member with his own qualities.

Mallory, the main protagonist of the film, is representing the honest and true leader. He has a strong sense of duty. For instance, he would never have been late on the first appointment if his plane was not attacked just out of Crete, and he seems to have performed great deeds in the past because ‘the Germans have a price on [him] and Andrea Stavros of 10,000 pounds apiece.’ (The
guns of Navarone, 1961: 6.17) His task is to infiltrate into the fort of Navarone and guide the team safely over the cliffs.

In the very beginning, Mallory has an adversary relationship with Stavros. Stavros blames him for the death of his family because Mallory gave free passage to a German patrol so they could bring their wounded to a hospital, but instead they shot their casualties and went straight to Stavros’ house. His house was blown up, his wife and three children still inside. They were all killed. Had Mallory guarded his ground, then this would have never happened, and Stavros is still waiting for a moment to kill him for this mistake.

Another adversary relationship exists between Miller and Mallory. Miller is a chemical expert in real life, but in war he is the bomb expert. He represents the cynic who does not believe in war. He is the most unwarlike character of the party, and once in a while he offers comical relief. For example, ‘It's been so comfortable, I hate to leave.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 18.20) He is the counterpart of Stavros who is constantly weary, yet he clashes with Mallory because after Franklin’s fall, Mallory becomes the leader of the party.

Franklin, the leader when the movie begins, represents the ‘dead’ father figure. He is the one who protects his team mates, but when he falls off the cliff and breaks his leg he passes on the leadership to Mallory. Franklin is extremely dutiful and believes that committing suicide after the accident is the only viable option if his soldiers are to survive. He wants to sacrifice himself, but Mallory does not allow it and tags the wounded leader along until his leg catches gangrene and he is forced to leave him behind with the enemy. Mallory becomes more persistent to reach his goal, realizing that without the devastation of the objective Franklin’s sacrifice will have been for naught.

Alongside the major characters, two minor characters fulfil the party. Butcher Brown, a Spaniard who received his nickname in the Spanish civil war. He already has fighting experience and becomes the mechanic of the party. However, when the first deaths start to fall he refuses to kill. Spyro Pappadimos is the second side character. He is still inexperienced, but has a strong nationalistic fervour.

This unit starts their mission, but in Saint-Alexis they are joined with two women from the resistance. We meet Anna, a silent woman who used to endure German torture and now kills to
serve her country and Maria Pappadimos, who comes from a family of tough warriors and who is the sister of Spyro who originally went to America to get an education.

After this short summary and the introduction of the main characters, it is important to discuss the esthetical format, the melodramatic features of the movie and the myths that are reinforced or adjusted. This method of analysis will reoccur in the discussion of the other films.

1.1.1 Aesthetical format

The guns of Navarone' chooses colour and not black-and-white, even though the acknowledgements at the beginning of the move ensure us this is based on a true story. The sense of authenticity is created through the black-and-white intersections in the first ten minutes. We see veritable newsreels of WWII, and we hear a documentary voice explain the historical facts. The following two hours and a half we are immersed in sometimes epic scenes with the use of broad scope. For instance, when Mallory’s boat is about to crash against the cliff we get a broad overview of the wild sea, and we see the sky ominously shift from blue to black. Moreover, the epic scenes are supported by the music. For instance, in threatening scenes the use of trumpets and percussion adds a sense of importance to the mission.

1.1.2 Melodramatic features

One of the first images is the peaceful stroll of one of the farmers and his carriage amidst a warm field. Greece is presented as the locus of innocence which is being threatened by the Nazis. We never receive references of the American or British characters to their home land; only the Greek characters utter the desire to restore their country, and often they are presented with a close connection to the locals. When Mandrakos, a small country town, is punished for the escape of the combat unit, for instance, Maria expresses her sadness. Remarkably, the combat unit is less presented as a place to safeguard than you would expect. This might be because the party is not
truly close-knit, only at the very end when the adversary relationships are solved. Nonetheless, the peace (both in the party as in the country) is threatened by the enemy and the environment which sometimes presents them with unforeseen circumstances such as the storm weather during the unit’s sailing journey.

Like many combat movies, suffering is also important to establish the melodramatic dichotomy between us and them. The American soldier is presented as virtuous, and suffering is a sign of this virtue. For instance, Franklin has gangrene and can barely sleep because of the pain. On the other hand, Anna, the member of the resistance who alleges she has been tortured by the Germans, is unmasked as a German spy because she has no scars on her back, and thus she must have been lying. Her lack of suffering for the good cause makes her unvirtuous.

We return to peace in the end. On one hand, the adversary relationships are solved. Mallory and Stavros shake hands in the end. Stavros has realized Mallory’s worth because of his dutiful behaviour during the mission. Furthermore, he now has the chance to start a new life with Maria. The conflict between Miller and Mallory is solved as well and they share a cigarette while Miller discusses the happy end ‘I’d like to offer you my apologies, sir. And my congratulations. The truth is. I didn't think we could do it. Neither did I.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 2.28.22) On the other hand, the guns have been destroyed, and the rescue boats now have a clear passage.

The movie also solves a series of moral dilemmas. One important moral dilemma is the question if a soldier should risk his life on a mission that is nearly impossible to fulfil:

*It can’t be done. Not from the air, anyway.*

*You’re sure about that, squadron leader? This is important.*

*So’s my life!* (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 7.41)

The use of the sacrificial pilot is also questioned. ‘You fill a plane full of TNT and then you do a suicide dive right into that cave.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 8.32) is one suggestion, but they cannot find any volunteers to perform such mission. In the rest of the film, the choice between human life and the mission is further explored. When Franklin is wounded, Mallory feeds him with
the wrong information in case he would fall in the hands of the enemy. Miller, Franklin’s former partner protests heavily when he discovers that Mallory’s motives to leave Franklin with the enemy have not been to save his life, but to feed the enemy the false information so their mission could succeed. He screams ‘Do you know what you’ve done? You’ve used up an important human being!’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.38.02) Mallory tries to defend himself by saying ‘it’s the only chance we’ve got to get the job done.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.38.25), but that does not seem to satisfy Miller who estimates the worth of a human being higher than the success of this mission. What is more, Miller does not believe in possible success so it is rather logical he should try to save the lives of all of his friends.

This tension between the objective and a human life reoccurs when the group detects Anna’s sabotaging attempts. Mallory is now in an even more painful situation because he has kissed Anna just the night before, and he pities her. Despite his personal feelings, he is forced to shoot her because she might pass on important information to the Germans, and that might endanger the mission. The question of objective versus human life is resolved in the very end, when the guns are blown up. The explosion is loud enough to reach Franklin who is staying in a German hospital, and he smiles. The objective has been achieved, and none of the human sacrifices were wasted because now at least 2000 soldiers can be saved.

In the same line, the purpose of war is doubted. Some of the characters are war sick long before the end of battle. Specifically, the Butcher of Barcelona refuses to kill any more German soldiers because the killing seems to reach nothing. ‘I am tired and fed up. I’ve been fighting this war for a long time. I’ve been killing Germans since 1937. There’s no end to them.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 53.34) Yet in the end, the doubts are resolved and the characters decide that their fighting for the right cause was worth it.
1.1.3 Reinforcement or adjustment of the myths

i. Exaggeration of the significance of the event

In the opening scenes we are already confronted with images of the Parthenon and several other Greek monuments. The accompanying documentary voice narrates the following:

_Greece and the islands of the Aegean Sea have given birth to many myths and legends of war and adventure. And these once-proud stones, these ruined and shattered temples bear witness to the civilization that flourished and then died here. And of the demigods and heroes who inspired those legends on this sea and these islands. But though the stage is the same, ours is a legend of our own times and its heroes are not demigods, but ordinary people._ (Emphasis mine, The guns of Navarone, 1961: 00.51)

This discourse already establishes a connection between the great epics of Antiquity and the story that is about to unfold. Moreover, ordinary people have performed extraordinary deeds; one man can make the difference.

Throughout the movie, different characters express their doubts about the attainability of the mission, but the importance of the mission forces them to at least try. ‘Mallory, this is our last hope.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961:11.56) The urgency of the mission is even more emphasised when Franklin is wounded and he orders Mallory to fulfil the mission for him.
ii. Ambivalent portrayal of the enemy

In a true black-white picture, the Nazis should be portrayed as pure evil, but this movie casts a negative as well as a positive light on the enemy. A negative depiction is found in the character of the SS officer. At one point, the outfit has been captured by the Germans, and they are interrogated concerning the place where they hid the explosives. The SS officer is prototypically portrayed as a tall man with white blonde hair and penetrating blue eyes, and he employs a rude interrogation technique. He threatens to hit Franklin’s wounded leg as a form of torture if none of the men and women present disclose the information. This cruel side of the Germans is further explored when Mandrakos is burned; many citizens who have nothing to do with the escape of the group are nonetheless punished because of it.

At certain moments, the Germans are also visualized as unwary or plainly dumb, a characteristic which might explain why the Germans ultimately lost and coincides with the conception of the Americans as ‘better’. Instances of this military laxity include the Schlager music which is played on the inner court of the fortress Navarone. The German soldiers are not aware of any danger and are not even ready for combat. In the following scene we see them lose valuable time because Mallory and Miller have locked themselves in the cave where the guns are. Apparently the Germans have overlooked the possibility that these gates might not be as useful if the enemy is already inside.

The positive traits can be found in the figure of the German oberleutenant. First of all, he treats the American and British captives with great respect. ‘Captain Mallory, you've made a remarkable effort. Unfortunately, it was doomed from the beginning.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.23.58). He also protests when the SS officer is about to begin his torture which proves a certain empathy for his enemies. Another positive feature is highlighted when the oberleutenant explains the German policy concerning wounded men: ‘We don’t make war on wounded men. We’re not all like Hauptmann Sessler.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.30.36) Not only does this statement reveal a respect for the other side, but thanks to the figure of the oberleutenant the enemy is less abstract and in a way, more human.
iii. Being a hero

Certain hints are given to what makes a true hero:

*Anything can happen in a war. In the middle of absolute insanity. People pull out extraordinary resources. Ingenuity, courage, self-sacrifice.* (emphasis mine, The guns of Navarone, 1961: 16.55)

This quote points out that people can be transformed under extraordinary circumstances. Just like in Greek tragedy, the truly great men are those that manage to persist in horrible situations. Furthermore, a hero is ingenious which means he needs to be able to improvise when a plan goes wrong. For instance, when Mallory and Miller discover that Anna has sabotaged the fuses of the explosives, they need to invent another way to ignite the bombs without being killed. Courage is a necessity for heroism as well. In this movie, this is translated into the performance of altruistic deeds and the checking of one’s emotions; not one male character sheds a tear. For instance, when Franklin learns he is going to see a doctor he speaks bravely ‘I hope the doctor is a good surgeon.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.13.30) Self-sacrifice fits the courageous path, even more because a soldier can sacrifice himself for the greater good which might either be the success of the mission or the saving of one or more lives.

Subsequently, a true hero never betrays his fellow soldiers. In concrete terms, this means: no disclosing of information to the enemy (not even under torture) and not abandoning your team mates in combat. Anna violates the first rule; she has betrayed her team by conspiring with the Germans. Butcher Brown violates the second rule because he refuses to fight. Both of them die; Anna by her colleagues, Butcher Brown because he fails to kill his enemy effectively.

Another characteristic of a hero is their obedience. They manage to follow orders and thus successfully complete their mission. When Mallory needs to postpone his pension to lead this mission he utters not a word of protest. He knows it is his duty to lead the men. In addition to this
trait, a heroic man has an inherent quality; he is a ‘born killer’. Not every man can handle the pressure of war, and only few succeed in taking the enemy’s lives.

We receive clear clues about the nature of a hero, and many times the members of the team fit the definition, yet sometimes uncertainty is expressed about the status of the combat unit in that area. Ambivalence exists, for instance, about the nature of killing. Mallory utters ‘The only way to win a war is to be just as nasty as the enemy. I'm only worried we'll find out we're even nastier than they are.’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 37.30) Mallory does not want to be a murderer and is only willing to go as far as the enemy, and even that is dubious, because in certain instances the enemy is portrayed as rather cruel.

iv. The combat unit as a bond of brothers

Surprisingly, the army unit is not represented as a melting pot, and this depiction does not fit the normal genre conventions. However, it is still represented as a group of interdependence (even though still less than in certain other movies to be discussed further on).

When the group explores the waters, the sky and water are blue at first, and we hear a soothing tune of violin music on the background. What is more, the team has close enough a bond not to abandon Franklin when he falls and damages his leg. They carry him with and even take him to a doctor in an occupied town. They also need to trust each other which is demonstrated when Miller is forced to jump into the water during their escape from Navarone. He cannot swim and thus lays his life in the hands of Mallory. The members of the unit also have to depend on each other to reach the objective because each member has different skills. For instance, the Butcher is forced to fix the fisher boat with which they plan to cross the distance to Mandrakos.

Because they need to be able to depend on each other, Butcher Brown is cast out of the group. Mallory does not want to give him any assignments until he sets aside his aversion to killing. In combat, Butcher Brown has to be able to kill in order to protect his team. Another outcast at the
beginning is Miller. He is called ‘the professor’, and he behaves the most unwarlike. At the end, however, he is fully included because he has shown he can act and not just talk.

The band is also conceived as a group of close friends with the leader being the father figure. The superior is rather isolated because he needs to make the rough decisions, and he has to take up his responsibility. For example, Mallory is forced to choose between Anna’s death and the abandonment of his mission. Miller urges him on with the words ‘Come on, be a pal. Be a father to your men.’ (emphasis mine, The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.56.39) On the one hand, he cannot leave the dirty work to his soldiers; he needs to lower himself to their level and kill the woman himself. On the other hand, he needs to stand above them to take the decisions that are most sensible and to protect his men.

v. The issue of gender

Normally females rarely appear in the WWII film, and if they do, they are merely suited for romance. The guns of Navarone (1961) forms an exception to that trend because the two female characters that appear are fighters, not civilians. Maria even defends her friend, Anna, by stating ‘But she’s a good fighter. As good as any of you!’ (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.09.37) which means that women are not the inferiors to men in combat. Moreover, Maria is sometimes placed in a superior position than the men. She, for instance, outsmarts the men when they first come to Saint-Alexis, and she is the one that gives the orders. She is also the one who mostly drives the car, and in the end, she is the one to kill her friend Anna before Mallory can fire his gun.

Nonetheless Maria’s positive depiction, some of the gender boundaries stay intact in the portrayal of Anna. Anna is weak because she spies for the Germans instead of fighting for the right cause. She explains ‘I cannot stand pain. It’s easy to be brave when you are free, when you’re with friends. But I was caught. The others were free, but they didn’t help me. I was alone. I was alone in their hands. They said they would put me into their brothels. They said they would torture me.’ (emphasis mine, The guns of Navarone, 1961: 1.53.01), but that is no excuse for betrayal. Not only
is she the only character that discloses information, because of her gender she is also vulnerable to sexual threats. She is also the only character who cries, which reveals a weakness of character.

**vi. Correct portrayal of trauma**

Despite the lack of openness regarding emotions, the film does address the issue of trauma in two characters. First of all, Anna is first introduced as being mute. She has lost her speech because of the cruel torture she allegedly went through.

*Before the Germans came, she was a schoolteacher in Mandrakos. Last year, she was caught. They tortured her to make her betray us. They whipped her until the white of her bones showed. Some nights, we could hear her screaming. Then they kept her in the fortress for six months. When they let her go, she could not speak.* (The guns of Navarone, 1961: 01.09.31)

The other character is Miller, the character providing comical relief from time to time. He explains:

*I'm not anxious to kill anyone. See, I'm not a born soldier. I was trapped. You may find me facetious from time to time, but if I didn't make some bad jokes, I'd go out of my mind.*

(The guns of Navarone, 1961: 01.55.28)

This jocularity is a known response of soldiers to war.
1.2 Hell is for heroes (Siegel, 1962)

This rather short movie directed by Don Siegel (IMDb, 19th of May) narrates the story of six GIs who have to hold their station in a small village somewhere in France. They face numerous challenges, starting with their shortage of men and the superior numbers of the opposite side. For most of the time, they house in manholes, but ultimately, when the enemy discovers the scantiness of men, they set out on a mission to destroy the German bunker on the opposite side of the field.

Their army unit is a mixture of different backgrounds. The protagonist, Reese, is the new soldier arriving at the first squad of the fifth platoon. We learn that he has been court marshalled causing a degradation from master sergeant to common soldier. Reese has a problem with authority and outside of combat he acts surly and unfriendly; he is the representation of the rebel, and he will end up disobeying the orders of his superior.

Larkin, Reese’s superior and leader of the fifth platoon, is a man of orders. He respects the military hierarchy. Cumberly is another major character. He is the optimist of the party; he occasionally hums, and nothing can break his good mood. Quotes like ‘Every time things seem bad, I think of something worse. Try it.’ (Hell is for heroes, 1962: 31.03) fit his character. His optimism is countered by the cynical Corby. Corby is the fixer of the party who does not seem to care about noble goals, only about how he can profit from the situation. He often produces comical remarks which makes him the most humorous character. The core unit is completed by two more characters: Kolinsky and Henshaw. Kolinsky represents the Russian immigrant. Remarkably, he is included as an integer character. Even more surprising because the 1960s are already immersed in the cold war in which the Russians are usually cast in a bad light. Henshaw is not an immigrant and supplies the group with his mechanical skills. He wears glasses, yet he is not the intellectual.

These six soldiers encounter two more men that join their squad. One of those men is Driscoll who crashes with his jeep against a tree. We learn he was ordered to deliver typewriters, but he is lost and has accidentally entered the front line. He stutters and has never held a gun before. He is the intellectual of the party, but his scholarly skills prove to be of no use. After Driscoll’s encounter, Homer joins the party. Homer was already present in the military camp before
the squad joined the trenches, and he carried out several minor tasks for sergeant Larkin. He does not own a uniform, but he is most eager to participate in the fight. Homer is a Russian like Kolinsky, but he speaks with a broken accent, and he is depicted as rather dumb. However, Homer demonstrates a disarming loyalty, and he is most sincere.

As with *The guns of Navarone* (Thompson, 1961), we will now discuss the format, the melodramatic features, and the reinforcement or adjustment of myths concerning WWII.

### 1.2.1 Format

Unlike *The guns of Navarone* (Thompson, 1961) which was produced a year before, *Hell is for heroes* (Siegel, 1962) employs the black-and-white format that provides an atmosphere of authenticity. Furthermore, the film starts with real footage of WWII and ends with the pictures of the squad members and their ranks. The movie is also constructed in the last stand layout. The squad needs to hold their ground for a day or two, but their task appears almost impossible: ‘The six of us have to hold here by ourselves?’ (*Hell is for heroes*, 1962: 28.56) However, despite the last-stand appearance, the movie sometimes reminds us of WWI. For example, there is a clear distinction between the soldiers’ cantina and the trenches. In the cantina we sense a feeling of boredom and war tiredness. Moreover, the separation between life outside the trenches and the trenches breaks down the image of a total war. Life proceeds outside of the front and does not seem to be thoroughly affected.
1.2.2 Melodramatic features

Once more, this movie differs from *The guns of Navarone* (Thompson, 1961) in the open ending. The main protagonist, Reese, dies and manages to destroy the bunker, but we as spectators do not know the outcome of the entire battle because it ends in an almost apocalyptical scene where most of the American soldiers die. We do not know if the locus of innocence is restored. This locus of innocence is twofold. First of all, it could be the home front with which the soldiers have a connection through the sending of letters. We learn, for example, that Kolinsky has children. The locus of innocence could also be the army unit. More than in *The guns of Navarone* (Thompson, 1961), the main focus is on the party and not on the spectacular events. In *Hell is for heroes* the party does not travel, and the film shows us the raw circumstances the soldiers had to survive. The aforementioned apocalyptical ending can be connected to the remarkable WW1 format, and as we will see in this movie ambiguously combines anti-war feelings and glorious self-sacrifice which is furthermore explored in (1.2.3).

1.2.3 The reinforcement or adjustment of certain myths

i. Portrayal of the Americans

The Americans are depicted as respectful towards the locals and religion. Sergeant Larkin does not leave the bar without leaving the correct amount of money on the counter, and when the American soldiers are forced to spend the night in church they take off their helmets during their entrance. Religion is also taken very seriously, with God as the ultimate judge. The words “God forbid we’ll replace you in another week. - God willing, we’ll get both feet in the door by then.” (emphasis mine, Hell is for heroes, 1962: 22.41) are uttered as the first and second squad part. Another instance of respect occurs as Corby is looting away in the church where they are staying. He defends himself by saying that the church is in ruins now so it is no longer a church, but the sergeant stops him ‘You ought to have respect for things that used to be.’(Hell is for heroes, 1962:
This comment can be interpreted literally as a defence for the church, but it could also be a metacomment towards the spectator; as a spectator we ought to have respect for the past, and in specific, for the deeds many Americans performed in World War II.

Moreover, sometimes the Americans are seen as missionaries by Homer who imagines America as the Promised Land. He will do anything to earn his place on the boat back, and when the sergeant announces the war is not over yet, they will have to stay a few more days before they can return home, Homer disappointedly asks ‘Homer not go States?’ (Hell is for heroes, 1962: 16.53).

ii. Definition of a soldier

The public is educated as to what it takes to be a good soldier, and as a consequence, a good man. A good soldier learns to obey. Larkin is defined as a good soldier: ‘He knows how to give and take orders. He’s a good man.’ (Hell is for heroes, 1962: 30.27). Reese, on the other hand, is first considered a good soldier despite his stern and obnoxious behaviour outside of the front, but then he loses his status and receives a lecture for acting on his own and attacking the bunker. He heads towards the bunker and loses all the men in his party, only to return to his own lines having achieved nothing. Had he listened to the orders of Larkin, his superior, then none of this carnage would have happened. To redeem himself from the horrible mistake he has made, Reese must sacrifice himself in the end to be considered a true hero once more.

The quote ‘That’s what makes a good soldier. You are very observant.’ (Hell is for heroes, 1962: 14.23) shows that a good soldier is also alert and can never let down his guard. Cumberly is shot, for instance, because he fails to take out into account one of the most important rules of survival; you can never turn your back to an enemy.

A soldier also has to be able to act and fight. Everyone can become a hero in combat despite their moral qualities as long as they kill enough enemy soldiers. For instance, Reese acts very unfriendly and surly outside of battle, but sergeant Pike defends him ‘I know how he acts
behind the lines, but he's a damn good soldier.’ (Hell is for heroes, 1962: 16.17), and indeed, Reese is very good in handling his gun. Your gun also defines you. If you lose your gun you are unable to fight, and you might as well be dead. Corby makes this clear to newcomer Driscoll ‘Look, dum-dum, up here this gun is your life. Like when you were a civvy, what you own makes you who you are’ (Hell is for heroes, 1962: 35.19)

Being a soldier is also an issue of being manly. The GIs use stark slang language and cuss a lot. They also associate fighting power with gender. Whenever they are vulnerable, they use feminine terms to define themselves: ‘I can imagine when those Krauts discover there’s nobody here but us campfire girls.’ (emphasis mine, HIFH, 1962: 31.13). A last trait of a hero is his willingness to endure everything it takes to win. This readiness is already made clear in the film title and is demonstrated when Reese rolls into the bunker together with the explosives; the bunker starts to burn like the mouth of hell.

iii. The combat unit as the band of brothers

In HIFH (Siegel, 1962) no females make their appearance. The combat unit consists of only men who employ rough language and slang words and address one another with ‘buddy’. They share their cigarettes and food and try to safeguard each other. Reese, for example, heads back to the front to drag his friend Kolinsky out of no man’s land.

Four characters seem to stand out slightly from the team; Larkin, Reese, Driscoll and Homer. Larkin has to be an equal to his soldiers, but at the same time he has a solitary place as a superior. In the very beginning, he has to be dishonest with his men because he alone has to bear the secret that they are returning to the front. Reese stands apart as well, but that is his own decision. He arrives as the new man who’s transferred and immediately shows no interest in bonding as he refuses to shake Henshaw’s hand. He is the lone wolf who only steadily learns he needs his squad to fulfil the mission. He is also distrustful towards any newcomers, fearing they
might endanger the safety of them all. To Homer he says ‘You got no place in the line. The Heinies get you and torture you, you’ll spill everything you know.’ (HIFH, 1962: 54.09)

Driscoll and Homer are also isolated because they are inexperienced. They are both addressed as ‘kid’ which demonstrates their inability to handle guns. Driscoll arrives at the camp by coincidence and is only tolerated because they need fresh troops. He is a clerk, a stutterer, and he does not show very much courage because each time a gun is fired or a bomb is dropped he cringes and becomes almost catatonic. He needs to learn how to hold and fire a gun, and that does not seem to go well; he almost shoots Reese when he handles his gun for the first time. It is clear intellectuals are considered unsuitable for war since he cannot even feed false information to the enemy:

Yeah. Go in and fake some reports.
What kind of reports?
You’ve never heard them?
Look, all I’ve ever done is type. (HIFH,1962: 47.59)

Homer is also inexperienced, but he is most eager to fight. He is not a coward like Driscoll and wants to earn his place among the other soldiers. One of his statements goes as follows ‘I go and kill Krauts. Be good soldier. Make captain say OK.’ (HIFH,1962: 19.21) Homer also has more loyalty towards the team than Driscoll.

Ironically, almost all of the members of the team are killed except the two inexperienced men and the cynical Corby. These are the members that needed a transformation; thanks to Reese’s sacrifice Corby will lose his cynicism towards war because one man can make a difference, and Homer and Driscoll will become true soldiers in Reese’s example because they now have enough combat experience.
iv. Breakdown of heroics

anti-war feelings

The anti-war feelings are expressed in the war tiredness of some of the characters. Corby, for example, longs to go home and even starts to sing when the news is announced that event might happen. Less explicit, we as a spectator feel an aversion towards war in the portrayal of certain violence. After a serious fire fight, one of the German soldiers falls into Reese’s manhole, and he uses his knife to murder the German. The camera takes in the position of the victim, and we gaze upon an animalistic Reese with wide eyes and blind hatred. Not only Reese is sometimes unnecessary cruel, but Homer as well. The party has taken captive two German soldiers and Homer tries to interrogate them, but they refuse to speak proper English because they simply cannot. Homer walks out in a frenzy, yelling ‘I teach them. Where flame-thrower?’ (HIFH, 1962: 01.02.01). Fortunately, he is stopped by Larkin.

The infliction of violence on the characters is also quite straightforward. Henshaw is blown up by a mine, Cumberly is shot in the back, and Kolinsky is shot as he tries to cross no one’s land. Kolinsky is the only one who can still speak, and he pleas ‘If you see my wife, don’t tell her it was like this!’ (HIFH, 1962: 01.12.32) War is often glorified at the home front, and only the men in war know its cruelty. However, we can also interpret this visual violence as an attempt to make the American characters more virtuous. Moreover, because we know the faces of the characters, but none of the German casualties is shown in close-up. In fact, in the very beginning we only hear the gunshots of the enemy who remains abstract.

Doubt is also occasionally expressed because war has no right or wrong, and Reese realizes this uncertainty. Sergeant Pike asks him ‘Were you right?’ to which he replies ‘How the hell do I know?’ (HIFH, 1962: 01.14.22) In war, everyone has to make decisions, and we can only tell the validity of our approaches with hindsight. The only reason Reese’s move towards the German bunker is condemned is because he failed to obey orders and killed all of his fellow soldiers. Had the mission been successful, he would probably not have received a preach about the importance of obedience.
One other glimpse of the reality of war behind the heroic veneer is the mentioning of censorship: ‘If I say we're coming home, they'll censor it out.’ (HIFH, 1962: 01.51) The letters of the soldiers were censored as were the newsreels.

**The ambivalence of the self-sacrifice**

Despite these anti-war sentiments, Reese sacrifices himself in the end. Valuing the achievement of the objective higher than his own life. He has an exemplary function; even though he is shot right in the middle of the chest he still stumbles towards the German bunker and manages to drag the explosives with him. This action is two-fold. He manages to successfully ignore pain, keeping his emotions inside, and secondly, he would be no good wounded to the army so he decides to give them the only thing that is left to give, his life. This interpretation casts a glorious light upon Reese’s character, but one might wonder if his sacrifice is done out of altruistic reasons. He has already driven the rest of the unit to their deaths, and the only chance to redeem himself is by dying himself and completing the mission so their losses would not without a cause. Moreover, for disobeying the orders of his superior he would receive another court marshal. The only way to avoid further military humiliation is death.
2. End 1960s - beginning 1970s: reversal

2.1 The Dirty Dozen (Aldrich, 1967)

The end of the 1960s coincides with the emergence of the dirty group movies. *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967), as the title gives away, is one typical example of those films. Set in America during the end of WWII, major Reisman is given the assignment to train twelve convicts for a special mission. This special objective concerns the destruction of a resort especially designed for German officers. The film starts with the training of the rebellious group, continues with a military exercise to test their abilities and ends with the devastation of the residence.

The characters are varied and divided into two groups. On one side, the authority is represented by General Worden, General Denton and Captain Kinder. On the other side, we find the prisoners, major Reisman and his adjuvants major Armbruster and sergeant Bowren.

The inmates are all convicted to either hard labour or the death sentence, and the only way to avoid their punishment is to cooperate. We meet Joseph Wladislaw, a Polish immigrant, who is condemned to death because he shot a deserter. This deserter was fleeing with all of the sorely needed medical supplies tied to his back. In a way, Wladislaw’s action was righteous, but as Reisman puts it ‘Yeah. But you only made one mistake, huh? You let somebody see you do it.’ (The dirty dozen, 1967: 21.49).

Franko is another inmate and a real trouble maker. He has also received the death sentence, but for a different reason than Wladisaw. He mugged an old man; he wasted his life for a mere ten dollars. In the beginning, Franko does not believe in the mission and presents himself strongly as an individual. When he sees a chance to escape, he grabs it with both hands. Luckily he is stopped by two other prisoners who act out of a sense of belonging to the group and because if one inmate attempts to escape, they are all going back to death row. This measure is inserted to establish an esprit de corps, but it is not until later that Franko feels connected to the other prisoners.
Another remarkable figure is Maggott. He is almost entirely negatively portrayed as a religious fanatic. He sees himself as an instrument of God who has to bring punishment on the unrighteous. Maggott regards his fellow prisoners as doomed, but saves most hatred for the prostitutes. He landed in prison because he raped and killed one of these women, and he will endanger the mission when he discovers the German mansion is filled with girls of easy virtue.

The group includes one black inmate as well: Robert Jefferson. From the very beginning, it is clear that this inmate has been subjected to racism. He was sentenced because he killed a white superior, even though he only acted in self-defence. Not only was he treated badly in his army unit, but the judge showed no mercy either because of his black skin. In the dirty dozen, he has to cope with denigratory remarks as well, but he bonds with Wladislaw, and despite their racial difference, they become friends.

An Indian is part of the dirty dozen as well. Posey, an Apache Indian of sturdy build, is introduced as a rather simple man. He does not know how to read or write, and he has an aversion to violence; he could never kill a man willingly. Unfortunately, he also has a short temper which causes him to lose control over his actions. In a blind rage, he killed someone who provoked him by pushing his shoulder over and over again. He hit the agitator once, but apparently he underestimated his own strength an killed the man.

The aforementioned five prisoners are most prominent, but seven other minor characters belong to the dirty dozen as well. The first one is Jiminez, a Spanish immigrant and true guitar-lover. He is the smallest of the group and is rather soft-hearted. Vladek is an immigrant as well, but we do not discover wherefrom. Vladek rarely comes to the foreground just like Gilpin, Lever, Sawyer and Bravos. The last minor character is Pinkley, an inmate who’s borderline mentally defective. He is scared of death and easily obeys.

These twelve men are guided by major Reisman who has does not care about rules and regulations. Major Reisman has alternative principles that prove to be more morally valid than the rigid army regulations. For instance, he will act according to his own sense of right and wrong instead of blindly obeying orders. This individuality has cost him bad reports in the past. This bad reputation is what forces Reisman to participate in this mission because he has ‘been waiting for a
transfer for over two months now’ and ‘With a record like [his], [he] could go on waiting forever.’
(TDD, 1967: 05.01).

### 2.1.1 Aesthetic format: inversion

As the Vietnam War progressed, attitudes towards it became less favourable. This swing is reflected in the format of the dirty group movies, and an inversion of the generic codes appears. This inversion is clear in the way the authority is presented as the true enemy and the lack of black-and-white portrayal of the German enemy. Moreover, the inmates are introduced one by one, but instead of their profession (like in traditional war films) we learn their sentences. Furthermore, the pictures of the soldiers/inmates in the end credits are in colour. Both depictions imply two things. First of all, the movie is not trying to be authentic and recognizes that every film is largely fictional. Secondly, a soldier’s profession is less important than his moral health. Being a ‘good’ soldier does not automatically redeem you morally, and instead we should focus what the soldiers actually do and question whether killing is the right path.

### 2.1.2 Melodramatic features

Despite the slight subversive tone, this movie remains indebted to Hollywood traditions, and thus melodramatic features are still present. The only important difference is the locus of innocence which is not the home country, because the movie tries to uncover the hypocrisy of the homeland’s administration. Instead, the true locus of innocence is the group which starts to bond more and more as the true objective approaches. In the beginning, the dirty dozen consists of individuals fighting for their own well-being, but in the end they truly care for each other and try to safeguard one another.

This locus of innocence is threatened by two forces. The first force is represented by the authority that tries to get the men back into prison. Colonel Breed, for instance, meddles with the
affairs and tries to uncover the secret mission the dirty dozen has been assigned. However, if any information ought to leak, the inmates should resume their place in prison, missing out on the chance to regain their freedom. The other force is the German enemy who will try to prohibit the destruction of the mansion and which also forms a threat to the lives of the inmates. In the end, both forces are annihilated, and the men who survived the assault receive their freedom.

This circular movement shows no radical change is achieved because the authorities are not overthrown, nor are the Germans completely destroyed since the objective was not even military. Moreover, true villains such as Maggott are killed during the mission which means the authorities have not failed after all; the men who are released in the end form no threat to society. Nonetheless, the movie handles several controversial subjects which are discussed in 2.1.3.

2.1.3 adjustment or reinforcement of certain myths

i. the concept of heroism adjusted

Major Reisman does not consider a soldier’s death desirable, nor is self-sacrifice on the field a form of heroism in his opinion. He pleads for an alternative reward if the inmates were to succeed in their mission. The authorities still think serving as a soldier is an inherent reward, because ‘They do have an alternative way to go, you know.’ (TDD, 1967: 08.18), but Reisman realizes none of the prisoners will see it that way. What is more, he states ‘That's no way for anybody to go.’ (TDD, 1967: 08.22), meaning he regards a soldier’s death most cruel. This matter is touched upon once more when Posey remarks ‘I reckon the folks would be a sight happier if I died like a soldier. Can't say I would.’ (TDD, 1967: 24.30). There is nothing heroic about dying.

A different way to define heroism is demonstrated in the need for dirty fighting in order to survive. The only fashion to win the military exercise is by constantly switching teams and tricking the other side, and similarly, the dirty dozen only succeed in their mission because of their use of deception. The army unit is also called the ‘dirty’ dozen for a reason; they refuse to shave and
receive no soap after an attempt of mutiny, but more importantly, they do not keep to the rules of normal combat.

**ii. What makes a good war unit**

Nevermind the alteration of heroism, the concept of being a hero in the team remains unchanged. ‘They’ve gotta function as a team.’ (TDD, 1967: 46.31) which means the men have to stand by each other and act as one. This unity is shown in the characters of Wladislaw, Jefferson and Posey. When Wladislaw is attacked by two men sent by Colonel Breed, Jefferson and Posey come to his aid. Subsequently, Franko’s attitude turns 180 degrees, and he starts to believe in the mission, yelling ‘You fink, you tell him nothing!’ (TDD, 1967: 01.14.48). He is no longer fighting for himself, but for the entire team.

A good soldier also learns to accept authority, but only if the authority is incorrupt and honest. After Colonel Breed’s assault, the men throw away the weapons they’ve acquired, and Posey even returns the gun to sergeant Bowren, accepting his superiority as a warden. Alongside this obedience, a GI also knows how to kill without emotion. In the mansion, the Germans are cold-bloodedly shot, and none of the inmates flinch. Additionally, even cruel acts towards the enemy are justified by the mode of thought that without the eradication of the enemy, more teammates might get hurt. This principle is exhibited in a conversation between sergeant Bowren and major Reisman:

*Bowren, get some gasoline*

*Some gasoline? Are you sure?*

*You want to ask Pinkley and Vladek?* (TDD, 1967: 02.12.50) (Pinkley and Vladek are dead)
iii. Denial of the realities of war

Adjustment: reminder of war as no playground

During their training, the inmates might get the impression that they are merely fooling around. However, major Reisman constantly tries to remind them that in their mission they might get killed, and they should take war seriously. When Jiminez fails to climb up the rope, for instance, he uses gunfire as an encouragement because these circumstances are going to occur in their mission as well. Right before their assignment, he also states ‘If you guys foul up on this one, none of us will ever play the violin again. Because up until now, it's all been a game. But as of tomorrow night, it's gonna be the real thing. If you want to know how real, I'll tell you. It's my guess the lot of you guys won't be coming back.’ (TDD, 1967: 01.37.42). Up to this point no casualties have fallen, but in the first stage of their assault Jiminez already dies. Posey sadly informs the others ‘We found him hung up in an apple tree. His neck's broken.’ (TDD, 1967: 01.41.23)

Reinforcement: war as a game

In spite of Reisman’s emphasis that this is not a game, he still uses a rhyme to make clear in what phases they ought to conquer the mansion. This playfulness is aided by music on one hand and comical relief on the other hand.

Still in the training camp, the world outside seems to be far away. The only connection to the war is the radio which once in a while reports the different stages. Moreover, the playful tune of ‘in the army now’ (anonymous) is played as they set up the camp; one of the inmates accidentally paints over Pinkley’s hand, and we see another balancing on a ladder. This piece of slapstick comedy does not establish a serious tone and is continued in the parachute training and the military exercise in which they need to infiltrate in Breed's headquarters. We see the prisoners happily hum in their car, and Franko even metacomments ‘We're playing war games, right? Anything else, sir?’ (emphasis mine, TDD, 1967: 01.22.48). It becomes clear that the film’s entertainment value is more important than an education about the true horrors of war.
iv. The traditional combat unit

Adjustment

Reality of discrimination

In most traditional units, the soldiers do not experience racial frictions as in TDD (Aldrich, 1967). Jefferson, in specific, has to endure discrimination. For one, discrimination is the reason he resides in prison in the first place: ‘Don’t sweet-talk me, whitey. You know why I'm here.’ (TDD, 1967: 24.56), and in the group he is not treated with equal respect either. Franko, for example, asks ‘What is this, anyway? Uncle Tom week?’ (TDD, 1967: 38.03). Uncle Tom is a term used for ‘a black man considered to be excessively obedient or servile to whites’ (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2005). However, Jefferson is not the only one subject to racial remarks. Wladislaw receives the following comment ‘Do it, Polack!’ (TDD, 1967: 01.54.01) Immigrants are still regarded as ‘the other’ which harms the traditional image of the melting pot considerably.

Forced bond of brothers

After major Reisman’s personal visits to the prisoners, they are gathered in the hallway. It is made clear that if anyone of the crew breaks the rules or tries to escape, they are all going back to death row. This tactic uses social control as a group forming device. They are not a true bond of brothers, but they bond to escape death.

Reinforcement

Late bond of brothers

The combat unit is still conceptualized as a bond of brothers, but this feature only becomes clear in the later stages of the film. In the beginning stages, Jefferson and Wladislaw, the two most integer characters, already form a small unit. They, for instance, obstruct Franko’s plans of escaping and protect Jiminez from Franko’s bullying. Later on, more characters join this unit when they first take Reisman as a common enemy, then the authorities and finally, the Germans. In this second phase, when Reisman is considered one of them, Reisman acts more and more like a
father figure. He gives advice such as ‘You know, you learn how to take care of that temper of yours ain't nobody gonna take this knife away from you.’ (TDD, 1967: 43.43), provides Pose with education because the ‘Folks back home would be proud if [he] could write.’ (TDD, 1967: 44.34) and makes sure Jiminez receives guitar strings to practise his musical skills. He also proves his own worth in military combat to demonstrate he has the right to ‘father’ them, and he roots for his men: ‘My men have crammed six months of intensive training into as many weeks. As of this moment, I'd stack them up against any men in the Army.’ (TDD, 1967: 01.19.21)

v. Black-and-white portrayal of the enemy

Adjustment

The real enemy is not the German army, but their own government:

These guys think the U.S. Army is their enemy, not the Germans.

Well, they know the U.S. Army. But the Krauts haven't done anything to them yet. (TDD, 1967: 45.48)

The Germans are distant, and many of the men have been ill-treated by the government such as Jefferson who landed in prison because of discrimination. Moreover, the government is seen as a worse threat than Hitler by Franko who states ‘“Trust your major” I’d rather trust Hitler’ (TDD, 1967: 01.03.18).

In other instances the government is equalled with the German army. There is no right or wrong side anymore. In the military exercise, the constant changing of sides symbolizes the lack of clear boundaries; enemy side or our side, they are all the same. This feeling is enforced by an scene between two German soldiers who long to go home; the enemy has the same desires as the American soldiers and a feeling of empathy is established. Moreover, their mission consists of the killing of German officers, not civilians or normal soldiers; they are killing the authority.
Reinforcement

Being a German is still considered an insult in phrases such as ‘hey Maggott, what are you? German?’ (TDD, 1967: 32.56) and ‘You Nazi!’ (TDD, 1967: 01.16.18). Not only are they stereotyped as bullies in the mansion, they also deserve to be eradicated. Reisman dehumanizes them when he asks ‘Ready for the turkey shoot?’ (TDD, 1967: 01.55.05), and in the end, the officers are killed when they reside in their bomb shelter and are completely helpless. Grenades are thrown down the vents, and we see the officers and their companions scream and try to push them back out. The scene is reminiscent of the concentration camps where Jews were locked up as well and Zyklon-B (instead of grenades) flowed down the vents. The Germans are still considered evil and held accountable for their deeds.

vi. Respect for authority

Adjustment

Hypocrisy

The authority is shown as utterly hypocrite, concerned with social conventions, whereas Reisman is a man of no nonsense. During his entrance in general Worden’s building, Reisman is greeted with ‘John. Good to see you.’ (TDD, 1967: 2.42) to which Reisman grunts ‘Don’t you give me that. We had dinner last night together, remember?’ (TDD, 1967: 2.44). Reisman is obviously discontent with his summoning in front of general Worden after he was forced to witness a hanging, and when Reisman mentions the subject, Worden merely asks ‘Private Who?’. He does not even know the subject of the hanging, neither does he care. This portrayal of the authorities fits the general tendency of the government not to care about individuals, only about the execution of the objective.
Critique on the system is not tolerated either: ‘You do not have permission to make personal comments concerning the officers responsible for its conception.’ (TDD, 1967: 06.33). No free speech is possible, and only the voice of the superiors counts. This latter fact is demonstrated when colonel Breed delivers a negative report about major Reisman’s behaviour on the parachute training, while Reisman did not do anything wrong. The only reason for the negative report was Breed’s aggrieved honour because he could not know the whereabouts of the inmates’ mission.

Major Reisman is also held accountable for the party the prisoners received as a gift for their good participation in training. Reisman wanted to give his men a reward consisting out of a festivity with alcohol and women, but the authorities do not want to admit that those two things are part of military life. Reisman uncovers hypocrisy by stating ‘So I broke an Army regulation. You're gonna kill five men and send the rest to prison for life? Because if you did that you'd have to lock up half the U.S. Army, officers included.’ (TDD, 1967: 01.18.57)

**Bad portrayal of authority**

The nature of the objective also puts the authorities in a bad light. First of all, the army unit is to consist out of prisoners and not soldiers and secondly, the inmates are supposed to destroy a house of pleasure because most of the officers reside there, and allegedly, it would disrupt the German chain of command. Despite this explanation, we have the feeling the lives of these men are wasted on a futile matter.

Even Reisman doubts the validity of the mission as he remarks ‘Since I'll have to assume we're over here to win the war it wouldn't pay to advertise that one man we're working for is a raving lunatic.’ (emphasis mine, TDD, 1967: 06.16). Furthermore, the authority is bashed when Pinkley pretends to be a general, and Reisman instructs ‘You've seen generals inspecting troops. Just walk slow and act stupid.’ (emphasis mine, TDD, 1967: 57.25). In order to make it to the top, you have to be either insane or retarded.
No need for obedience: individual actions can be more valid

If authority is corrupt, you had better rely on your own decisions. Major Reisman has already realized this in his former army unit, but the authorities take it rather ill, and he receives a bad report. Nevertheless, major Reisman never admits guilt, and he believes he has acted correctly: ‘I didn't write those reports, sir.’ (TDD, 1967: 04.30). He acknowledges that superiors can be in fault sometimes too.

Another character who acted on his own is Wladislaw. He saved his entire unit by killing the man fleeing with the medical supplies. For his actions, however, he receives the severe punishment of a death sentence. One other character expresses his disgrudgement towards the decisions of superiors. Surprisingly this is general Worden himself when he says ‘Personally, I don't go for this behind-the-lines nonsense. As far as I'm concerned, a soldier's job is to wear his uniform and kill the enemy.’ (TDD, 1967: 05.14) He is merely carrying out orders as well, even though he himself does not quite agree. The difference with Reisman and Wladislaw is that general Worden stays in line and they did not.

Ambivalent portrayal of major Reisman and the prisoners

On one hand the army unit is immoral and unfit for society. They remain a group of criminals who have committed terrible deeds. On the other hand, the dirty dozen is more moral than the authorities.

The immortality of the group is underlined when the crimes of Franko and Maggott are mentioned. Franko has mugged an old defenceless man, and Maggott is a true psychopath who believes he can kill every prostitute in the name of God. When Maggott enters the German mansion, he honours his last name and slyly hides in a room until a lady passes by. Then he threatens her and forces her to scream before he slits her throat.

The immorality stretches even as far as major Reisman because when Franko attacks him, he uses extreme violence to prove his dominance. Reisman’s assault goes beyond self-defence, but still, he speaks the only language Franko would understand to keep this inmate in line: ‘Look, you little bastard, either you march or I’ll beat your brains out. Understand?’ (TDD, 1967: 16.57).
As the story progresses, however, it is clear that the prisoners and Reisman are more moral than their superiors. For example, Wladislaw and Jefferson were unjustly convicted and prove to be trustworthy characters. The other prisoners (except for Maggott) are depicted as decent people as well; they pay respect to the prostitutes when they enter their barracks and even seem shy and uneasy; they also have no trouble admitting their mistakes because when they realize they have misjudged the major, Franko mumbles ‘Yeah, we had Reisman all wrong.’ (TDD, 1967: 01.12.13)

Reisman is also a morally incorrupt man. He does not want anyone to flatter him, but he searches the truth:

Well, what do you think, sergeant?

I think you’ll do just fine, sir.

Don’t give me that. I said, what do you think? (TDD, 1967:29.00)

He also sheds hypocrisy and realizes that soldiers need alcohol and women to survive war. The home front was normally extremely puritan towards any extra-marital contacts or the use of drugs during war, but under extremely stressful circumstances men turn to these two pleasures, and by making them forbidden, you only make them more tempting. In a way, Maggott symbolizes the hypocrisy of the home front. He constantly critiques Reisman’s actions and gives his verdict as follows ‘I saw those filthy strumpets! You’re turning this place into a bottomless pit of vice!’ (TDD, 1967: 01.06.30). Fortunately, Reisman does not listen to his objections and goes his own way.
2.2 Kelly’s heroes (Hutton, 1970)

Kelly’s heroes (Hutton, 1970) is designed in the same fashion as TDD (Aldrich, 1967); the movie handles a story centring around a dirty group war unit and is meant to question the established war film conventions. The difference between the two movies is its structure. While TDD (Aldrich, 1967) consists out of three stadia: the training camp, the military exercise and the final mission, KH (Hutton, 1970) takes place in the middle of the war and focuses on the unit that journeys on. The story focuses on Kelly, a degraded lieutenant, who discovers the whereabouts of huge gold depot thanks to the interrogation of a German intelligence officer. This treasure is not easily accessible, however. They need to break through the enemy lines to the city of Clermont where they will be faced with three tiger tanks and at least 40 soldiers. To attain a successful outcome, Kelly convinces several men to cooperate in return for a share of the riches.

Kelly first seeks first sergeant Mulligan’s help; he offers him a gold ingot in exchange for a bombing of the German barrage. Mulligan willingly changes the aim of his tanks from an important military target to the location of Kelly’s desire. Mulligan is easily corruptible, but so are the other figures Kelly includes into his party. He invites Crapgame, a fixer, to invest in the mission because he needs necessary supplies, but Crapgame refuses an investment without the promise that he can come with. The conversation between Crapgame and Kelly is overheard by a long-haired hippy called Oddball who offers the help of his three Sherman tanks in exchange for a share of the profits. Oddball is the most idealistic character of the unit which sharply contrasts with Kelly’s sense for realism.

Kelly’s original plan was to include Big Joe, but Big Joe refuses to cooperate, thinking of the safety of his men. Only when he and his men are transferred to a dull village without entertainment does he yield to Kelly’s arguments. Big Joe proves a valuable asset to the unit; he takes the role of leader, but leaves the tactical aspects to Kelly because it was Kelly’s idea to raid the German bank in the first place.

Outside of the party, two more characters are important: Captain Maitland and major general Colt. They both represent authority, but have their funny quirks. Captain Maitland is
obsessed with a yacht he discovered in a shed and wants to transfer the boat to Paris, even if that means he needs to leave his men alone on the battlefield, and major general Colt is still living in the past, seeing war as a heroic battle between two forces of which the one with the strongest willpower and morale survives.

2.2.1 Format and melodramatic features

The format is similar to *TDD* (Aldrich, 1967). Colour is used, and the generic conventions are parodied. For instance, in the end credits we see the picture of the soldier, but instead of their real names their nicknames are used. Thus we see names such as ‘Crapgame’ appear on the screen. The melodramatic features are the same as in *TDD* (Aldrich, 1967) as well, but with the exception of the outcome of the mission. The true locus of innocence is still the army unit, and both the authority and the enemy threaten to destroy the group, but in the end with the salvaging of the gold, the only persons who benefit is the army unit and not the U.S. army as a whole. This division of profit was different in *TDD* (Aldrich, 1967), because U.S. the army gained from the completion of the assignment as well. In a way, we could state that *Kelly’s Heroes* (Hutton, 1970) is more radically subversive than *TDD* (Aldrich, 1967), even though still some endorsements of the old war film conventions appear. This relationship between uncovering and confirming certain myths is unfolded in 2.2.2.
2.2.2 Reinforcement and adjustment of the myths

i. No respect of authority

*Betrayal of both sides*

The film begins with the kidnapping of the German intelligence officer with in the background the song ‘Burning Bridges’ by Mike Curb (as cited in KH, 1970: 00.00):

*All those burning bridges that have fallen after me.*

*All the lonely feelings and the burning memories.*

*Everyone I left behind each time I closed a door.*

*Burning bridges lost forever more.*

Symbolically, Kelly has now betrayed the German army to the point of no return. He has kidnapped one of their officers and will subsequently rob the Germans of their gold supply. In the end, the same song is played once more, but this time its message is applicable to Kelly’s betrayal of the American army. On the wall of the freshly robbed German bank it reads ‘Kilroy was here. Up yours, baby’ which means the unit is now turning its back on the U.S. army; they are tired of fighting the war for a pittance and decide that it pays more to act outside of the system.

Moreover, in order to obtain the gold they collaborate with the German enemy. Big Joe offers the last surviving German a deal ‘Hey, look, Max, You and us, we’re just soldiers, right? We don't even know what this war's all about. All we do is we fight, and we die. And for what?’ (KH, 1970: 02.04.55) He proposes the German private blows a hole in the bank so they can all enter, and the German receives a share of the loot. This act of cooperation is a slap in the face of America’s war policies.
Disobedience

Several characters are discontent with the commands of superiors. It already starts with Big Joe’s concern about the safety of his men. The enemy tanks are approaching, but command still orders them to hold. Big Joe exclaims ‘I don’t give a damn what Command says about anything!’ (KH, 1970: 04.27), and even later his own men ignore his commands by fleeing. This depopulation is flatly opposed to the last stand format present in many war films; if the odds are too high, then most men will leave the scene.

Obedience is also shown to do little good because often the demands of higher up are unreasonable or absurd. Kelly, for example, used to be a lieutenant ‘[…]until he was ordered to attack the wrong hill. Wiped out half a company of G.I.’s. Somebody had to get the blame, and he got picked.’ (KH, 1970: 36.36).

Authority depicted as dumb or corrupt

The few characters representing authority are not cast in a good light. The first authority figure we encounter is 1st sergeant Mulligan; he is in command of the outfit a few yards away from Big Joe’s division, and instead of bombing the Germans, he bombs them. When Big Joe tries to make clear to him there has been a clear misunderstanding and that his men are under fire, Mulligan ignores Big Joe’s pleas at first and just continues with his rash shelling.

Big Joe’s own superior is not righteous either. Captain Maitland leaves the battlefield to safeguard his personal yacht, and his reply to Big Joe’s protest of ‘You’re supposed to be in charge of this outfit!’ is simply ‘You’re doing such a good job. Why should I get in your way?’ (KH, 1970: 12.35). Captain Maitland is also the one who only offers poisonous gifts:

$I made a deal with headquarters. I have three days rest for you and the men.$

$We're 10 miles from the nearest town! There's no action!$

$That's the beautiful thing about this location. It's quiet. Get yourselves a suntan, a little rest.$

(KH, 1970: 25.37)
By putting Big Joe’s team on inactive he both denies them the glorious entrance in Nancy which is now only reserved for the superiors who take all the credit, and the holiday the men receive is not truly enjoyable because the town is dead.

**ii. Denial of the realities of war**

**Adjustment**

**Friendly fire**

Normally, friendly fire rarely occurs in war movies as the soldiers are shown to be very adequate in aiming. *KH* (Hutton, 1970), however, has two instances of friendly fire. The first scene already starts off with Big Joe complaining ‘Mulligan, I don’t think I’m getting through to you! You’re dropping your damn barrage on our position!’ (KH, 1970: 04.33), and as the unit travels on, they seem to get more resistance from their own troops than from the Germans: ‘Is this why we pay taxes? To be bombed by our own Air Force?’ (KH, 1970: 57.38).

**All is fair in love and war**

Often in war, little attention is paid to violations of the Geneva Conventions. Big Joe, one of the more integer characters in the film, does not respect the rules either when he rudely interrupts the German officer who protests ‘Under the Geneva Convention you only...’ with ‘Sit Down!’ (KH, 1970:06.05). Later on, Big Joe gives the order to shoot the German officer because they need to escape before the German tanks arrive. Kelly protests to this order, but only brings to defence that they are never going to find the gold without the officer. The only reason he wants to keep the officer alive is his own greed and not humanitarian considerations. After Kelly has realized the drunk officer will not spill any more information, he leaves him on the battlefield where he is shot only a minute later by one of his own tanks.

Alongside rule violations, the moral code in war is also quite different. If you steal from the enemy, it is not considered a crime in se because you are weakening the enemy side. Crapgame
realizes the possibilities when he states ‘Behind enemy lines. That could be the perfect crime.’ (KH, 1970: 29.14). No one will punish the unit for robbing the bank and even less so because everything will remain secret; what happens on the enemy side, stays on the enemy side.

**Bad equipment**

Even though America had a huge industrial outcome, some of the soldiers were supplied with inadequate equipment. For instance, one of the privates whines ‘Now, come on, pal! Ain’t you got any Shermans? We’ve been polishing these things for two days! If we take them out there in that rain, they’ll rust up on us.’ (KH, 1970: 13.08)

**No hypocrisy**

Alcohol and women are a part of military life. After Big Joe has received the news they are going to invade Nancy, he immediately interrogates the German intelligence officer about the brothels. He does not seem to be interested in heroic deeds because he does not ask one military question, rather he wants to know the facilities. One of the men tries to be helpful and takes out a Michelin guide, but he is cut short: ‘Will you cut the culture crap and get to the hotels?’ (KH, 1970: 07.35). The image of the educated American is damaged as the American soldiers only wish to fulfil their private needs.

Big Joe seems to realize the consequences of sexual abstinence as he explains to captain Maitland ‘I must get my men near some broads before they start freaking-out.’ (KH, 1970: 12.03) In wartime paid sex is needed to keep the men in line; otherwise they might start raping civilians. The home front did not agree, however, and as a consequence the soldiers received few sexual education which led to the spread of venereal diseases. This reality is explored when one of the men randomly comments ‘I think I’ve got the crabs.’ (KH, 1970: 34.22). With statements as such KH (Hutton, 1970) breaks taboos that were only discussable on rare occasions.
Reinforcement

War as a game

As with TDD (Aldrich, 1967), the tone of this film is often very playful. Few casualties are shown on the American side, and both music and humour lighten up the atmosphere. The music is either excessively bombastic such as ‘the battle hymn of the republic’ (also known as ‘glory hallelujah’) or very comical such as ‘in the army now’ which was also used in TDD (Aldrich, 1967). Humour is all-present during the movie with one-liners like ‘Don't hit me with negative waves so early in the morning. Think that bridge will be there and it will be there.’ (KH, 1970: 01.04.34) or the teasing treatment of Crapgame as a packhorse.

The film also literally refers to the games; major general Colt is informed that some men are trying to push the enemy lines, and he is immediately enthusiastic. He barks ‘Get the hell out of here! We've got the game on!’ (emphasis mine, KH, 1970: 01.26.03). Interestingly, he resembles a military strategist playing a tactical board game. To him, the lives of the individual soldiers are of no importance, only the final victory.

Nevertheless, war as a game is more ambivalently portrayed than in TDD (Aldrich, 1967). First of all, the superior seems to be the only one truly enjoying the ‘game’, and secondly, one character is called ‘Crap-game' which might be a metacomment on the true nature of war.
iii. concept of heroism

Adjustment

Ridiculing idealistic believes

The only character still believing in heroic fervour is major general Colt. He believes in the importance of individual efforts:

*I want to know why this loser of a general is keeping me the hell out of Nancy!*

*We haven't got the supplies.*

*We've got logistics coming out of our ears! What we need is fighting spirit! The will to win!* (emphasis mine, KH, 1970: 49.19)

Apparently he thinks one can win a war without resources. Moreover, the major general sees the Americans as superior to the Germans. The Germans are already doomed to lose, they are ‘born losers’ (KH, 1970: 48.08).

He is absolutely delighted to hear Kelly’s men have broken through the enemy lines and credits them for their hard work. He exaggerates their performance with empty words like ‘History waits for no man. I have an appointment with destiny in Clermont’ (emphasis mine, KH, 1970: 01.30.16), and his own motives are those of praise and recognition. Ironically, the motives of Kelly’s men are not patriotic either, yet they are called ‘heroes’.

Absurdity of war

Even if the men would like to perform heroic deeds, it would have little to no use. For instance, the bridge Kelly and his men need to cross is bombed by the Americans by night and rebuilt by day. In a way, that makes it unnecessary to bomb the bridges because every time the American efforts are erased.
The absurdity is also demonstrated in the abstract reasons many politicians give to fight the war. WWII was justified as the liberation of Europe from antidemocratic tendencies, but few soldiers believed in this ideological necessity. The abuse of abstract notions is also present in *KH* (Hutton, 1970) when Oddball mows down the Germans of a military installation and blasts his way through. In the background we hear the song 'All for the love of sunshine' by Hank Williams (cited in *KH*, 1970). Sunshine is as good as any abstract reason to start a war. Moreover, the same song (but a sadder version) is repeated when two American soldiers die in a mine field. This repetition embodies the darker side of war; many people die, and often they are portrayed as necessary sacrifices to obtain the abstract goal, but in reality wars are rarely fought for benevolent reasons, and often a lot of money is involved.

*The feminine tint*

War has masculine connotations, and in former war movies the GIs were presented as masculine as possible as an evidence of their fighting skills. *KH* (Hutton, 1970) harms masculinity by making the subtle link between the soldier and femininity. For one, two of the soldiers have female names. Big Joe asks ‘What do you want, Barbara?’ (*KH*, 1970: 07.48), and Kelly, the protagonist, has a woman’s name too.

Throughout the film references are made as well. For example, when Big Joe announces to the men that they have been ordered to pull back, one of his men protests ‘But my hair is still in curlers.’ (*KH*, 1970: 23.23), and Oddball consistently calls everyone ‘baby’. *KH* (Hutton, 1970) fractures traditional gender dichotomies and shows that machismo is not necessary to be a soldier or to be part of the group.

*Self-preservation*

Almost none of the characters are willing to risk their neck for their country or friends; most characters only go on the mission because of the gold to gain, and participation is granted through bribery. At a certain moment, Kelly needs to have the Germans distracted so they can cross enemy lines, and he contacts Mulligan, asking him to change the aim of his tanks. Mulligan replies
with ‘Kelly, without an authorization, I can't help you.’ (KH, 1970: 21.36), but once Kelly hands him a gold bar, he seems more than willing to lay down the barrage. Crapgame reacts in exactly the same manner and so does Oddball. Each time the gold is introduced to the characters their attitude changes significantly.

Oddball explains further that he did not participate in the war because ‘We see our role as essentially a defensive image. While our armies are advancing so fast and everyone’s knocking themselves out to be heroes we are holding ourselves in reserve in case the Krauts mount a counteroffensive which threatens Paris or maybe even New York’ (emphasis mine, KH, 1970: 30.24). He does not want to act like a hero for a country that barely gives him a reward. There are no patriotic motives here; he says literally ‘But for $1.6 million we could become heroes for three days.’

The concept of what is the right thing to do in war is also redefined. Running is no longer considered a feature of cowards only, but is seen as a smart thing when the situation is unmanageable; Oddball had his tanks upgraded to become the fastest tanks in Europe because ‘We like to feel that we can get out of trouble quicker than we got into it.’ (KH, 1970:32.59) and during the last combat, Big Joe exclaims ‘He must be a full, fanatic freak! Or he would've split 20 minutes ago.’ (KH, 1970:02.01.33), claiming that only people who are insane do not safeguard their own lives.

The definition of a good man is also readjusted:

*You won't forget me now, will you?*

*Why, no. I won't forget, Kelly.*

*You're a good man, Mulligan.* (emphasis mine, KH, 1970:22.10)

A good man is loyal, but this loyalty can be bought. Mulligan is only willing to participate after he has received the bribe money.
Reinforcement

Combat is still considered necessary in war. This necessity is demonstrated in the depiction of Oddball’s hippy troops, a critique on the flower power movement of the 1960s. On one hand, the flower children claimed to be pacifist as does Oddball because he claims to have his ‘[…]own ammunition. It’s filled with paint. When we fire it, it makes pretty pictures. It scares the hell out of people. We got a loudspeaker. When we go into battle, we play music very loud. It kind of…calms us down.’ (KH, 1970: 33.41), but on the other hand his idealistic thinking does not achieve anything. In the 1970s, people increasingly had the feeling all the protest marches had attained nothing. The Vietnam War was still going on, an oil recession was approaching, and the government seemed ignorant towards the wishes of the people.

Kelly is more realistic than Oddball which is why he takes plenty of guns with him on the mission and does not avoid violence to obtain the gold. At one point, Oddball is seen firing normal guns as well to get through the German military camp; he can only advance when he turns to real gunfire.

iv. The combat unit as a bond of brothers

Adjustment

Trust is far gone in the group. The only thing that binds everyone is the longing for riches. Crapgame is the extreme example of this forced dependence; he wants to protect his investment and is afraid they might escape with the gold if he does not come with the party. Moreover, Crapgame is deemed untrustworthy because he belongs to the administration. Big Joe puts Crapgame in his place: ‘You butt out! The only time you come out of the ground is when you smell a profit. I’m coming out now because Kelly has the perfect caper! For you it’s a vacation. Six days out of seven you’re behind the lines. We’re at the broken end of a bottle all the time, so you butt out!’ (KH, 1970: 39.27) Crapgame has never experienced true combat, and he causes resentment among the group who considers him a profiteer; in order to become part of the group, he needs to
go through a rite of passage. First he needs to carry the machine gun all the way to Clermont and then he will have to participate in the fight.

Sacrifice to save your team mate is also not considered a smart move. Big Joe expounds that ‘there's certain rules and regulations governing the fighting of a war. And the first one is that you never stick your neck out for nobody! Unless you're some kind of a hero type.’ (KH, 1970: 40.02). Everyone has to survive on their own.

**Reinforcement**

Big Joe often acts as a father figure: ‘I got a job to do and that is to get you guys to Berlin alive. We've been at the front end of this war all the way. If you whisper one word about the gold to the guys I'll bounce you from this outfit so fast your feet won't touch the ground.’ (KH, 1970:23.58). He protects his men the best he can, and when the first casualties fall, Big Joe is the one to stay longest to mourn the dead.

Big Joe’s goal also appears to bind the men sufficiently to care for each other in combat. When two men are stuck in the minefield Kelly orders ‘You'll never make it! We'll cover you from the road. Don't move unless they spot you.’ (emphasis mine, 1970: 01.13.31), and in the last battle, when Crapgame gets wounded, his buddies drag him to a safe place.
3. End 1970s until end 1980s: restoration

3.1 Midway (Smight, 1976)

Midway is exceptional in comparison to the other movies because it does not focus on the combat field, but it centres on the happenings of three cruisers. Nonetheless, the film is included because it is one of the few films focussing on the war in the Pacific, whereas the other films narrate the events in Europe.

Midway recounts two interwoven stories, one in the personal sphere, the other in the general sphere of war. The personal story concerns the life of captain Garth and his son, Tom. Both are enlisted and participate in the battle of Midway. However, Tom’s battle skills are questioned because he has a controversial relationship with a Japanese girl which is thought to influence his vision on the ‘enemy’. What is more, his girlfriend has been arrested on suspicion of collaboration with the enemy. She and her family are forced to stay in a Japanese detention camp until they will be deported to Japan. This latter event is what Tom tries to prevent, and he calls for the help of his father. Captain Garth first protests to the relationship, but then decides to aid. In the end, Tom returns from the battle of Midway and is happily united with his girlfriend.

Alongside this personal story, a more general story unfolds. The Americans have the suspicion admiral Yamamoto will attack the coral sea and another military target. This military target remains guesswork for the Americans as they only have spare decoded messages and need to base their strategic moves on few information. Ultimately, captain Garth tries to convince his superiors that the military target will be Midway and that they ought to act as quickly as possible. Three cruisers are sent out to meet the enemy, but neither the Japanese, nor the Americans know the exact position of each other, and a cat and mouse game develops. In the end, the Americans win the battle which proves to be a turning point in the pacific war.
3.1.1 Aesthetic Format

The introduction makes clear what kind of movie we are dealing with:

This is the way it was – the story of the battle that was the turning point of war in the pacific, told wherever possible with actual film shot during combat. It exemplifies the combination of planning, courage, error and pure chance by which great events are often decided. (emphasis mine, Midway, 1976: 00.00)

First of all, the movie has a mimetic desire. It wants to be authentic and uses actual footage to increase objectivity. In contrast with other movies using real footage, the material is not only used in the beginning of the movie, but also during the battle scenes which creates a true mingle between reality and fiction. Connected to the desire of authenticity is the portrayal of great events. The movie does not narrate just any story, but a ‘turning point’. This emphasis on greatness reminds us of the epic movies created during the sixties, and in a way, this is a restoration of those propagandistic film after a period of genre-inversion cinema. Midway (1976) seeks to serve an exemplary function in which the qualities of good soldiers are highlighted.

3.1.2 Melodrama

The two narrations both contain melodramatic features. On the general level, the locus of innocence is once more the homeland which is threatened by Japanese invasion. No more mentioning of the corruption of authority, and the war on sea is central, the locus of innocence is not the combat unit either because no combat unit appears in the movie. Consequently, the characters have nostalgic feelings towards their native country. Captain Garth expresses it as follows ‘Times like this, Joe, I miss the flatlands. It's a big body of water out there. I'm a fella from the Texas prairie. Nearest lake was 120 miles away. You could wade across it at the height of the rainy season. During summer we made clay pots out of its bottom’ (MW, 1976: 01.03.35).
In the personal story of Garth and Tom, the locus of innocence is the family. We learn, for instance, that Garth is divorced, a consequence of the war, and Tom wants to form a family, but his attempts are hindered by America's hostility towards the Japanese. Moreover, both the father-son relationship, and the relationship between man-woman are put to the fore. Father and son have to stay together, but since they both serve in the army the chance of one not returning is rather large. Tom is severely burnt during a mission, but he survives. Garth is not so lucky, and after his noble heroic act of flying a fighter plane himself, he does not make it back to the base.

The relationship between Tom and his Japanese girlfriend, Haruko, is thoroughly explored as well. Their happiness is threatened by racism from both sides. On one hand, Tom receives a lot of critique because his relationship is 'unpatriotic'. On the other hand, Haruko is forced to marry within her own race by her parents. This racial tension is solved by Garth who convinces the U.S. government to release Haruko and her parents, and in the end Haruko and Tom can remain together. Garth's action makes clear that melodrama does not aim for an adjustment of the entire society; Garth has only rooted for Haruko and her family, but does not comment on the other Japanese who are unjustly held in detention camps. He touches upon the problem of racism, but only ensures an amelioration of the situation on the personal level.

The melodramatic features on both levels are even enhanced by the amount of sentimentality present. Whenever a sad or emotional moment develops, we zoom in on the character's faces to show the tears or sorrow. Moreover, few attention is paid to the suffering of the American pilots except when Tom catches fire or when Garth does not make it back to the base. They are presented as virtuous with their suffering as evidence. These two characters stand for the entire U.S. army as a whole which remains largely faceless.
3.1.3 Myths

i. Japanese portrayal

Invincibility

The Japanese are depicted as nearly invincible to increase the dramatic tension. Their superiors are seen as war-eager, and their resources are endlessly better than the Americans. For instance, Admiral Yamamoto does not mourn the American war raid on his country, but sees it as an excuse to wage war:

This raid is a blessing in disguise. The Americans have proven you correct. Our homeland is not invulnerable. After today, the General Staff will certainly approve your operation M-I. (MW, 1976: 04.59).

He underpins his decision with allegedly rational arguments:

Gentlemen, consider this: The Americans are still unprepared and outnumbered. If their fleet can be lured into battle and defeated, they will have no significant naval force left in the Pacific. They will have to sue for peace. (emphasis mine, MW, 1976: 15.47)

With the character of admiral Yamamoto, the Japanese do not remain abstract. Yamamoto is slightly ambivalent. He is honourable and wants to fight for his country which is an admirable trait, but he is also America’s number one enemy who will not yield unless extreme force is applied.

Throughout the film, the odds keep on changing. The Americans have two disadvantages. First of all, they ‘[…]face the biggest force the enemy has ever sorted, over 200 ships. They’ve got 4-to-1 supremacy.’ (MW, 1976: 38.46), and secondly, ‘the Japanese changed the J-N 25 code, the one they used for Yamamoto’s plan.’ (MW, 1976: 29.12). The Americans will have to rely on the
spare equipment available, using its potential to the fullest, and they will have to base their strategical decisions on nothing more than guesswork.

The first time the Americans get the upper hand is when they manage to locate the enemy’s fleet, while the enemy is still at sea about the position of their cruisers. Thanks to this military advantage, they manage to destroy many Japanese boats which solves the 4-to-1 supremacy. They are now fighting with superior numbers. Nevertheless, this relationship quickly changes when the Japanese admiral employs kamikaze attacks as an effective technique, and the American forces are reduced to the same size as the Japanese cruisers. However, despite the equality in forces, the Japanese have the upper hand when it comes to dedication; they still have fighters left for kamikaze attacks. To balance this inequality, a noble sacrifice is performed by captain Garth. He shows an equal military dedication in engaging in the dangerous mission to bomb the last Japanese cruiser. He succeeds in destroying the last battle ship, but passes away himself.

Racism

Racism occurs on the general level and the personal level. Generally, the Americans have little respect for their Japanese enemy. The pilots deliver one-liners such as ‘Got one! Look at that Jap bastard!’ (emphasis mine, MW, 1976: 01.15.01) In addition to these racial remarks, suffering on the Japanese side is rarely shown.

Still, the portrayal of the Japanese is not all black-and-white as is shown on the personal level. When Tom confronts his father with the objections he might have against Tom’s marriage, the following conversation unfolds:

*It sticks in your throat that I want to marry a Japanese girl?*

*Sticks in your...?. Don't give me that ‘racial bigot’ crap.*

*I don't care what color she is.* (MW, 1976: 12.39)

Garth denies racism. He argues that the only reason he is against the marriage is that the Japanese are now their enemies. This statement is rather ambiguous because that would mean
that ‘all’ the Japanese are necessarily a threat to national security. So Garth might deny racism, but in essence he still employs criteria of race to decide who is trustworthy. Nonetheless, he puts aside his doubts and tries to accept Haruko for his son’s sake.

Subsequently, the captain tries to discover the reason why Haruko has been detained and discovers her parents had a subscription to a patriotic Japanese magazine. Moreover, Haruko has not told the real reason why she has come to America. After these findings, Garth defends the authorities with the words ‘[…] the FBI doesn't think she’s telling the truth about coming here. You can't blame them for that’ (MW, 1976: 25.49). At this point it truly seems that Haruko is guilty and has abused Tom’s naivety, but the attitude towards Haruko changes when she convinces the captain she is first and foremost an American, and not a Japanese citizen. Haruko confronts Garth as follows:

Damn it, I'm an American! What makes us different from German-Americans or Italian-Americans?

Pearl Harbor, I guess. (MW, 1976: 33.01)

Captain Garth is forced to admit his first judgement is wrong because he cannot uphold the hypocritical attitude of condemning one community merely because they attacked America personally and the Italian and German communities did not. Moreover, it becomes clear that Haruko only lied about the reason to come to America because she wanted to protect Tom. She did not want to involve Tom into an FBI investment since that might damage his military career.

Now that captain Garth is convinced of Haruko's innocence he has to compete against the conflicting opinions of his military comrades. One of them, Jessop, even transfers Tom to prevent him from seeing Haruko again, and when Garth asks the favour if revising Haruko’s file he receives the incredulous reaction ‘A Japanese?’ (MW, 1976: 48.41). By visualizing the tension between Garth and his friends, the film orchestrates the essential problem of deciding one's inclination by race. Nevertheless, MW (Smight, 1976) only focuses on the Japanese staying in America and not on those living in Japan. They are still considered all bad, civilians and military personnel alike.
Furthermore, the parents of Haruko are ironically portrayed as racists as well because Haruko explains that her ‘[…]parents have forbidden [her] to marry outside [her] race” (MW, 1976: 35.04). This attitude might be explained in two ways; they might have true aversion towards other races, but they might also be protective towards their daughter. They might realize that racial mixture is a sensitive issue in America, and to avoid further problems, they prohibit their daughter to contract an interracial relationship.

ii. Myth of the superior American GI

In spite of the depiction of the Japanese as invincible, the American GI is extolled profoundly as well. Not only do they have superior fighting skills, but their characteristics of obedience and persistence prove to be very valuable as well.

The myth of the precise strike is upheld by reports such as ‘Lieutenant-Colonel Doolittle led the raid with a force of 16 B-25s and an all-volunteer crew of airmen. Most of the planes carried 500-pound demolition bombs and single incendiary clusters, which were dropped on oil stores, factories and military sites in Tokyo.’ (emphasis mine, MW, 1976: 05.23). The planes have only hit military targets, and supposedly, no civilians have been hurt. The aforementioned quote also indicates the ideological motivation of the men, because the crew consisted out of volunteers as if everyone is rallying for the war.

The precision of the planes will be repeated when the first group of airmen is sent off. They bomb the enemy cruiser and exclaims things like ‘Score 1 for Commander Thach!’ (MW, 1976:01.40.06) and ‘Bull's eye! Yahoo!’ (MW, 1976: 01.47.04). Almost every bomb seems to hit the target, and what is more, they seem to be having fun which indicates their eagerness to destroy the enemy. The aspect of pleasure is repeated a few times. For instance: ‘The poor bastards'll (sic) miss all the fun. There's nothing north of us but ocean.’ (MW, 1976: 01.06.25).

The effort of the American GI also seems to be appreciated. They are not depicted as expendable, and every man can make a difference. For example, had Joe not deciphered a
message indicating Midway as a possible military target then Midway would have been unprepared. It is thanks to each man’s contribution that the war is won. The latter is demonstrated in the end when Garth’s self-sacrifice changes the entire outcome of the battle.

A good soldier shows no fear either. The initial mission to sent three cruisers towards Midway is a serious risk because then the West Coast and Hawaii will be open to enemy attacks, and ‘[…]the safe play is to defend the home folks first.” (MW, 1976: 27.32). General Nimitz, however, decides to engage in the mission because he sees the larger picture of winning the war, and sometimes a victory can only be obtained by the taking of risks. In addition, the general is not convinced that the policy of ‘wait and see’ is the most valuable one. He calls for action as do several other characters. One figure even clearly expounds ‘Wait and see. We waited. December 7th, we saw. The wait-and-seers will bust your ass every time.’ (MW, 1976: 45.24). This active attitude is closely connected to the myth that Europe failed to defeat Hitler because they waited too long to act against him.

Showing no fear or emotion is also applied to the duty of a common soldier. A superior orders one of his men ‘You're paid to fly fighter planes, not to sit in your cabin and cry over your girl's picture. You better shape up, Tiger, before a hot-shot Jap pilot flames your ass!’ (MW, 1976: 52.20). Personal matters should not get in the way of the soldier’s fighting ability, neither should he let his attachment to home let him distract of the possibility that he might have to sacrifice his life for his country.

About Tom, the following is said: ‘He’s a good man, a natural pilot, good attitude, good marksman.’ (MW, 1976: 46.07) which means that he will obey his superiors without questioning the motives. In addition to his attitude, he also seems to have a born quality to qualify for soldier because he is a ‘natural pilot’. In other films, this inherent feature is stressed as well. Only a few set of men are born to be soldiers, and those are the ones that can conquer their fear properly.

Although the above features indicate an emphasis on heroic acts, the influence of heroism is also put into perspective. For instance, luck can decide the outcome of war just as much as individual deeds. On the enemy side, the two best air commanders fall sick: one with influenza, the other one with appendicitis, and on the American side, the three boilers are out of commission.
which causes a delay in the departure of one of the cruise ships. Had these events not occurred, the fight could have ended differently. The constant insecurity about the enemy's position also demonstrates the importance of luck. If the Americans had been first discovered before they had discovered the Japanese then the Japanese army would have had the advantage, and in the end, one of the superiors asks 'Were we better than the Japanese, or just luckier?' which is both an adjustment of the exaggerated American superiority and an adjustment of the consequences of individual effort.

iii. Relationship superior – men

Notwithstanding the focus on naval warfare and less on a combat unit, the relationship between superior and men is lightly touched upon. First of all, captain Garth is literally Tom’s father, and he acts accordingly. When Tom is hurt, he immediately casts aside his activities to check his son’s healthy. The fatherly relationship can also be taken figuratively; one of the superiors orders his men to go asleep. He understands their nervousness, but he commands them to ‘[…]<get below and try. We got a heavy day ahead.’ (MW, 1976: 01.06.50). He truly seems to care about his men.

Another relationship exists between the men. They have a feeling of loyalty towards each other which is shown in battle:

Sir, we don't have a bomb!

*We can draw some heat off the guys that do.* (MW, 1976: 01.45.46)

They are fending for each other, and even the airmen without bombs engage in battle. The unity is not only shown in their loyalty, but also in the acceptance of each other’s skills and geographical background. Similar to the traditional war unit, this naval film hints at a melting pot with statements such as ‘If anybody can find the Japs, Waldron can. He's part *Sioux Indian!*’
(emphasis mine, MW, 1976: 01.25.22). It seems everyone fights willingly, despite race or descent, and they are all integrated into the American army.

3.2 The big red one (Fuller, 1980)

Samuel Fuller directed The big red one in 1980. The story is based on his personal experiences in WWII and narrates the story of himself as a young soldier. Zab, Fuller’s alter-ego, is introduced into the war as soon as 1941 and joins a platoon called ‘the big red one’, named after the red stripe on their arms. This platoon is legendary as it fought most bravely in WWI, and now it will have to fight in WWII.

Alongside private Zab, we meet privates Vinci, Johnson and Griff. Vinci is a representative of the Italian minority group in America, and during the film he is faced with sometimes hostile attitudes because of the rise of fascism in Italy. Vinci’s loyalties are doubted, but his combat unit always defends him because he has always protected them in battle.

Private Johnson used to be a farmer, and now he is the medic of the unit, but he also knows how to handle a gun. Griff has also had a shooting training, but petrifies in the first battle in the North of Africa. Griff has trouble with killing other human beings, and only at the end of the film will he learn that killing is necessary in war.

All these privates are led by the sergeant who already fought in the trenches of WWI. He is a tough war veteran who only shows emotions outside of combat. In the heat of the war, however, he is the one with most fighting experience who is meant to guide his men first through the North of Africa, then through Sicily and lastly, on a trip through Europe to arrive in a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia where the unit learns the war treaty has been signed and the war is officially over.
3.2.1 Aesthetical Format

*The big red one* (Fuller, 1980) is one of the few blockbuster WWII films of the 1980s because the combat films that appeared during that era are largely Vietnam-inspired. Think, for instance, of *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979), *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick, 1987) and *Good morning, Vietnam* (Levinson, 1987). In a way, the 1980s WWII film is underrepresented.

Fuller directed his film to commemorate his own experiences of WWII and not merely because of the public need for WWII films and despite Hollywood demands, Fuller tries to stay critical towards his experiences which creates an amalgam of restoration and criticism. The restoration is visible in the army unit which now consists of sincere soldiers and no longer of criminals (TDD, Aldrich, 1967) or opportunists (KH, Hutton, 1970). Moreover, the humorous tone is replaced by a serious one and heroic events are presented to us. Despite these restorative elements, there is a discrepancy between the happenings on screen, and the irony of the voice-over which commentary suggests an anti-war attitude.

3.2.2 Melodramatic features

As in previous films, the locus of innocence is located both with the homeland and with the combat unit. The homeland is no longer seen as corrupt or immoral, and thus we see scenes of mail-writing reappear in which the characters receive the latest news of the home front and share their war experiences. While the film progresses, however, the locus of innocence shifts more and more to the party. Zab asks ‘Hey, Johnson, you ever notice how no one ever talks about home anymore, or women?’ (TBRO, 1980: 01.35.53). A question to denote that they now only have each other to protect.

The locus of innocence is not only threatened by the enemy, but more so than in previous films by the hostile environment. The group travels from North Africa to Europe and encounters the dangers of unexplored land. The sergeant warns his men ‘Keep an eye peeled for snakes.’ (TBRO, 1980: 50.59) and the heat and sand are almost unbearable.
Moreover, sentimentality is present in TBRO (1980) and it is not only experienced by female characters but by the sergeant in specific. First, he accepts a symbolical gift from a little girl who thanks him for saving her village, and he pursues the journey with his helmet full of flowers, even though that makes him a more visible target. Later on, he tries to make contact with a traumatized little boy whom he saved from the concentration camp. The narrator comments ‘He walked around for half an hour before he could bring himself to put the kid down.’ (TBRO, 1980: 2.35.49). These interrupting scenes show a softer side of the sergeant and create a feeling of sympathy towards him.

3.2.3 Reinforcement and adjustment of WWII myths

i. Portrayal of war as ‘good’

Adjustment

Absurdity of war

The very first scene depicts the sergeant in WWI. A German soldier approaches him with the words ‘Der krieg ist forbei. Nicht schieben. Der krieg ist forbei’\(^1\) (TBRO, 1980:2.48). Despite his pleas, the sergeant mercilessly kills him with a knife, but when his superior translates the victim’s words, he feels incredibly guilty. This scene is repeated at the end of the film, when Schroeder, a German officer, approaches the sergeant with his hands in the air, murmuring the exact same words. The sergeant once more stabs him with his knife, but this time his men arrive on time to inform him the war is over. The sergeant’s attitude changes completely, and he tries everything to stitch the German’s wounds. Both scenes illustrate the hypocrisy of war which gives soldiers the right to decide over the live of a human being which they would not harm in any way during peacetime.

\(^1\) ‘The war is over. Do not shoot. The war is over.’
Another absurd comment is made when the group has to overpower a German combat unit residing in an madhouse. The safest way to overthrow the Germans would be to bomb the entire facility, but that would not be politically correct:

*I say division should bomb it.*

*Killing insane people is not good for public relations.*

*Killing sane people is okay?*

*That’s right.* (TBRO, 1980: 1.42.22)

**Stress imposed on the soldiers**

At one point, the camera focuses on a the bloodshot eyes of a wild horse. The animal is shell-shocked, and as a consequence, it’s gone completely berserk. The sergeant’s superior remarks ‘Well, I suppose horses have as much right to go crazy in this war as men have.’ (TBRO, 1980: 4.33). With this comment he illustrates the trauma both man and nature undergo during wartime.

The documentary narrator refers to the effects of war as well when he observes his fellow soldiers: ‘There were four things you could hear on the boat: The waves, the engines, an occasional muffled prayer and the sound of 50 guys all heaving their guts out.’ (TBRO, 1980: 9.26). He not only recounts the rough circumstances, but later on he also talks about the alienation because you cannot get too attached to your team mates; they might die any moment. What is more, in one of the final scenes a GI dies because of a heart attack; he could no longer handle the constant stress.
The authority is uncaring

The authority is not really positively portrayed, but the comments remain sparse and are not integrated in a general protest against the nation like in *Kelly’s Heroes* (Hutton, 1970) or *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967). Whereas the latter films try to expose the hypocrisy of the government, *The Big Red One* (Fuller, 1980) merely tries to show that you cannot relate on anyone but your team mates and yourself. Furthermore, the negative attitude towards authority is only expressed by the narrator and never openly by the soldiers. The soldiers never defy a command and do not question their superiors’ motives.

For example, the narrator ironically states:

*Our brilliant (irony) generals had figured that Rommel’s push would come at a place called Speava so they massed most of the Allied forces over there. But they sent our regiment around the back way through a shit-hole (emphasis) called the Kasserine Pass.*

(TBRO, 1980: 28.14)

He is disrespectful towards higher command, but he also has the benefit of hindsight. No one could know at that time where Rommel would strike. As a consequence, Zab and the other privates follow their orders and travel to the Kasserine Pass.

Reinforcement

In spite of the anti-war statements, the film also indicates that WWII is better than WWI. In addition, it points out that during war cruelty is necessary sometimes. The myth of WWII still being better than WWI is endorsed by the repetition of the beginning scene. In the first scene we saw the sergeant stab a German to death after he had announced in German the war was over. He feels extremely guilty about his deed as Zab illustrates: ‘He told Vinci he fought around here in the first war. He kept ahead as if looking for some old ghost to rise up out of the mist.’ (emphasis mine, TBRO, 1980: 1.28.25) He receives the chance to set bury the ghost that haunts him in the ending scene. In that scene, he stabs a German once more after the armistice, but this time the German
The officer has not died yet, and he manages to save the person. The personal redemption of the sergeant symbolically stands for the redemption of Europe as a whole; WWII achieved peace when WWI could not.

The necessity of cruelty is another way of justifying the violence war invites. The sergeant makes a difference between killing and murdering. You murder a person, but you kill an animal. In a similar fashion, you do not murder a German, you kill him. This dehumanizing of the enemy signals the different moral code of war in which everything is allowed as long as the objective is achieved.

ii. The concept of heroism

Adjustment

The privates of Zab's unit are presented as ignorant towards the real motives for fighting the war. The boys do not seem to be ideologically motivated at all, and they are ignorant towards the stages of war. Griff, for instance, mentions that he '[…]always thought Vichy was some kind of soda pop.' (TBRO, 1980: 07.42) They do not fight for democracy, but to survive. The closing statement of the film underscores this aim: ‘[…]surviving is the only glory in war, if you know what I mean.’ (TBRO, 1980: 2.39.44). The soldiers realize that people who die during war are considered heroes, but they appreciate their life more than a vague mention on a statue or memorial as a conversation between Zab and the sergeant demonstrates:

Would you look how fast they put up the names of all our guys who got killed.

That's a World War I memorial.

But the names are the same.

They always are. (TBRO, 1980: 01.29.10)
The preference of life over death is shown in the narrator's comments as well when he states after they have helped a pregnant woman: ‘We got a bunch of medals not for delivering the kid, just for killing Krauts.’ He finds it ironical that their effort is not rewarded, even though giving birth is a lot more difficult than delivering death. Moreover, even a mentally retarded person can kill; when they enter the madhouse in Belgium one of the lunatics manages to grab a gun and fires all around while yelling ‘I am one of you. I am sane.’ (TBRO, 1980: 01.47.51)

Reinforcement

The army unit is still displayed as exceptional thanks to their military achievements both in WWI and in WWII. The film starts with the message ‘A quarter of a century later, that piece of red cloth from the dead Hun’s hat had become famous all over the world. It was the insignia of the 1st Infantry Division. The Fighting First, the Big Red One.’ (TBRO, 1980: 5.40), indicating that the platoon had already earned its stripes.

The integrity of the division will once more be proved in WWII under the command of the sergeant, and he orders his troops not to run when they encounter Rommel’s tanks. This show of bravery is repeated, for example, on D-day when Griff manages to make a breach in the German’s defences. Subsequently, at first Griff is unable to kill another person, but after his exclusion from the group he learns how to surmount his ‘fear’, and no one breaks down after this turning point. They all preserve their calm in battle and are portrayed as a group with excellent fighting skills.

The heroism of their deeds is reinforced by the impossibility of the missions they face. The narrator always sketches a semi-impossible mission such as ‘Jesus. We’re sitting in our own coffin.’ (TBRO, 1980: 52.11) Even though his remark has an ironical tone in the end, the core of the army unit never dies and surmounts all difficulties which earns them the nickname of the ‘Sergeant’s Four Horsemen’ (TBRO, 1980: 47.56). Despite the fact that surviving is presented as the only aim of a soldier he only seems to be able to do so if he knows how to fight. Moreover, when Kaiser, the rookie of the group, is shot, he still takes honour in the death of his enemy. This interpretation contradicts with the initial goal of the film to make survival the most important aim of
the GI since the killing enemy soldiers is praised thoroughly, even when you have to sacrifice your life in order to achieve that goal.

This traditional concept of heroism, the sacrifice of your own well-being for a higher good, is emphasized as well in a radio message by the Germans: ‘Adolf Hitler has nothing against you American dogfaces. You know Hitler's beef is with England. All those limeys hate your guts for licking them back in 1776. Why fight for them?’ (TBRO, 1980: 17.37) This communication phrases the concern many Americans had during WWII; they did not feel as if they needed to help Europe, and thus, the fact that they did is highly laudable; they came to the help of the defenceless without any cravings for personal gain.

This American heroism is taken even farther in one of their missions in Africa when the party is saved by American troops and not by French troops. Yet, the French ought to be the ones to have the most influence in that area. As a consequence, the sergeant utters incredible ‘You know who fired that artillery? The United States Navy. That was the crews of Savannah miles offshore, all right? Right. Can you believe that? The U.S. Navy saved our ass.’ (TBRO, 1980: 57.02) This fragment shows that the Americans are more capable than Europeans of taking back territory because they apparently have more will to fight, even in impossible circumstances.

This image of Americans as saviours is repeated in a mission in Italy when we meet a boy who has just lost his mother. He pleas for a coffin to bury her in, and the American unit promises this item in return for information. The boy is utterly pleased when he finally receives his coffin and even more so because the casket is ‘[…]silk-lined, with six handles on it.’ (TBRO,1980: 01.07.14) The Americans are very generous towards those that aid them, only their enemies get the worst.
iii. A black-and-white enemy

Adjustment

The Germans have the same principles as the Americans by making the afore mentioned distinction between killing and murdering. By indicating this common principle, the Americans seem to be more alike their enemy than they would like to admit; they both kill to achieve a purpose, and neither of them believes that killing is a bad thing in war.

Furthermore, the unit makes a difference between a German and a Nazi. Griff, for example, explains indignantly ‘She's just a German, sergeant. She's not a Nazi.' (TBRO, 1980: 2.13.32) This distinction suggests no racial hatred is involved, only a different ideology, whereas this issue would be different if the group had talked about the Japanese enemy where a clear racial disliking is involved.

Reinforcement

Despite the two remarks above, the film does not often portray the enemy in shades of grey. Even the narrator sees killing the Germans as ultimate goal when he narrates ‘We were in this war to fight Germans, not Frenchmen. We were kind of hoping they were feeling the same way. ’ (TBRO,1980: 07.59) The French of the Vichy regime are deemed sensible people to talk to, while the Germans are shot at sight. The French have the same attitude towards the Americans because one of them admits ‘I can't kill an American’ (TBRO, 1980: 09.14). Apparently, they consider each other as humans whereas the Germans are almost always dehumanized, and their deaths are rarely made personal.

The Germans are also portrayed as divided in comparison with the unified American army. Within the German divisions some doubt Hitler’s competence such as Schroeder’s inferior who proclaims that ‘Horst Wessel was a pimp who supplied Hitler with baby faces like you. He was killed in a brawl over a whore in Berlin. A poem by a pimp became the hymn of Hitler's party.’ (TBRO, 1980: 26.39) Horst Wessel wrote the national song for Hitler’s party. The inferior continues: ‘Let Rommel's panzer grenadiers march behind those tanks. But not me. I want no
more. I'm no damn Nazi fanatic like you. Germany is through, singing for Adolf Hitler.' (TBRO, 1980: 27.42). As opposed to those who doubt Hitler we find the Hitler fanatics such as Schroeder, who coldly kills the man that uttered these blasphemous words. Schroeder believes in Hitler even in the end stages of the war because ‘Hitler will live for a thousand years.’ (TBRO, 1980: 2.16.22) Even when a wealthy German landlady proposes to share her fortune if he capitulates, he insists on fighting the Americans still. Other fanatics are, for example, the people’s army. They are a group that block the road when The Big Red One tries to reach Belgium for a final battle. The people’s army consists out of civilians with Nazi sympathies and only step aside when the sergeant threatens to use violence. In presenting us these fanatics, once more war cruelty is encouraged because extreme violence is the only thing that will deter them.

The Nazis are also associated with homosexuals at a certain moment when the sergeant arrives at a German hospital. He is faced with a doctor who tries to make advances and who asks ‘How could such a decayed country like America produce such a magnificent soldier like you? You are a very beautiful man, sergeant. I adore supermen.’ (TBRO, 1980: 34.23) The doctor also tries to kiss him on the lips, but, of course, the sergeant does not allow that. By making the link between Nazis and homosexuals, the Nazis get a bad reputation. Homosexuality is still not accepted in America of today, and it was certainly not acceptable in the 1980s when a restoration movement tried to limit the freedom proclaimed in the 1960s.
iv. The bond of brothers

Reinforcement

*Father – sons*

After the initial battle in Africa, the soldiers are reunited with their sergeant. This reunion takes place on the beach, and we see the men run towards their superior, dancing and rejoicing. They are the only five men left out of the original 12-man rifle squad, and they are bound to stay together for the rest of the expeditions.

The men act more and more like a team as the movie progresses. For example, when Vinci is accused of collaborating with the enemy because of his Italian heritage, the entire group defends him. They also form a tight group in battle and work together to achieve military goals. Moreover, when a team mate dies, Zab decides to give a party in his dead friend’s commemoration.

In order to be part of the group, a man has to be able to fight which is why Griff is excluded from the unit at first. Griff suffers from the inability to kill and will thus not be able to defend his friends in battle when needed. Zab comments ‘It got to Griff. He kept away from the rest of us. Nobody wanted to use the word “coward,” not yet.’ Griff will need to undergo a rite of passage to become one of them. This rite goes in several phases. At first, Griff learns how to throw grenades, a long distance weapon which does not force you to look into the eyes of the enemy. Then he assembles the torpedo which makes the breach in the German’s defences, and when the film is drawing near its end, he learns how to shoot from man to man. This last scene is a follow-up of close-ups in which we switch from Griff’s panicked eyes to the eyes of the enemy. Reminiscent of the Western, Griff needs to shoot first or else the enemy will shoot him.

The sergeant is part of the unit as well. On the one hand, he needs to be one of the men, fighting as bravely as they do and not transferring responsibilities to save his own life. For example, the sergeant orders Vinci to scout ahead, even though snipers are located in the area, which is a blatant sacrifice of the life of one of his men. However, Vinci repays him and does not kill an enemy standing right around the corner because he wants the sergeant to feel the nerves he felt:
You had him in the sights all the time.

All the time.

You just wanted to see me sweat.

It’s punishment for transferring me to the point. May I rejoin the rear echelon now?

(TBRO, 1980: 47:05)

On the other hand, the sergeant needs to be superior to his men and act as a father figure. For instance, on Zab’s party he is the only one who does not drink alcoholic beverages, and he sends his men to bed at a responsible hour. He is also literally portrayed as a father figure when he is forced to participate in the delivery of a baby. He has to hold the woman’s hand and urges her to push.
4 The 1990s: further realism

4.1 Saving Private Ryan

_Saving Private Ryan_ (Spielberg, 1998) might well be one of the most popular WWII films of the last two decades. The film was directed by Steven Spielberg who also directed _Schindler’s list_ in the early nineties. _SPR_ (Spielberg, 1998) honours its title by depicting the search after Private Ryan, a young soldier who has to be saved since his three other brothers have already died in the war and having to lose four sons would be too much for the mother. We follow Captain Miller and his unit as they experience D-day and finally arrive at Ramelle where Ryan is staying.

Captain Miller is a good soldier, following his orders and duty. Even though he has doubts about risking the lives of his men for one soldier, he still guides the group. Captain Miller used to be an English teacher before the war, but he has abandoned this intellectualism. He still seems to have trouble with the horrors of war because his hands frequently tremble, and sometimes he experiences the environment silently and in slow motion. One step down the hierarchy is sergeant Mike Horvath. Like Captain Miller, he is older than the other privates, and he helps the captain in making the tactical decisions.

The rest of the party consists out of privates. Private Daniel Jackson is a sniper with a Christian background; he believes himself to be God’s tool. Another Private is Adrian Caparzo who is a representative of the Spanish minority group. He dies fairly early, but bravely. Furthermore, Private Stanley Mellish stars in the movie as the representative of the Jewish minority group. Like Caparzo he is killed fairly early together with Hospik Irwin Wade who was meant to cure any fallen men, but now has to use the morphine to avoid a painful death. Wade’s death is different from the other deaths in the way that Wade cries for his mother and does not die like the typical ‘hero’. The last member of the party is Corporal Timothy Upham, but he does not have any superiority over the other men. In fact, he is the intellectual of the party. He has never handled a gun before and used to be a writer.
4.1.1 Format

_SPR_ (Spielberg, 1998) introduces a new form of realism. Never before was the violence so explicitly staged in a war film, nor were the casualties so extensively documented. This new realism does not mean earlier war films were unrealistic. They were capable of portraying the atmosphere of WWII. However, Spielberg uses historical sources such as pictures of D-day to accurately construct certain scenes.

Furthermore, the film is a restoration of traditional patriotic values and is less subversive than, for instance, _The Big Red One_ (Fuller, 1980) which used the irony of the narrator to question certain matters. _SPR_ (1998) is also typical in that it restores the traditional army outfit and relies more than the other films on the features of melodrama.

4.1.2 Melodrama

The locus of innocence is once more situated with both the home country and the army unit. The only difference with the other films discussed is the interrupting scene in which the homeland is shown, whereas other films only referred to the native country in dialogue. A countryside scenery occurs in _SPR_ (Spielberg, 1998) which is representative for America as a whole. We see warm fields, golden colours and a woman doing the dishes. The woman is the mother of the brothers Ryan, and she is about to receive the bad news that three of her four sons have died. When she receives the news she falls down and starts to cry; war disrupts the locus of innocence.

The army outfit is the other locus of innocence. As an introduction, they are exploring the beautiful landscape heroic music is played, and images of green grass and a clear sky are shown. The camera zooms out, and we see the men as a tight group contrasted with their peaceful surroundings. This outfit, the real locus of innocence, must be protected just like the homeland. The message is that you need to protect your country and safeguard your colleagues.
A lot of sentimental events happen in the film as well. In the very beginning, an older version of Private Ryan is crying before the grave of Captain Miller. His tears are not considered unmanly because they demonstrate the emotional bond he had with one of his team mates; he cries for something which is worth crying for. From the tears in his eyes we switch to the hectic situation of D-day in which limbs are torn apart, men die brutally, and everything collapses into chaos. The suffering on the American side is fully depicted, and already, we feel sympathy towards the American side as victims. We rarely see German suffering, and the enemy never truly receives a face.

Another feature of melodrama is the moral dilemma this movie resolves. The question posed is whether soldiers’ lives ought to be risked to save one man. Moreover, they do not even know whether he is still alive so every effort might be for naught. One of the privates asks “You wanna explain the math of this to me? I mean, where’s the sense of risking the lives of the 8 of us to save one guy?” (SPR, 1980: 41.22) The answer to this moral dilemma is provided to us; yes, it was worth saving the life of Private Ryan because he lived a good life. It is a sensible decision to save a good American.
4.1.3 Reinforcement and adjustment of WWII myths

i. Portrayal of the war as ‘good’

Adjustment

SPR (Spielberg, 1998) shows the wounds of the soldiers up close and is very realistic in depicting the gore weapons can inflict. For instance, the film begins with the conquest of Omaha Beach on D-day where a real massacre is taking place; limbs are blown off, men are set on fire, and the water colours bright red. The camera also sways back and forth and fills us with confusion because we can never get a full oversight of the situation.

Not only physical pain is displayed, but the psychological consequences of war are present as well in the figure of Captain Miller. Throughout the movie, he experiences moments of absolute silence when everything appears to be moving in slow motion. In these instances, he seems to freeze, unable to move further because the horror of the battle overwhelms him. Captain Miller’s hand also trembles from time to time, indicating a serious trauma alongside nervousness and fear. Captain Miller also feels alienated because he says ‘I just know that every man I kill, the farther away from home I feel.’ (SPR, 1998: 01.38.24). He proves that soldiers cannot kill heartlessly and that no matter how hard you try, you will never get used to the experience of war. Furthermore, when facing death, people rarely act heroically. When Wade, the medic, is shot, he asks for morphine because he cannot bear the pain. His last words are ‘Mama? I want to go home. I want to go home.’ (SPR, 1998: 01.27.23). Wade who is normally a brave soldier and in calling for his mother which defies the image that only cowards are ‘mommy’s boys’.

The cruelty the Americans inflict on their enemies is not hidden either. When they manage to reach the enemy lines, they set fire to a bunker to smoke out the Germans inside. We see burning men falling through the slits in the concrete, and one of the soldiers comments ‘Don’t shoot! Let ’em burn!’ (SPR, 1998: 23.02). A bit later two American soldiers shoot two men who come towards them with their hands in the air. Despite the fact that these men are helpless, they
shoot them anyway and ridicule their accent afterwards. The Americans have a true hatred towards the Germans and violate the conventions of Geneva.

**Reinforcement**

Despite the exposure to cruelty, we rarely meet the enemy personally, and their deaths remain anonymous. Moreover, the beginning scene might be historically correct but also has an aesthetic beauty, and one might ask if the explicit suffering is not merely a device to redeem the Americans morally.

Subsequently, a few patriotic elements surface. For instance, religion and war are intertwined. When the soldiers are landed on Omaha Beach, Miller exclaims 'God be with you!' (SPR, 1998: 05.19), and in an ensuing battle one of the man asks 'If God be for us, who could be against us?' (SPR, 1998: 01.06.16) Moreover, the sniper of Miller’s unit is a priest who believes he is chosen by God to perform his will. Before every fight, he kisses the cross around his neck, and when Miller asks him why he participated in this war, he answers 'Well, it seems to me, sir, that God gave me a special gift, made me a fine instrument of warfare.' (SPR, 1998: 42.30). The love towards one’s country is also expressed from the beginning onwards. The film starts with the waving of the American flag and returns to the cemetery in the end. America is a land worth fighting for and even their government seems to care about its citizens personally because Private Ryan needs to be rescued in order to prevent his mother from further hurt.

What is more, the Americans are often portrayed as the heroes who sustain in almost impossible situations. When Miller’s outfit has finally managed to find the right Private Ryan, Ryan refuses to leave because his orders are to defend the bridge, and he does not want to leave his team mates. Miller agrees with his decision to stay and explains:

*Part of me thinks the kid’s right. What's he done to deserve this? If he wants to stay here, fine. Let's leave him and go home. But another part of me thinks what if by some miracle we stay and actually make it out of here? Some day we might look back on this and decide that saving*
Private Ryan was the one decent thing we were able to pull out of this whole god-awful, shitty mess. (SPR, 1998: 01.48.03)

The captain stays because he believes Ryan to be morally pure and worth saving. When the captain dies a bit later he tells Ryan that he needs to 'earn this' (SPR, 1998:02.30.12). Miller saved Ryan so he could become a good American. Ryan succeeds in this goal because the narrator adds:

Reports from the front indicate James did his duty in combat with great courage and steadfast dedication even after he was informed of the tragic loss your family has suffered in this great campaign to rid the world of tyranny and oppression... the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. (emphasis mine, SPR, 1998:02.32.05)

James Ryan was a solid soldier who fought with the right ideological conviction. Furthermore, the interference of the Americans is justified because they brought democracy to Europe and the many sacrifices were necessary to provide Europe with freedom. The Americans are still portrayed as the savours and are treated as such by the few citizens they meet and of which one proclaims ‘Les Americaines! Les voila! Ils arrivent! Ils viennent nous sauver!’² (SPR, 1998: 44.25)

The war is further rationalized by corporal Oldham who is the intellectual and who claims: ‘I think this is all good for me, sir.’ (SPR, 1998: 01.08.30) because ‘War educates the senses, calls into action the will, perfects the physical constitution, brings men into such swift and close collision in critical moments that man measures man’ (SPR, 1998: 01.08.42). Normally intellectuals have a clear anti-war stance, but Oldham believes the war experience to be good for him because now he can prove himself; it is only in war that one can measure a man's worth. Oldham's worth will be measured as well, and he will only become a worthy member of the team once he has killed. At first, he is in favour of respecting the Geneva conventions, and he releases a German prisoner

² The Americans! There they are! They have arrived! They are here to save us!
whom he believes to be harmless. However, later he learns the consequences of his judgement when this German returns and kills one of his colleagues. Oldham realises that because of his inability to kill, one of his friends died unnecessarily and that in war, one can not do what is ‘decent’, only what is necessary to protect your fellow soldiers. In the end, he shoots the German prisoner after all, avenging the death of one of his friends.

**ii. The good soldier**

**Reinforcement**

A good soldier knows how to fight. This message already becomes clear in the beginning scene when Miller shouts ‘Get rid of that crap! Grab yourselves some weapons. Follow me.’ (SPR, 1998: 11.29). He forces the medics to leave their medical equipment behind and join in battle. Similarly, he adopts corporal Oldham who used to work in the administration and orders him to leave his typewriter and grab a rifle instead.

Integrity is also proved if you protect your colleagues. Miller, for instance, tries to drag a wounded man to a safe spot. Unfortunately he fails because the man is blown in half before he can find shelter, but his effort shows that one cannot only think of oneself. Moreover, Miller is protective not only towards his own team, but towards the Allies as a whole. During the campaign across a field, the men vote to avoid confrontation with the enemy because they believe their objective is solely to rescue Ryan. Nevertheless, Miller refuses to make a detour because the Germans could ambush another American party.

Soldiers know how to obey as well, and Miller sets the right example by accepting tough assignments without a word of protest. The corporal enforces the idea of mindless obedience by quoting ‘Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die.’ (SPR, 1998: 41.45). As if the message was not clear enough, Captain Miller adds ‘We all have orders, and we have to follow ’em. That supersedes everything, including your mothers.’ (SPR, 1998: 41.48). Even though the captain doubts the validity of the mission of saving Ryan, he still obeys, and in the end he realizes that
obedience was the right path because Ryan will become a good American citizen. Private Ryan is the image of obedience as well when he states: ‘I have my orders, too, sir. They don’t include me abandoning my post.’ (SPR, 1998: 01.44.52). He refuses to go home and leave his brothers in the dangerous situation. Disobedience, on the other hand, almost always leads to death. At a certain moment Caparzo decides to save the child of two French civilians, ignoring the orders of his superiors not to. He argues ‘I can't [give her back]. She reminds me of my niece, sir.” (SPR, 1998: 50.16), but a few seconds later he is shot by a sniper because of his carelessness, and he dies. If he had listened to captain Miller, he would probably still be alive.

As a last asset, a soldier also needs to have the will to do everything to reach their objective. They need to ‘[…]earn the right to go home.’ (SPR, 1998: 01.48.43). Even if this means they have to sacrifice themselves in order to gain victory. In the last scene, Miller orders that if they are pushed back the “last man alive blows the bridge.” (SPR, 1998: 01.53.09). Captain Miller is the one who risks his life trying to reach the explosives, and he dies in this attempt.

iii. Bond of brothers

Reinforcement

The combat unit forms a bond of brothers who depend upon each other in battle. Corporal Oldham, the intellectual, admits he is writing a book about this bond, and his proposal is met with laughter and the comment ‘Brotherhood? What do you know about brotherhood?’ (SPR, 1998: 41.05) The latter quote shows one has to engage in battle in order to be considered part of the group and because Oldham has not ‘[…]held a weapon since basic training’ (SPR, 1998: 38.47), he is excluded. In order to become a ‘brother’, he needs to undergo the rite of passage and kill a German, a task which he performs at the very end.

Ryan also recognises the importance of brotherhood in battle. He refuses to abandon his colleagues and asks Miller to tell his mother that “[…]when [they] found [him], [he] was here with
the only brothers [he had] left. And that there's no way [he] was gonna desert them.” (my adaptation, SPR, 1998: 01.46.45).

Alongside the brothers, Miller acts as the father figure. He is always aware of possible danger and tries to protect his men as well as possible. At first, he is also unwilling to tell where he is from because that would place him on an equal level with the soldiers, while he needs to be superior. This superiority is also shown in his refusal to complain to his men because ‘There's a chain of command. Gripes go up, not down. Always up.’ (SPR, 1998: 42.57) However, when the unit threatens to disband, he reveals where he is from and recreates the missing bond. This revelation shows that a commander needs to be both above his men and at the same time he needs to be one of them.

When Miller is dying, he also teaches Ryan that he needs to live a good life in order to earn this rescue and at the end of the film, Ryan indeed visits Miller’s grave to pay tribute to the one who guided him. This event shows that Miller transformed Ryan in his wake.
Conclusion

This thesis adventure began with the enterprise of three tasks; First, to show the influence of the socio-economic context on the production of WWII combat films. Second, to investigate the relationship between form and content and lastly, to study the myths which are exposed or reinforced in the case studies.

I believe I have succeeded in showing the impact of the socio-economic context by applying the theory of the first chapter to the different case studies. As such, we can state that the years proceeding The Vietnam War and the first stadium of the war, gave rise to films with a glorious nature. These films were not unambiguous, but did not question American values as thoroughly as, for instance, *Kelly's Heroes* (Hutton, 1970) or *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967) which were produced in the latter years of The Vietnam War when the public’s opinion towards the decisions of the government were unfavourable.

Moreover, during the end of the 70s and throughout the 80s, the WWII combat film was underrepresented since the public preferred Vietnam films; the distance between The Vietnam War and the present was now large enough to reinterpret the events. What is more, no more continuous news reels provided the public with an image of the war and thus films were necessary to document. Nevertheless, the 80s provided us with a few WWII combat films which were of a very glorious nature such as *Midway* (Smight, 1976). An exception is *The Big Red One* (Fuller, 1980) which seeks to record the experiences of war veteran Samuel Fuller, the director, and which has an interesting clash between the glorious events on the screen and the down-to-earth commentary of the narrator. The latter years of the 80s and the whole 90s, demonstrate the impact of The Gulf War. In the years running up to the event, WWII films were conceptualized as propaganda, meant to prepare the nation for yet another war, and the years after The Gulf War indicate that a favourable public opinion towards a war results in the making of patriotic films once more. *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998) is the perfect example in this perspective since it is one of the most heroic films of all the films we discussed and few American myths are questioned.

What is more, *Saving Private Ryan* employs a very realistic aesthetic format which was praised by
the critics as a veritable historical documentation of war and thus convinced the public of the objectivity of the events.

The relationship between form and content was explored in this dissertation as well and as a conclusion, we can say that Hollywood and the genre film are intertwined because these films have proved to be success formulas in the past, and thus they guarantee almost certainly economic profit. Consequently, as genre films, all of the case studies were WWII combat films which showed an adherence to the features of the combat genre. The only exceptions in this perspective are the films *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967) and *Kelly’s Heroes* (Hutton, 1970) which try to invert the common characteristics. Nonetheless, a few characteristics are still present to provide an atmosphere of familiarity to the public. Furthermore, the Melodramatic mode is present in all the films discussed, but is once more deviated from by *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967) and *Kelly’s heroes* (Hutton, 1970) since they do not regard the American home front as the true locus of innocence, but the combat unit. In contrast, in the films were the Melodramatic mode in its traditional sense is employed, the content is notably less subversive.

The last task was to analyse the occurrence of myth in the different films. Yet again, most of the myths are reinforced except in films such as *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967) and *Kelly’s Heroes* (Hutton, 1970), but none of the films reinforce as many myths as *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998). It seems that the 90s go even further than the early 60s in glorifying The Second World War. The 1960s still produced films which debunked several myths. This phenomenon might be explained by the proximity to The Second World War and the fact that most of the veterans have not yet forgotten the WWII experience. The 1990s are farther away from the event and thus more mythologizing emerges. This process has already been explained in the relationship between Myth and History and is now proved by the differences in these movies.

The enterprise of these three tasks was of course subject to certain limitations. For instance, due to the limited time I only had the chance to explore seven motion pictures in depth. To gain a better representation of the historical periods, one ought to look at all the WWII box-office-hits. My research was also limited because of my academic background; I am a literature scholar and by no means did I follow any film studies courses. Nevertheless, the view of a
literature scholar may provide a different angle since my blindness towards the technical film aspects might bring me closer to how the actual public experienced these films.

I also want to indicate certain areas of further research; One might wish to explore the relationship between myth and film further and look at the difference between the various material objects used to commemorate a certain event. In this perspective, the difference between a film or a novel might be interesting to analyse since a film is an object of popular culture whereas a novel belongs to the more intellectual sphere. One might also want to explore why The Korean War is still referred to as ‘the forgotten war’ and gave rise to so few motion pictures. Similarly, The Vietnam War films can be analysed to see if history is being rewritten. Another field of research might be to investigate the Combat Film from a gender perspective and whether the Combat Film is really a typically ‘male’ genre.

As a last remark, I would like to add that this thesis is merely an interpretation and by no means a final analysis of the afore mentioned films. I would encourage my readers to remain critical towards my interpretations and to explore the films on their own. Moreover, I hope that my analyses have demonstrated not to take any film for granted since conscious strategies of form are applied to bring the content as convincing as possible.
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