

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT:
PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY IN THE WAR ON TERROR

A Thesis

by

EMILY JO PIEPENBRINK

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2012

Major Subject: Performance Studies

Rules of Engagement: Performance and Identity in the War on Terror

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Kirsten Pullen
Committee Members,	Judith Hamera
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ABSTRACT

Rules of Engagement:

Performance and Identity in the War on Terror. (May 2012)

Emily Jo Piepenbrink, B.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Kirsten Pullen

War and war-fighters have become immortalized through performance; generations of service-men and women are defined by actions on the battlefield artfully altered on stage and screen. This reciprocal relationship, whether war-fighters intentionally participate or not, has imbued the entertainment industry with the power to characterize war-fighters in lasting ways. Performance enters the military in other ways as well: war-fighters reenact moments from war films; combat training takes on theatrical tactics and rhetoric; war-fighters of the War on Terror record and stage their own war performances.

We accept that current war performances will inevitably affect the perception and reputation of war-fighters, not only for the duration of the war but for decades afterward, but do we fully understand the cost of the relationship between today's war-fighters and performance's role in the military? In this MA thesis, based on ethnographic fieldwork with veterans of the War on Terror, I explore the intersection between war-fighters, war, and performance. By examining how veterans relate to cinematic and stage performances of war, I will discuss how war-fighters of the War on Terror use performance to surrogate their warrior identities, to train for and defer the war

experience, and to produce their own war performances. Combining my ethnographic fieldwork with archival film and play research, I illuminate how performance constitutes and challenges the war-fighter's identities in the War on Terror.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“All right, do *Platoon*, bro,” a Marine asks Corporal Evan Stafford during an episode of *Generation Kill* (2008). Complying, Stafford embodies the African- American character, Junior, from the 1986 film so well that his audience asks him “what color” he is. Cpl. Stafford laughs, and asks his fellow Marines for another movie to quote. This leads to several minutes worth of film allusions and references among the Marine characters. This movie trivia is interwoven with the other sounds of Bravo Company: static voices speaking over the radio, boots on sandy gravel as men slide down berms hiding their location, and the staccato hammering of Sgt. Colbert fixing the damage to his Humvee (“Combat Jack”). The Marines’ movie references are an integral part of the military representation created by *Generation Kill*, not exceptional enough to be the sole focus of the camera’s attention, but common enough to be part of the background.

In addition to representing the exchange between the military and movies, *Generation Kill* also exemplifies that exchange. Wilson Bethel, who plays Cpl. Stafford, is one in an approximately thirty-person cast who all perform First Reconnaissance (Recon) Marines involved in the invasion of Iraq. In March 2003, the Recon Marines of Bravo Company were part of the first division to invade Iraq. Assigned to their company was Evan Wright, a reporter from *Rolling Stone*, who stayed with the Bravo

This thesis follows the style of *Text and Performance Quarterly*.

Marines through the invasion and occupation of Iraq that April. Once back on U.S. soil, Wright published his experience in *Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War*, and Lt. Nathaniel Fick, Commander of Bravo Company penned his memoir of the same tour in *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*.

In 2007, HBO began shooting a seven-part miniseries about Bravo Company, appropriating Wright's book title, personal experience, and interviews with Bravo Company's Marines for the production. During filming in Africa, the actors wore light-weight, imitation uniforms, but Rudy Reyes spent his on screen time in the same flak jacket he wore during his 2003 Iraq tour with the Marines on whom the series centers ("Becoming a Marine"). Though Rudy Reyes is one of several veterans involved with the production, he is the only one playing himself. Eric Kocher, also of First Recon, served as Key Military Advisor on the series and helped Reyes conduct a pre-filming military boot camp for non-veteran actors. Air Force veteran and actor Jon Huertas plays Antonio Espera and noted that being on location for seven months with the other actors "reminded [him] of being deployed" (Generationkillinsider.com). *Generation Kill* would have been impossible to produce without the contributions of the Marines on whom the series is based.

Generation Kill demonstrates the elision between the American military and the movie industry. These institutes converge in the miniseries: it becomes a subject of the series in the form of Stafford's movie quotations and a facet of the production process evidenced by the inclusion of veterans in key roles. Performances, whether cinematic or

staged, have become the medium through which war-fighters¹ of the War on Terror formulate identities, train for combat, and filter their own war experiences. By examining performances, first-hand written accounts, and interviews with war-fighters from the War on Terror, I triangulate war-fighters of the War on Terror engaging performance in the military field with the consequences of this relationship in their deployment and civilian identified experiences.

Movies about war are more than entertainment films; they operate as historic military texts, using pro-war master narratives as evidence of historical accuracy. In this work, I use war films to examine the American military through its representational self and its reactions to that same manufactured self. Movies about past wars (produced during the conflict), like *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) and *The Green Berets* (1968), to recent productions of past wars, like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *We Were Soldiers* (2002), and *Jarhead* (2005), illuminate how performances about the military evolve. Films about the War on Terror from Academy Award winner *The Hurt Locker* (2008) to HBO's *Generation Kill*, illustrate how war-fighters react and engage with representations of themselves.

Plays and stage performances about war are also data for assessing how war-fighters are represented. I viewed performances or read scripts of plays about earlier wars, like the Broadway musical *South Pacific* (1949) and Vietnam veteran Dave Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* (1969), and read plays about the War on Terror, like *Dying City* (2008) and *Beast: A Fever Dream in Six Scenes* (2008). The myriad ways war and war-fighters

are represented in these plays provides an interesting counter to the default realism of war movies.

In my research, I found that war movies have an uncontested popularity with war-fighters. War films and the relationship between the military and movie industries have given primacy to war movies (rather than war plays) with war-fighters. This is an enduring fact for many reasons. First, the military institution has legitimated the war movie by encouraging screenings on bases and in warzones for decades (Fagelson 94). Second, war movies are more accessible to soldiers in and out of warzones. On the Forward Operating Bases of Iraq and Afghanistan, war-fighters have access to both legal and black market DVDs (Buzzell 151), and most have access to institution-provided televisions or personal viewing devices. At home, movies are more available to war-fighters because of the theaters' close locations and competitive ticket-prices. The popularity of war movies is supported by the frequency of movie references and theatrical language of war-fighters of the War on Terror, which I rigorously interrogate here. War-fighters of the War on Terror perpetuate this primacy by the countless war movies they publish on YouTube. The popularity of and reliance on war movies in the military only increases as war and film industries continue to work together, and movies continue to stimulate the military's place in and performance of pop culture.

The information about war-fighters' reactions to war and war movies in my research relies heavily on the military memoirs of war-fighters of the War on Terror. Their first-hand accounts of war and the conversations they recall offer a broader base of knowledge about the greater population of American war-fighters. These memoirs, like

Fick's *One Bullet Away*, are also excellent sources for determining the disparities between war-fighters' experiences and filmic representations. War-fighters' military memoirs are comparisons of and companions to my ethnographic case studies.

My ethnographic research consists of oral histories of five Texas A&M University student veterans of the War on Terror. I am employing "critical ethnography" as defined by Soyini Madison as reflexive and ethical research that "unsettles neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison 5); in this case the operations of film and military institutions as they relate to war-fighters. My interactions with student veterans began as individual interviews that focused on their interactions with war performances; most of my interlocutors continued online conversations with me during which we exchanged recommendations and opinions on movies, plays, blogs, and articles about the War on Terror. This ethnographic work is the foundation of my case studies on how war-fighters of the War on Terror engage with war performances.

In addition to my written research, I plan on performing the ways war-fighters relate and react to their warrior representations. Having collected the veteran's stories, I will create a performance which highlights the relationship between war-fighters and war performances. This performance follows projects based on ethnographic interviews, such as Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* (2007), and juxtaposes soldiers with their film representations, like the play *Going to See a Movie Called Gunga Din* (2011). Most importantly, this production allows me to use performance as research; by personally grappling with which themes and stories to put in the script and how to stage them I will

better understand the agendas and intentions behind mainstream popular plays and films about war-fighters' experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. The script is located in the appendix.

The theoretical framework for this thesis relies heavily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard. Through Bourdieu's concept of "field" I redefine the American military to include the performance structures and industries that directly work with and influence it. A field, as Bourdieu describes and identifies it, is an independent "social universe" performatively constituted. The field of the military, then, not only contains domestic training camps, Forward Operating Bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the war-fighters who operate in them, but the movie studios, stage sets, and performance professionals that recreate the American military (Bourdieu 162). The difference in these milieus creates the initial opposition and subsequent relationship between war-fighters and war performances in the military field. Baudrillard's theories of simulacra of war are used throughout this thesis. His work during the Gulf War, in which he asserts that, "virtual reality has definitively overtaken the actual," gives dimension to my examination of performance's effects on war-fighters (Baudrillard 27). When war-fighters are surrounded by war representations, the reality of the war in which they are engaged loses its immensity. Both Bourdieu and Baudrillard's theoretical ideas are present throughout this thesis.

In Chapter II of my thesis, "Old Movies, New Soldiers," I provide a theoretical definition of the "military field" and explore how performances of past wars emerge in the current military. I examine how war-fighters of the War on Terror don surrogate

identities of the characters in these movies in order to legitimate their place in the military genealogy. This chapter provides an understanding of how war movies have become an integral part of a military heritage.

Chapter III, “Theatre in War, War in Theaters,” examines the symbiotic relationship between the war and film industries and the effects this has on war-fighters. I investigate the ways in which military training has deployed the tools of Hollywood to prepare war-fighters for combat. This chapter concludes with examples of how war-fighters internalize dramatic theatrical rhetoric and their relationship with war movies upon completion of their service.

Chapter IV, “War in ‘Reel’ Time,” traces the separate histories of war and film and war and theatre in the American military. By examining these trajectories of war performances, I situate current, veteran-produced, war performances in this history, and suggest how past performances may lead to the cinematic and stage narratives of contemporary veterans.

War performances are more than temporary entertainments for war-fighters of the War on Terror. The issues highlighted in the production and performance of *Generation Kill*- veterans collaborating with Hollywood professionals and references to other war performances within a performance about war- index a more complicated relationship between war-fighters and war performances. The influence of film industries and theatrical training methods in the military forces war-fighters of the War on Terror to engage with performance in order to legitimate their warrior identity.

Notes:

¹ Throughout this thesis I use the USAF preferred term of “war-fighter” as well as “soldier” to refer to any service man or woman in any branch of the Armed Forces.

CHAPTER II

OLD MOVIES, NEW SOLDIERS

The best wars are scripted: the best wars look and sound like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); the best soldiers are demi-gods like Robert Duvall in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Eric Bana in *Black Hawk Down* (2001). While not, perhaps, necessarily true, the box office numbers and Oscar nominations of these films make a compelling argument for such a statement.¹ Warren Dodson², an E5 petty officer in the Navy and veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan noted:

It's interesting that war movies, specifically, are a very ingrained part of the military culture. In fact, a lot of the ways I can remember my deployments—because I was deployed on four different ships—and part of the way I remember my deployment is based on which particular war movie was popular. (Dodson 2011)

Dodson's words index the convergent nature of cinematic war in the United States military. Besides their popularity with civilians on the home front, these war movies (and to a lesser extent, stage performances) are entwined with the oral and written heritage of the United States Armed Forces (USAF). Once enacted, these war performances permit an unlimited number of reenactments, and every retelling perpetuates the character of the war-fighter and interpolates the history of the American military into the film industry's war narrative.

Performed warfare is implanted within the American military. The partnership between Hollywood titans and military generals in World War II in order to create training and combat films and the current reenactments of World War II and other war films by individual soldiers, sailors, Marines, and members of the air force demonstrate this reliance on performed war (Cunningham 96). While war cinema was originally intended to capture the battles of World War I “for the viewing pleasure of American consumers,” it has evolved into an accountable record of the military men (and later women) and the wars in which they served, chronicling their lives and canonizing their words and actions (Eberwein 1). Made heroes by Hollywood, these soldier-characters (in varying degrees of verisimilitude) become the examples of what a war-fighter looks and sounds like. They are identity templates for war-fighters of the War on Terror.

Performances of past wars allow American war-fighters of the War on Terror to surrogate identities of previous soldiers. Despite the fact that the war portrayed in these performances has long been finished; despite the fact that the weaponry is woefully outdated; and despite the fact that the enemy in those wars may have been our allies for decades, the soldiers represented in such films are present day idols, vocational ancestors, and examples to the men and women of the American military. Because war-fighters of the War on Terror have embodied the warrior lifestyle, they distinctly relate to the soldiers represented and the experiences depicted. War-fighters of the War on Terror surrogate the soldiers represented in performances of past wars. Their identity as war-fighters is not identical to that presented on stage or screen. Rather, it undergoes an “adaptation of historic practices to changing conditions, in which popular behaviors are

reinstated in new locales” (Roach 28). The American war-fighter of the War on Terror becomes “an effigy” of all warrior predecessors (105), particularly those glorified in performance. His/her desires, fears, tactical formations, fighting philosophy, and military culture crucially draw upon soldiers in performances of the previous war, and the war before that, and so on until today’s war-fighter is fractionally bodying forth the representations of soldiers in all performed wars.

The Military Field

The current American military culture has become so saturated with references to and quotations from war performances that it is unnecessary to separate the representational from the real. Instead, representations and materiality mutually constitute war-fighters. Any discussion of today’s military, and especially a discussion of interactions between war-fighters and war performances, must redefine contemporary American military society by including these performance parameters. I base my use of “military field” on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of field, as introduced in *The Field of Cultural Production*. Bourdieu defines a field as a “separate social universe having its own laws of functioning;” each field (and Bourdieu works specifically with the literary field) is constructed and subsequently bound by the positions and actions of the people complicitly operating within this field (162-163). Thus, the ranks of officers and privates, who are employed at domestic training camps, forts, and government institutions as well as international military bases and the Forward Operating Bases (FOB) across the Middle East comprises the military field. Their perpetual

performances of militariness, from filing paperwork to combat, construct the military field. Following from Judith Butler, the military field is performative; embodiments and acts continually reconstitute the military field, incorporating performances of war. Further, the surrogate performances of war-fighters of the War on Terror suggest how the military “labors assiduously at its counterfeit” (Baudrillard 43). The concretization of war performances as well as the military institution, itself, perform and consolidate the military field. “The media promote the war, the war promotes the media...” (31). The fusion of aesthetic performances of Hollywood and Broadway and the daily performances in the military allows the military field to incorporate not only the physical spaces and beings of the military institution but its performed representation.

Zack Whitman Gill, a performance scholar studying the military, offers the term “martial heterotopia” to include the less tangible, more ephemeral aspects of the military culture. Derivative of Michel Foucault’s definition of a performative heterotopia³, martial heterotopia is the “other space” of the military (144-145). Martial heterotopias are the collision of the actual and representational performances of war and war-fighters. The War on Terror and the American military “watches itself in the mirror” of film and stage performances; as Baudrillard reminds, cultural actors ask themselves “am I pretty enough, am I spectacular enough, am I sophisticated enough to make an entry onto the historical stage?” (32). The interactions between the images in the mirror- the representation of war and the war itself- become performances of marital heterotopias. Within the modern military field war-fighters engage in martial heterotopias in the form of reenactments of war performances. These reenactments emerge as simple derivations

of the filmed or staged performance: an infantryman will quote *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) (Welles 2011) or a staff sergeant will embody Sam Elliot's characterization of Sgt. Maj. Basil Plumley in *We Were Soldiers* (2002) (Grayson 2011). The military field is compounded by the performances of war and war-fighters by both the military and the entertainment industry. These reenactments, or martial heterotopias, support the legitimacy of war-fighters of the War on Terror in the warrior lineage.

The military field (now understood as the amalgamation of the military as an institution and the representations of the military through performance) includes not only the film lots, on-site movie locations, and stages across America, but the "other space" of martial heterotopia, where the idyllic war-fighter and the paradigmatic war are possible. The military field sites of Iraq and Afghanistan become doubly important places because they are both the sites of the War on Terror and stages for reenactments of war performances. However, these physical places cannot solely identify the military field because, upon the end of their tour, war-fighters will have "nowhere to place that identity, no landscape proper, only a tactical landscape that belongs to others" (Larsen 477). The places where they perform and legitimate their warrior identities will become unreachable to them as they return to civilian life, leaving only performances as a way to access the spaces of their warrior selves. The physical demarcations and places of performances in a field are temporary, as fleeting as the war-fighter's access to a military base, but the exchanges between performance and war-fighters which occur there affect lasting identities.

All aspects of the military field, the power structures, acceptable behavior, etc., as well as the importance of film performance, are taught to war-fighters during Basic Training. Since World War II, civilians-turned-soldiers have “become well versed in movie spectatorship through the frequent viewing of military training and orientation films, genres openly designed to indoctrinate” (Fagelson 97). Having been introduced to the concept of viewing war and war-fighters through film, the practice expands to include Hollywood biopics and war movies about soldiers in every war, from the battles between the Greeks and Persians to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Inclusion of war performance in the military field is necessitated not only by the popularity of war performances among war-fighters, but by the use of performances as training and indoctrination pedagogy by the military institution.

Performing Surrogation

War-fighters in the military field are interpolated into the roles of audience members of war performances, but they do not remain in classroom chairs or the soft theater seats; rather, they internalize what they have seen in war performances and carry them to the battlefield. What war-fighters have seen in war movies and plays—characters in camps, the fighting and the blood, the joking among soldiers—is what they expect to face during their deployments; they are watching the men and women soldier-characters who’ve gone where they’ll go and to whom they can relate. War-fighters of the War on Terror identify themselves as the latest surrogates of the military tradition, and index their role by reenacting the performances of war they’ve seen in the cinema or on stage. These

reenactments emerge in the form of movie quotations, references, and mannerisms that become integrated into the personalities and daily lives of war-fighters. These reenactments testify to the inclusion of martial heterotopia in the military field. The mimetic nature of these performances (as each reenactment is an allusion to a war performance) exemplifies what Richard Schechner calls “restored behavior” (35). When soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan quote Robert Duvall in *Apocalypse Now*, they demonstrate the “symbolic and reflexive” nature of restored behavior, where the “self can act in/as another” (36). These reenactments of war movies give today’s soldiers who are fighting a chance to “rebecome” the soldiers of scripted wars; they are able to “rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become” (38).

Reenactments, or performances of rebecoming, are made possible by the physical markers of the military field, which ties the reenactments to their stage or cinematic performance. Being in a warzone (whether staged or actual) allows for a “spatially induced carnival, a center of cultural self-invention through the restoration of behavior” (Roach 28). One battlefield becomes any battlefield. These spaces of restored behavior, or what theatre scholar Joseph Roach names “vortices of behavior,” occur in geographical places that lend themselves to moments of contravention, and whose “gravitational pull of social necessity brings audiences together and produces performers (candidates for surrogation)” (28). War-fighters who were previously audiences of war performances recognize themselves in the characters, and, when they find themselves in corresponding situations and places, become the stars of their own war performance reenactments. Though the soldier-character they’re quoting may have fought in World

War II, been in a different branch of the USAF, or even been fictional, today's war-fighter performs that character. Despite being in a different space, time, and moment, he recognizes the similarities between their shared military heritage and warrior culture and reenacts that moment. Whether or not he recognizes how his own situation deviates from the originating performance, the war-fighter will continue to reenact war performances, not only for the chance to rebecome, but for chance to alter the performance through surrogation, making it more relevant and powerful to his war-fighting contemporaries.

The influence of war performances on the identities of the American soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan is noted in the frequency of allusions to and reenactments of movies and plays about war. According to the veterans serving today, these performances of restored behavior abound in the military field and are initiated by the soldiers themselves. As Warren Dodson pointed out, "war movies, specifically, (...) are a very ingrained part of the military culture" (Dodson 2011). Army veteran C.J. Grisham attests to the great influence war movies have in the military field. In the Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now*, there is a famous scene in which Robert Duvall's character blares Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" from several helicopters in order to terrorize the North Vietnamese Army. In Iraq in 2003, Grisham was involved in "thunder runs," a tactical mission developed during the Vietnam War in which the military displays its impressive fighting power to the enemy; on one such "thunder run" into Baghdad, Grisham said they blasted Wagner's 'Ride' on the outside of their truck as they attacked, as in the movie" (qtd in Pieslak 84). The military field's inclusion of

cinematic war performances not only encourages such restorations of behavior but demands them. This reenactment illuminates how performances of restored behavior mean “never for the first time. (...) Performance is ‘twice-behaved behavior’” (Schechner 36). While the latest performance of this *Apocalypse Now* scene is twice-behaved behavior, it is not a perfect imitation of the originary performance. Grisham and his company in their role as surrogates demonstrate the “paradox of the restoration of behavior.” That is, that every performance after the first, from the 2nd to the nth, will be different from the first performance because no repetition is an impeccable mimicry. Each reenactment “must be reinvented or recreated,” and it is the difference between the original performance and the reenactment, between the 8th performance and the 9th, that reveals surrogacy in restored behavior and identifies reenacting war-fighters as performing surrogates (Roach 28).

Performances of restored behavior are just as often prompted by the military institution as they are by war-fighters. In an interview with David Grayson, veteran Army Ranger of the 82nd Airborne Division, he noted the military’s affinity to imbue war-fighters with films that depict and glorify martial moments.

A Bridge Too Far is iconic in the airborne community, to the point that at every jump they play it on the TVs in the pack ship. I’ve seen that movie too many times. They have these huge warehouses with long benches because some of our jumps have five thousand people. So you go and you get your chute, you gear up, and once you get jammed you just sit on these benches. ... at some point you’re going to spend four to six hours

in a pack ship, and they have TVs up and they play movies. Ninety-nine percent of the time they're playing *A Bridge Too Far*. (Grayson 2011)

With the military institution playing Hollywood's war movies and black market DVDs of war movies available to deployed soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan⁴, the military field is rife with reenactments of war performances. Matt Young, an Army veteran who served in Iraq, commented, "If someone wanted to be someone from a movie, they'd quote them all week. I'm sure we all did that. Movie quotations are everywhere" (Young 2011). The prevalence of movies and their vocal reenactments are brief but powerful restorations of behavior, displaying the ease with which today's war-fighters don the characters of past soldiers.

Their surrogation of the warrior heritage is also evident in the movements and embodiments that occur in performances and reenactments of the military field. Bridget Welles, an Army veteran who served tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan, recognizes the parallels between her war experience and that of Mel Gibson's character in *The Patriot* (2000):

Like *The Patriot*, I love that when he's sitting in the camp making bullets out of his son's toy soldiers—just sitting around making preparations, like when you have to empty the sand out of your magazine. We're always making preparations. Cleaning your weapon, you always have to do that. They're playing cards, smoking cigarettes, and drinking coffee that tastes like crap. It's the military. (Welles 2011)

The comparability of military acts, like cleaning weapons, killing time, and eating terrible food, allow the obvious differences between weapons and wars of *The Patriot* and the War on Terror to be elided. Because the representational performance of war captures so well the physical performances of Welles' own war experience, all differences can be overlooked: Welles and Gibson's character served in different wars, hold different ranks, and have different genders. Performance is a conduit, connecting war-fighters of the War on Terror to their military heritage, but this heritage is bedizened with flawless tactics and shining actors. Because of this glamorized representation, the military institution and individual war-fighters must believe that those representations of war are accurate and possible for them to recreate.

Complicating the ever-increasing blurriness between performance and reenactment, is that creators of war performances have noted the popularity of restored behavior in the military field and are including them in their latest movies and plays. *Generation Kill* (2008) demonstrates this numerous times, and in one instance, 2nd Lt. Fick outlines a mission to his company by telling them they'll be doing "some *Black Hawk Down* shit," alluding to the 2001 film by the same name ("Combat Jack"). The inclusion of the practice of war-fighters alluding to war movies in the latest string of war performances reinforces the idea that members of the USAF have always already been reenacting war performances. The restored behavior employed by cinematic and stage performances *of* the restored behavior performed in the military field makes it increasingly more difficult to discern between the originary performer and the contemporary reenactor.

Prioritizing Performances for Reenactment

While the military field incorporates the men, women, and places of the American military as well as the many war performances of those same items, not all film and stage performances become candidates for surrogate reenactments and identities of today's war-fighters. While there is no official canon of cinematic and stage performances in the military field or among the war-fighters of the War on Terror, the inclusion of particular themes in performances directly correlates to their popularity among my veteran interlocutors and the war-fighting public. Rather than quoting and reenacting any and every war performance contributing to the military field, today's war-fighters choose those they wish to rebecome. This element of choice allows war-fighters to assert agency within the cycle of restored behavior; they will not be every soldier ever lauded in a movie, but they will rebecome the ones they admire. Certain war performances then become more reenacted than others based on the needs of the war-fighters of that particular military field. War performances that parallel an older war to the current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, that focus on a past war fought in the same region as today's conflict, and/or that successfully translate the harsh "reality" of warfare and a warrior lifestyle become the most popular and the most reenacted among war-fighters of the War on Terror. The war performances that appeal to the politics, environment, and routine of war-fighters become the most accessible and thus the most re-performed in the warzones in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Surrogate war performances by today's war-fighters become more popular and powerful when they are able to reenact them on location. Cinematic and staged

performances set in the same place war-fighters are living and dying immediately bear a greater relevance and accessibility to members of the military field. These performances of restored behavior reflect the origins of war and war-fighters; they become “the reenactment of foundation myths along two general axes of possibility: the diasporic, which features migration, and the autochthonous, which claims indigenous roots deeper than memory itself” (Schechner 42). The reenactments by war-fighters of the War on Terror include performances of both traditions- the diasporic is reflected in reenactments of war performances about the Gulf War and the autochthonous is demonstrated through references to the ancient Greeks who fought in the same region.

Jarhead (2005), a film about Marines during the Gulf War in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, has acquired particular attention (both positive and negative) from war-fighters of the War on Terror, but as Air Force veteran Jacob Corner noted, “They got the sand right” (Corner 2011). Veterans of the War on Terror continually note the physical attributes of the environment in Iraq and Afghanistan, namely the sand and dust.⁵ The complications created by the landscape “underline the heroic nature of the warriors” in both war performances and reenactments, “maybe as an insurmountable obstacle, which is, nevertheless, surmounted” (Larsen 475). When American soldiers returned to the desert sands of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the environment wasn’t the only element of the Gulf War they were reunited with, as James Ransone, playing Ray Person, in *Generation Kill* comments, “We already kicked [Saddam Hussein’s] ass once, and what does this retard go and fucking do? He spends the next ten years pissing us off even more. We don’t even want to be in this shithole” (“Get Some”). The surrogacy of

war-fighters of the War on Terror is reinforced by the parallels of the landscape and the enemy between this war and the Gulf War and indexes the diasporic tradition evident in the military field. Person's quotation and other reenactments and allusions to Gulf War performances, like *Jarhead*, illuminate the earlier conflict and the return of the American military to the Middle East.

While returning to Saddam's stomping grounds and Middle Eastern warzones, war-fighters invading Iraq found themselves crossing two famous rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which dramatically associate the region with its ancient name, Mesopotamia, or the cradle of civilization. Confronted by these landmarks of the past, American soldiers recognize themselves to be only the latest of a long line of armies to fight over this landscape (Fick 81; West 248). The autochothonous origins of today's military field are impossible to miss when fighting over the same space as many of the pillars of Western civilization fought; the oldest surviving military memoir, which is studied in American military academies, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, follows the military career of Alexander the Great across what is modern day Iraq (Harari 291). War and war-fighting's timelessness origins are highlighted in the deserts of the Middle East. The landscape of the "cradle of civilization" allows for performances which emphasize the vortices of behavior and the seemingly infinite history of warfare, a fact not missed by veterans and Hollywood. War-fighters of the military field acknowledged their likeness to ancient Greek hoplites (West 253), and Hollywood cast them as such in *300* (2006).

300 is itself an indulgent restoration of behavior, where the heroic Greek warriors, all cast as white Caucasian males, fight and defeat the heathen Persians. This war performance not only continues the practice of mediatized restored behavior, but perpetuates the idea that the godless, non-white Middle East (Persia included part of modern-day Iraq) must be conquered. Occupying the same places as their military predecessors and the represented spaces of soldier-characters of past wars allows war-fighters of the War on Terror to find particular kinship with these war performances. Their reenactments are grounded, fixed in specific places and spaces founded on memory and the art of representation; however, the likenesses between environments imbue war-fighters' reenactments with a realism that discourages discernment and promotes investment into the constructed autochthonic history of the military field.

Realism is (according to my interlocutors) the greatest reason war performances become repeatable. A movie or play that can "accurately" portray the chaos of war and the daily life of a war-fighter instantly become classics in the military field, which is why performances like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers* (2001) are continually quoted by today's soldiers despite their irrelevance to the style of warfare and the landscape of the War on Terror.⁶ If a war movie doesn't pass the realism standards of the war-fighters they will as, David Grayson pointed out, "turn it off pretty quickly" (Grayson 2011). Veteran Matt Young noted that watching for the realism of a war performance is an active pastime of war-fighters, "Every war movie, even TV shows where they just have a guy in a dress uniform, you have to look for what's wrong" (Young 2011). Soldiers of the military field have become so acclimated to the

interaction between performances of war and war proper, that they have become connoisseurs of representational warfare. Their judgment rests on the “two things they [know] so well- military life and violent combat” (Fagelson 105). So when films do get an aspect of the military field correct, they become candidates for surrogate reenactments. For Grayson, though *Jarhead* may have fallen short on portraying some parts of a war-fighter’s life, because they captured the homoerotic games of war-fighters as he remembered the movie was acceptable and appropriate for reenactments (Grayson 2011).

In other instances, war performances get a moment of warrior life or a tactical movement so perfect that military leaders hope their women and men will repeat it; they use the tradition of restored behavior in the military field to their advantage. The realism in war performances also becomes examples of martial heterotopias, which can be referred to and used for and by war-fighters of the War on Terror as pedagogy tools.

I have used movies in dealing with young and new soldiers to portray things to them, like to show the consequences of things to them. Like, “do you remember this? Well, that’s actually what happens.” It doesn’t necessarily have to be in a negative way. We do a lot of first aid training, what we call combat life-saver stuff, and so when you’re talking about major arterial wounds, you end up talking about the femoral artery because people just bleed out so fast. The best identifying situation you have for that is in *Black Hawk Down*. There, they portray how difficult it

can be to deal with this, so you can go back to that scene and say this is what they were trying to do, this is how they did it, and this is what went wrong. (Grayson 2011)

Young noted a similar use of war performances:

If you were trying to explain a certain situation or a kind of equipment you'd tell [new soldiers] to go look for it in a certain movie. Like *Black Hawk Down*- we were air assault so we jumped out of helicopters- so I'd day go watch *Black Hawk Down*. Those guys, that's what we do. (Young 2011)

Realism here is noted and deployed by war-fighters in constructive, and yet still constitutive, ways.

While Hollywood has increased its popularity and influence with members of the military field by appealing to the war they are currently fighting, war-fighters of the USAF deploy these war performances to their own ends. Today's American soldiers identify the influence of war performances in the military field and deploy them in order to reflect on themselves and the nature of war through comparisons; cinematic and stage performances allow war-fighters of the War on Terror to observe themselves and others through a director's camera lens. For some, like Army veteran Grayson, this panoptic perspective gives them access to soldier-characters who they admire and want to emulate.

One of the things that I've done over time, probably subconsciously, is, certain characters, whether in real life or in movies, that I like something about I've attempted to adopt that. (...) A really good NCO [non-

commissioned officer], it's not even who he is- he's an amalgamation.

It's not even who he is as a person although it eventually becomes him.

So you become a kind of mimic....” (Grayson 2011)

In moments like that which Grayson describes, war-fighters internalize the mannerisms and words of representations of soldiers. The process of surrogation is purposeful and intended to make them better soldiers. The examples of soldier-characters in war performances, many of whom, like that of Sgt. Maj. Basil Plumley in *We Were Soldiers* and Capt. John H. Miller in *Saving Private Ryan*, are representations of real soldiers which only adds to the complicated interactions of war performances and war-fighters in the military field. The performances and reenactments of restored behavior pile upon each other until distinguishing the real and the representational is futile. Rather, as war-fighters have noticed, it is more helpful to learn these performances and use and alter them to their advantage.

For all the comparisons between war performances and actual war-zones, the war-fighters of the War on Terror recognize the disparities between themselves and the representational war-fighters in performances. Jacob Corner, an Air Force veteran, noted that while soldiers today still go through the same training and share the same heritage, “in terms of actual fighting, it's too different. You're not going to see the same thing in World War II movies, to Vietnam movies, to what you see now” (Corner 2011). Bridget Welles also highlighted distinctions between war performances of past wars and the fighting today: “In those [World War II] campaigns everybody is scruffy and dirty, but we're getting a different kind of dirty. We're getting dusty and sandy and sweaty and

they were getting muddy and cold” (Welles 2011). When the images of past wars and the experience of today’s War on Terror are juxtaposed the impossibility of restored behavior “avoiding anachronisms and the intrusion of today’s values, political and aesthetic” is highlighted (Schechner 88). The ability to use the perspective of war performances allows war-fighters of the War on Terror to negotiate their role as surrogates through comparison.

These interactions between war-fighters of the War on Terror and war performances demonstrate how the military field makes restored behavior possible. As Dodson mentioned, war movies have become “an ingrained part of the military culture,” so an examination of modern war-fighters must include the influence of cinematic performance. The military field can then be described as the inclusion or compilation of multiple perspectives focused on war-fighters: the view of war and war-fighters through the camera lens and through the eyes of the war-fighters. The military field is not only these perspectives of the War on Terror, but the physical places that war-fighters occupy, whether to reenact or fight, and the impossible spaces of martial heterotopias, whether staged in performance or imagined by soldiers. Because performances of war make up such a large part of the military field and culture, today’s war-fighters inevitably become surrogates of war-fighting predecessors both real and representational. Surrogate identities reveal themselves through performances of restored behavior, or reenactments of war performances in the form of quotations, references, and mimicry. While these performances of past wars have illuminated both problems and benefits caused by the cycle of restored behavior in the military field, the intricacies and issues of identity

increase infinitely when war-fighters are faced with representations of themselves and the war they're fighting in war performances.

Notes:

¹ *Saving Private Ryan*'s domestic total gross was \$216, 540, 909, was nominated for eleven Oscars (five wins), and was the number one movie released in 1998 (Boxofficemojo.com).

² The names of my interlocutors have been changed in accordance with the confidentiality agreement they signed as mandated by the Institutional Review Board.

³ Michel Foucault defines heterotopias as spaces "like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (24).

⁵ PX shops run by Iraqis on the Forward Operating Bases sell bootlegged copies of movies (Buzzell 151). This practice is so ubiquitous on American military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan that it appears in recent movies, like *The Hurt Locker* (2008).

⁶ The veterans I interviewed and veteran memoirists all mentioned how the weather and environment became an obstacle, from having sand in their weapons to terrifying dust storms (Conroy 117; Corner 2011).

⁷ Every veteran I interviewed mentioned either *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, or both as the most realistic of war movies.

CHAPTER III

THEATRE IN WAR, WAR IN THEATERS

“Yeah,” Sgt. Brad Colbert says to his friend, Sgt. Antonio Espera during a talk-back with the Marines of Bravo Company, “you were saying, ‘Man, I’m so close to this. I don’t know what’s real and what’s part of the series” (“A Conversation with the 1st Recon Marines”). Colbert, Espera, and the rest of the members of Bravo Company, 1st Reconnaissance Marines were the subject of an HBO mini-series which aired in 2008. *Generation Kill* recreates the invasion of Iraq in March and April of 2003 from the perspective of these Marines and embedded reporter, Evan Wright, with professional actors playing the Marines and on location in Namibia. After the show aired, HBO produced a talk-back with the actual Marines during which Espera remarked how difficult it became to distinguish between his own combat experience and the representation of that same experience in *Generation Kill*:

Last time I was watching it- to me it was so close that I really got to hold onto my reality because that’s what’s true to me. That’s what’s real to me. I don’t want this production to obscure my reality because that’s how real [the series] felt to me. (“A Conversation...”)

Interactions with performances about the war in which they’ve fought or are fighting cause a unique crisis for war-fighters of the War on Terror; with the military and production companies relentlessly pushing towards realistic simulations of war for both training and entertainment purposes, performances of war have become proxies for war

and war becomes a performance.

While performances of other (and older) wars help soldiers recreate identities as warriors through surrogation and the restoration of behavior, performances of the War on Terror force them to face themselves and revisit warzones. Performances of restored behavior are distinguished by a separation of time and/or place between other wars and the War on Terror. The reenactments of *We Were Soldiers* and *Saving Private Ryan* index the surrogacy of today's war-fighters, but performances of themselves, of their friends, and of their war cause confusion between the actual and the representational. Martial heterotopias or reenactments of past wars focused on the surrogacy of current war-fighters' identities, but martial heterotopias of the War on Terror center on the conflation and confusion between performance and life. What was a collapse of time and space through the vehicle of restored performances becomes the collapse of selves through cinematic and staged performance. Film and stage performances of the War on Terror are simulacra of the War on Terror, and so the soldier-characters they feature are the simulacra of actual war-fighters (Baudrillard). As performances of war are increasingly more accepted by the military, as a reflection of itself, representation becomes more important than reality. The theatre-saturated nature of today's military field confuses the perspective of the camera lens and the war-fighter, making them often seem one and the same, a mediatized martial heterotopia. Performance is omnipresent in the War on Terror, following and directing the war-fighter from training, to combat, to the movie theater and then back home.

War as Performance

War-fighters of the contemporary USAF are taught the power of performance from the impetus of their career as soldiers, and their definition of performance becomes more inclusive and interactive. Dramatic commercials entice men and women to enlist, new recruits perform mental and physical readiness at their mandatory visits to the Military Entrance Processing Station; war-fighters both view and act in performances meant to train them for war. While performance is most often understood as a simile for a production, whether a fully-fledged Hollywood blockbuster or the reenactment of a movie quotation in an Iraq warzone, the military also deploys performance as a method of training. The purpose of performances of war, by the military and for the military, “is to train everyone in the unconditional reception of broadcast simulacra” (Baudrillard 68); by exemplifying performances of war either produced by themselves or the entertainment industry, the military teaches war-fighters to accept performance as participation. Theatre immersion and war simulations are modern results of military tradition of performance as war practice. During the transformation of civilian to soldier, and through their transition from instruction to combat, the trope of “the theatre of war” acquires a new relevance.

Theatre immersion is the military creation of a Hollywood-style set located on an American military base. Across the country, military bases, such as Fort Irwin in California, have recreated warzones in Iraq and Afghanistan in order to give war-fighters the opportunity for dress rehearsing war. Theatre immersion takes war-fighters out of the classroom and puts them, for a month at a time, through “practical field exercises

featuring ‘high operational realism;’” this is war-gaming at its most realistic (Magelsson 50). Examples of this theatrical practice in war training have been featured in war performances. *Generation Kill* opens with the men of Bravo Company shooting at tanks and calling in air support as they trek across the desert in their Humvees, and it’s several minutes into the episode before it becomes clear that this is only a training exercise in Kuwait and not the invasion of Iraq (“Get Some”). Thus, even war performances about theatre immersion training illuminate how difficult it can be to discern practice from final performance because of the effort the military has made to make every training exercise performative.

The performativity of military training allows soldiers to embody the tactical movements they’ve previously only seen on paper, but also offers mental preparation for life in a war zone. The recreation of a small Middle Eastern town in the desert of the United States becomes the place where soldiers are acclimatized to war.

Theatre immersion works to institute combat-as-rehearsal, in which soldiers have already been exposed to the horrors of war and are trained to remain so collected in their decision making that combat becomes simply another rehearsal, always downplayed as merely another step towards a perpetually deferred performance. (Gill 154)

Performance instruction, while it does give war-fighters a chance to rehearse and learn to avoid fatal mistakes, also poses combat as simply another rehearsal. Theatre immersion, bolstered by its use of technology and devotion to realism, strategically uses theatrical rhetoric, like “rehearsal” and “staging,” to trivialize the tension and stress brought on by

the high-stakes of warfare. The relationship and interactions between war-fighters and mediatized performance in the military field- their penchant for surrogate performances, the use of movies to reference tactics and medical information- complicate their perspectives on war. Combat becomes a reenactment of training and nothing more.

Soldiers' desires to become stars of their own war performances become possible in theatre immersion training. The military has made these bases and the rehearsals that occur there as close to the warzones in the Middle East as possible. "With actors and stuntmen on loan from Hollywood, American generals have recast the training ground at Fort Irwin so effectively [...] that some soldiers have left with battle fatigue" (Filkins and Burns qtd in Magelsson 49). The performativity of theatre immersion training is emphasized by the use of talents and tools also used by production companies. The transaction between soldiers and war performances is directly correlated to the symbiotic relationship of military officials and Hollywood executives. While Hollywood had previously only filmed war, for propaganda, entertainment, or documentary films, it is now helping to create environments of war. The rehearsals of war are all but unscripted; Carl Weathers offers acting input, plots of the training companies are preplanned, and the stage is set with every level of texture and detail that a designer could imagine (Magelsson).

In addition to sharing the physical training grounds of war-fighters, the film industry contributes to war-fighters' simulated combat instruction. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and production studios share the same simulation technology used to teach war-fighters of the War on Terror (Lenior 304). This is because

the same graphics generator, RenderMan, that is used to give life to the virtual realities created by DARPA is the product of Pixar Animations and the most widely used generator among production companies (302-304). Combat simulations use the same graphics generators, like RenderMan, as film industries to achieve a “real” look; these virtual training modules are used to rehearse war-fighters on mission tactics and strategies. The military in turn reciprocates the aid from production companies; some of the latest simulations benefit from the written and oral accounts of veterans collected expressly for the purpose of bettering the technology and the products. “The Battle of 73 Easting” is one of these virtual battles, and “is something like the *Saving Private Ryan*” of battlefield simulations (331). Rather than bringing Hollywood into a physical space of the military field, as in Fort Irwin, or having a soldier or war be the focus of a movie, simulation training is another product of the military’s partnership with the film industry, exemplifying yet another way the military and the movie industry are irrevocably entwined.

Simulation as combat instruction also becomes another way of using performance as rehearsal to fend off the finality of war. Simulation training coerces war-fighters to use performance in virtual realities as a way to replace their own perspective with a mediatized scope. Thus, war-fighters are directed and bound by a simulation which bears a remarkable resemblance to the movies war-fighters have become accustomed to watching. The technological evolution of war-fighters’ training demonstrates the same cyclical relationship between the film industry and the military institution as previously

demonstrated in the performances of restored behavior. Because war has become a joint venture for both, information is shared.

Performance as War

Theatre immersion and simulation training have made war an always already deferred event. War becomes simulation and “combat is simply another rehearsal” (Gill 154). This training methodology reflects the influence film and (to a lesser extent) theatre industries have in the military field. Theodor Adorno’s work on the culture industry can be used to frame the effects of performance on war-fighters:

The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production. The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical object, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema. (Adorno 99)

The effects of the confusion between the real and representational caused by Adorno’s cinema are continuations of those caused by theatre immersion and simulation training. These methods portray war as practice or as a virtual reality. These training methods follow an “an asymptotic form which allows a brush with war but no encounter” (Baudrillard 26).

Soldiers carry this cinematic perspective with them to war. Performance doesn't just become a production, or a training methodology, performance becomes the war-fighter's perspective. Jacob Corner, one of my veteran interlocutors noted, "It's almost like a bad horror film, walking in the cities [of Baghdad]" (Corner 2011). This theme emerges in memoirs of other veterans. Second Lt. Nathaniel Fick, one of the members of the company featured in *Generation Kill*, wrote in his memoir, "Feeling like an actor on a movie set, I stood at the ship's rail in my khaki uniform" (Fick 68); Army Infantry Maj. Todd Brown penned, "I crossed the bridge over the Tigris. (...) It looks like a movie set with the giant mosque in the background" (Brown 32); Cpt. Conroy of the Armored Tank division noted, "The dead we saw the day after the fight at Rams took on a yellowish waxy appearance and bore an eerie resemblance to stuffed Saddam look-alike mannequins set out there as a part of some elaborate movie set" (Conroy 112). The theatricality of training and the vocabulary used to execute it become a part of the war-fighters skills.

As adeptly as performance has intruded in to the theater of war, movies and plays about the War on Terror feature the stories, faces, and influences of soldiers who've served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The theatrical techniques and technologies that war-fighters have become accustomed to through their training are also used by production companies to make performances about combat. The military field's use of performance as way of improving war-fighters' combat performance has necessitated a collaboration between the film industry, technology corporations, and the institutional military. Just as technology has become inculcated in the film industry, the military is also experiencing

“a drive toward the fusion of digital and physical reality,” like technology-enhanced war-fighters nicknamed “smart soldiers” (Lenoir 289-290). Continuing on this path, the future of the military field will be characterized by a “posthuman state” in which “there are no demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation” (290). This is exemplified by the lack of a boundary between war-fighters’ material and screen selves, and is reflected in Espera’s comment about his worry that he will be unable to distinguish his own memories from the images of *Generation Kill*. Movies have become the medium for a posthuman state. The influence and importance of performances of war in the military field index a desire for the representational. The scripted war is preferred by even the military itself as seen by its collaboration with Hollywood. “They are pledged to the decoy of war” (Baudrillard 28). Entertainment industries appeal to this affinity for real simulated war. The entertainment industry’s obsession with making representations of war as “real” as possible cause war-fighters of the War on Terror to develop an insoluble identity based on their own experience as well as that portrayed in performance.

War performances rely on the soldier-characters to further the storyline. Through the eyes of a soldier (or through the camera lens creation of a soldier’s perspective), military and civilian audiences come to understand the experience of war. Theatre scholar Kelly Wilz describes the overall goal of “reflective oscillation” is to “disembed entrenched assumptions about war, soldiers, and enemies while reembedding new, more complex accounts” of these same items (594). Wilz demonstrates this in the film *Jarhead* where director Sam Mendes shows images of Iraqis as both enemy and

victim (593). The audience learns to view the Iraqi opponent as human rather than as a simply violent other because of the process of reflective oscillation.

This identification between spectator and the protagonist of the film is created through the form of visual reflective oscillation. (...) In film, this visual oscillation serves as a model to invite audiences not only to see through the protagonist's eyes, but also to experience some of what the protagonist encounters in the narrative. (Wilz 592-593)

When non-military audiences watch war movies, they have to overcome themselves in order to relate to the soldier-character and to understand his perspective, but war-fighters, when watching films about the war in which they served, relate much more strongly to the characters on the screen. Because they have embodied the perspective, setting, and situation of the soldier-character, they more easily “become” that character.

The exchanges between the film industry and the institutional military in the military field make movie-watching a unique experience for veterans of the War on Terror. Performing simultaneously as audience and actor, veterans inhabit Richard Schechner's “not me, not not me” argument (108). Their use of movies to refer to tactics and medical information, their quips about how Hollywood gets military details wrong illuminate how war-fighters have fused performance representations with their actual identities; when watching a movie about the fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan, war-fighters are simultaneously “a spectator and a performer” (Fagelson 108). A veteran of the War on Terror watching *The Hurt Locker* is not IED disposal Sgt. J.T. Sanborn, but having been in that same place and uniform, s/he is also not not Sgt. J.T. Sanborn or any other

soldier-character of the War on Terror. War-fighters vacillate between themselves and the soldier-characters of the War on Terror until distinction between the screen self and actual self is impossible to determine; it is the martial heterotopia of the identity of the war-fighter of the War on Terror. Paradoxically, war-fighters of the War on Terror are not the characters they see on the screen, but also not not them.

This conflation of identities occurs because war-fighters can relate to the routines and tropes of life in Iraq and Afghanistan for a soldier. Importantly, some war-fighters are seeing literal representations of themselves on screen. The Marines of Bravo Company remarked how odd it was to see characters of themselves presented on screen; Sgt. Rodolfo ‘Rudy’ Reyes remarked how Sgt. Brad Colbert was “eight feet tall in the movie” (“A Conversation...”). Reyes, on the other hand played himself, conflating both his material-self and screen-self into his overall identity as a war-fighter.¹ Matt Young, an Army veteran who served in Iraq, faced this same collision of reality and representation when his company became the stars of the documentary-style film *Restrepo*. Young served with the company in Iraq and was discharged before their filmed deployment in 2007, and he noted that having them filmed allows him to “be able to see what they saw (...) to be with my soldiers” (Young 2011). While reflective oscillation allows civilians the chance to experience war in Iraq and Afghanistan through the soldier-character’s eyes in performance, it creates an identity by proxy for veterans of the War on Terror.

War performances are heralded for their realism. Since Spielberg’s masterful opening scene of the beach invasion of Normandy in *Saving Private Ryan*, the film

industry has attempted to condense war to a camera lens without sacrificing the scope or the details. But realistic war performance doesn't always equate to realistic war experience. "Realism" in war performance is often characterized by huge explosions, bloody violence, and raw emotions to an unrealistic degree; the focus of war performances is on moments of action rather than moments of waiting, missions rather than the daily routine of a war-fighter. "The closer we supposedly approach the real or the truth" in representations, the "further away we draw" from lived experience (Baudrillard 49). Veteran Bridget Welles, who's sex kept her from serving in combat, noted this lacuna in war movies, "Nobody would see a movie about what I did. (Laughter.) What most of the Army does. 'Here's your coffee, sir;' guard duty; Good, you've got your skiff badge'" (Welles 2011).

To give military and civilian audiences what it expects to see, war performances rely on special effects to make realism possible. The digitally produced graphics of training simulations and war movies become reality.

We have come to desire these effects even when the film could be made without them. The appetite for 'realism' in visual effects forms a feedback loop with whatever technologies are currently available, being inspired in part by them at the same time that the imaginary inspires more extreme and exotic visions. (Lenior 305)

The realism so lauded by viewers and critics is completely constructed by digital technologies. This is exemplified in *Saving Private Ryan*'s opening sequence, which provoked *New York Times* film reviewer, Janet Maslin, to note its "shattering

verisimilitude” and “terrifying reportorial candor” (E28). This realism is not, however, actual combat footage, but the clever recreation of war through sound and special effects. *Saving Private Ryan* was the first film of its kind to manipulate sounds so that audiences could “keep track of which characters were shooting or being shot at (and from where)” (Kerins 44). The visualization of war was created by technical prowess: the muted colors were made by altering the film; gunfire and military equipment were digitally generated; violent deaths were created through the combination of amputee stuntmen and make-up (Daly 20).

Production companies defend themselves from possible critics who would say that a particular film is unrealistic by procuring the help of veterans as advisors or by citing “‘mutual exploitation,’” an arrangement Hollywood has with the military institution that refers to the military’s loaning of equipment and weaponry to production companies “in exchange for favorable representation” (Westwell 3). This symbiotic relationship between the movie and war industries originates in their collaboration during World War II, particularly through the production of newsreels. Newsreels allowed the military to “manage public opinion” through the movie industry (Atkinson 88), and in return for showing the military in a positive light in both the newsreels and entertainment films, the military loaned its weaponry and other equipment to Hollywood studios (Boggs and Pollard 227). The reciprocal relations between the war and movie industries is still at work today; after the attacks on September 11, 2001, presidential advisor, Karl Rove, convened with Hollywood executives “to discuss how the film industry might contribute to the ‘war on terror.’” As a result of this meeting *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *We Were*

Soldiers (2002), films with clear patriotic and pro-military tendencies, had their release dates brought forward....” (Westwell 1). The military could expect support in the form of recruitment increase from these war films, and Hollywood would use the information about public sympathies to change their release schedules in order to increase revenue. Including veterans and military equipment as well as having military support in the project gives the impression that war films are approved by war-fighters themselves, perpetuating the cyclical relationship between performance industries and the institutional military in the military field.

Though the collaboration of the military with the film industry helps war-fighters survive their time in combat, it also causes an emotional relationship between veterans and the war films once they’re returned to the civilian world. Because they’ve been trained to learn war as a performance and because film techniques, such as reflective oscillation, make their relationships with soldier-characters complicated confluences of their own identities, many war-fighters have difficulties watching war films post-combat. The same performances they quoted and reenacted in warzones haunt them when they’ve left. Veteran Jacob Corner explained his wariness of war movies,

I’m a little nervous to watch war movies now. Just cause the things I’ve seen or experienced over there, especially like when I got back and my dad was like, “We’re gonna go put on the *Hurt Locker*.” And I was like, “No. No, I’m gonna go sit outside.” Right now, it’s still very much on my mind so I’ve been a little hesitant to turn those movies on. (Corner 2011)

Once excused from the physical space of the military field, war-fighters also need to distance themselves from war performances in order to assimilate back into civilian life and sort through their post-combat stress. Others whose company becomes the focus of a major film, like veteran Welles who saw members of her “unit” become the inspiration for *Hurt Locker*, may feel too close to the soldier-characters and their experience. “Maybe I won’t see that one,” Welles mentioned. “I wasn’t in any frontline kind of things, but maybe I’m overly sensitive. I know, I’m weird” (Welles 2011). While some avoid war movies to avoid the emotional attachments they expect to feel while watching, others engage with war performances for the opposite reason. Army veteran David Grayson noted the therapeutic aspect of war films for veterans:

The Unit (...), when the guys were doing tactical or there was intelligence gathering going on, they were insanely accurate, really good. There were some episodes of that show, some that I have watched over and over again because they were so intense and cathartic. My wife would ask me why I was sitting in a chair watching a show that makes me cry. I would say, “I just needed to. Leave me alone and I’ll be okay.” (Grayson 2011)

The realism of war performances, so lauded by war-fighters and attempted by their training is what allows Grayson and other veterans to parse through their combat stress. The collision and collaboration of the military and the film industry in the military field has affects far beyond the training grounds and warzones.

When war-fighters are taught that war is yet another rehearsal, it alters their relationship to war performances beyond the time of their military contract. Upon returning from war, war movies are possible inciters of stress or emotional catharsis. Even more worrisome are the effects of performance methods in combat training; deferring war through the rehearsal process teaches combat without mention of fatal consequences. The long relationship between the war and film industries may have the greatest ability to alter the interaction between war-fighters and war performances. From the borrowing of Hollywood stuntmen for combat training exercises and the loaning of military equipment for movies, the collaboration between the two industries only seems to be increasing. Any evolvment in the reactions between war-fighters and war performances must either begin with the ties between Hollywood and the military institution or be an intervention into them.

Notes:

⁵ Rudy Reyes is not the first war-fighter to portray himself on screen; Audie Murphy's role in *To Hell and Back* (1955), is that of himself. It is based off his own military memoir of the same title.

CHAPTER IV

WAR IN “REEL” TIME

The scripted war is no longer uncontested. The nostalgic war films of Hollywood and the singing war heroes of Broadway are now challenged by films and plays produced by war-fighters. While entertainment industries may have previously held a monopoly on representations of war, the current military field is teeming with cameras and the Forward Operating Bases give war-fighters an immediate internet connection to YouTube. The cameras of Hollywood and news channels are outnumbered by the personal Nikons and Cannons of war-fighters; “every tour of duty comes equipped with tourist cameras and every other move is shot from above someone else’s movie” (Stewart 45). The multitude of recorded perspectives reflects the nature of the War on Terror. The War on Terror is “the so-called ‘360 degree war,’” the war “without a real front” (Stewart 55). The War on Terror is unlike past wars in which war-fighters’ and the cameras’ gaze was fixed in the same direction; rather, the War on Terror is marked by the infinite number of war movies, each offering a different perspective and a different front, ranging from home videos of war-fighters, embellished narratives of Hollywood, “objective” news reports, and the military’s own surveillance footage. No over-arching storyline emerges from these films. Instead, the fractures between these various sources demonstrate the competition of representation among them. Everyone wants to tell (and finally has the ability to tell) his or her own story of the war, and for

war-fighters this becomes a battle of ownership of their identity. Whoever holds the camera dictates representation and can potentially direct audience reception.

The heightened popularity of the war movie in World War II exacerbated the issues of representing American war-fighters. Hollywood movies, particularly during the 1940s, glorified the war and the war-fighter to appeal to home front audiences, but their character machinations received negative remarks from the war-fighters themselves.

Do I like what I see in the movies? That's a laugh! All the falseness, the calumny and the hypocrisy in our fake culture reaches its climax in the Silver Screen of Hollywood. Where the cinema should serve as a glass to reflect life, our movies serve as a Coney Island comic mirror to distort it. The images are huge, grotesque, ludicrous often hideous distortions of reality. (Fagelson 104)

This same disgust with the way the entertainment industry represents war and war-fighters is reflected today in war-fighters' "inherently distrustful" feelings toward Hollywood (Grayson 2011). Despite their incorporation of (and often reliance on) movies of past wars within the military field, war-fighters of the War on Terror are combating Hollywood's depiction of themselves by creating their own performances. The media produced by war-fighters of the War on Terror changes the way war-fighters are represented; YouTube videos and war plays created and performed by soldiers tests the hegemony of Hollywood and Broadway to present war narratives and define warrior characters.

War and Film

Prior to today's wide availability of digital recording devices and access to distribution services via the internet, Hollywood dominated the visual narrative of war. As the distance between home front and battlefield grew, cameras brought combat into closer focus. As weapon technology strove to increase the separation between the American war-fighters and their opponents, film technology strove to capture that combat in the same frame. The birth of modern cinema coincides with the birth of modern warfare, of technological world wars, so the film and war industries have been tied since their genesis. The first war film, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag*, was released in 1898 immediately after the declaration of the Spanish-American War; the movie features the violent divesting of the Spanish flag from a pole and its replacement with the Stars and Stripes (Westwell 10-11). The nationalist, patriotic, and pro-war narrating offered by the visual rhetoric of this first war film became the standard for subsequent war movies. As Navy veteran Warren Dodson so acutely noted, "You're always going to make a buck selling the flag." By the beginning of World War I, "motion pictures had become great recruiting vehicles for the armed forces, especially for the Navy in the wake of its victory over Spain" (Boggs and Pollard 54). This initial exchange between the war and film industries set the standard for later interactions. By their entry into World War I in 1917, Americans were excited about the prospect of the war "unfolding before [their] cameras" (Jones 32).

During World War II, both Hollywood and military industries dominated the cultural imaginary and teamed up for propagandist newsreels and the First Motion

Picture Unit (FMPU). With the American public preoccupied by film culture and, post Pearl Harbor, intensely engaged with the American military efforts, the joint collaboration between film technologies and military corporations was inevitable. Newsreels shown in movie theaters not only signified the film industries partnership with the military, but “demonstrated the military’s willingness to submit itself to scrutiny” (Atkinson 88). World War II also saw the birth of FMPU, the Armed Forces units whose sole mission it was to capture combat footage to be used for newsreels, entertainment films, and military strategies. Director demi-gods like Frank Capra and William Wyler, received supplemental instruction from Hollywood’s top cameramen and technicians on the Warner Brothers’ lot as well as basic military training (Cunningham 111). The alliance between the war and movie industries during World War II resulted in an unprecedented number of war movies during the conflict and established a relationship that continues today.

Though World War II may have seen the most explicit interactions between the war and film industry, the Vietnam war became the first “televised war” (Chown 458). For the first time war wasn’t confined to the movie theater, but was played on every home’s television set. The heightened media coverage of the war—Hollywood was late to the game, producing only four films during the entire twenty year conflict (Lawrence 558)—orchestrated the “focus that makes these [wars] real. As we know, wars without a face are precisely wars that have no media visibility” (Larsen 470). Visual narratives of the Vietnam War, on television or the silver screen, cemented the idea that a war that lacks Hollywood representation never existed, or at least, that military heroism had

somewhat diminished. The struggle for cinematic representation, and thus respect, by Vietnam war-fighters is product of the home front's lack of support for the war. A protesting civilian audience would not pay for tickets to a pro-war movie about Vietnam, and an anti-war movie would disrupt the relationship between the film industry and the military institution.

The film coverage of the Gulf War follows this same trend, with unprecedented news coverage but few movies released about the war. The infinite amount of representations about the war on television and film spurred Jean Baudrillard to infamously note that “we are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war [...] and confined to the simulacrum of war” (Baudrillard 25). That “the Gulf War didn't happen” is a theme echoes in Hollywood's movies about the war. The big films of the Gulf War, like *Courage Under Fire*, work to prove that the Gulf War is not another Vietnam. Gulf War films released before 2001 are less about the specifics of the war proper, and rather about a war that is not ‘Nam, while Gulf War pictures released post 2001, like *Jarhead*, are about legitimating the War of Terror.

Cinematic War Performances of the War on Terror

As politics raise the stakes of war representation, especially after the Vietnam War, and as the technology of film becomes more mass produced and affordable, war-fighters of the War on Terror have entered into the movie arena and begun contributing to their own representations. War movies made by Hollywood construct the story of the war, the reason of the war, and the characters of the war for the American public; a war that has

no movies made about it might as well not have happened. Because of this, war-fighters of the War on Terror recognize they have a difficult relationship with cameras in warzones. Veteran Matt Young noted, “[The media] lets the people back home know what’s happening, but war isn’t a pretty thing. So everyone sees this stuff and then decides to be against the war” (Young 2011). The constant presence of the film industry in warzones has war-fighters on edge because they know that their every action could become film fodder. The power of Hollywood to misrepresent them or to turn the public against them has coerced many war-fighters of the War on Terror to release their own war movies.

Hollywood’s legacy, its hegemony of the master military narrative, is being challenged by the polyphonic mosaic of war-fighters’ own war movies.¹ The availability of recording equipment and the easy access to a viewing public through internet sites like YouTube, allow war-fighters to produce and distribute their own film representations of war and a warrior’s life. This internet war movie phenomenon is the war-fighters’ reaction to civilians dictating the representation of the military. When asked what she thought of Hollywood producing war films, veteran Bridget Welles laughed and said, “My first instinct is to say, ‘That’s cute’” (Welles 2011). The creation of veterans’ war tapes is not a new tradition to the military field, in World War II the FMPU made 300 films (Cunningham 96), but that number pales in comparison to the nearly infinite number of digitally distributed war movies of the War on Terror. The military field is brimming with recording devices, prompting its sobriquet of “digital war” (Chown 458); excluding civilian and embedded recorders, “it is the military that is

busy filming *itself* at every turn, from high-altitude surveillance transmits to video diaries and cell-phone souvenirs” (Stewart 45).

It is the war-fighters’ home combat movies, however, that have become an unexpected phenomenon. The proliferation of digital videos by war-fighters was so exceptional that in May 2007 the Department of Defense restricted access to YouTube and other web domains, citing operational security (and bandwidth) issues, forcing war-fighters to publish only upon their return home (McMichael). However, despite the myriad of public domain videos about the War on Terror, Eric Kocher a veteran who served as both Marine in the Bravo Company and as actor in its film representation, *Generation Kill*, noted, “Americans today still have the luxury to avoid [the war]” (“A Conversation...”). Ignorance or misunderstanding of what the war-fighters of the War on Terror are doing or who they are is what drives soldiers’ war movies; the war movies are made and shared with the civilian populace in an effort to expose the life and person of a war-fighter unedited and unscripted.

While so much of the military field emphasizes the codependency of the war and film industries, the home combat movies made by war-fighters of the War on Terror are often in direct opposition to the Hollywood movie machine. The mockery of the film industry’s war narrative is evident in the many parodic videos made by war-fighters. In 2001, the Navy produced its action-packed “Accelerate your life” commercial which shows sailors and seals jumping out of helicopters, diving, and storming a beach to the heavy metal tunes of Godsmack. This commercial has prompted multiple parodies in which war-fighters demonstrate the “real” Navy by mopping and chipping paint to the

same Godsmack song. They are offering their perspective to the Armed service Hollywoodization of deployment.

Hollywood's war movies are removed from war; they are representations of war recreated on studio sets with lantern-jawed actors who are more concerned with talent agents than chemical agents. Further, Hollywood war movies cannot be instantaneous reactions to a war because of the time necessary to write, cast, film, and edit films. The war movies made by war-fighters are immediate; "there's no exposure time, no lag for ironic or polemic framing. The legacy of oppositional cinema, and its leverage, is in large part forfeited by just this relentless instantaneous videography" (Stewart 48). War-fighters' combat footage that emerges on sites like YouTube is without edited narration; there is rarely a larger frame that links their war experience to the politics of the conflict. What does materialize in these videos, however, is a multitude of on-the-ground perspectives featuring spontaneous scenarios. The countless YouTube videos that feature everything from air assaults to vehicle checkpoints sacrifice hours of editing and traditional narrative structure to gain the power of immediacy, and because of that, honesty.

The war films of service men and women achieve what the "16mm screenings" in World War II attempted, a "direct conversation between the government and the people without interference from or reliance on Hollywood's system of production, distribution, and exhibition" (Brownell 62). While the American home front and civilian audience are desirous of the honesty and separation from "Hollywood's system of production," hallmarks of the war-fighter's war film genre, war-fighters have found that

they're not as accepting of their film perspective. Sgt. Brad Colbert, when discussing what he thought of the reception of *Generation Kill* which centered on his humvee in the invasion of Iraq, said:

I think we have this misguided perception that World War II was the good versus the evil, this very clear cut—it was messy and ugly, just as nasty and ruthless and vicious as what we have in the Middle East, you just didn't have a camera there, every step of the way to bring that home.
 (“A Conversation...”)

The belief that the photographic realism of war-fighters' movies is more shocking to civilian audiences than the Hollywood representation of war is echoed in Air Force veteran Jacob Corner's comment that “a lot of people back home are scared to see what's going on.” The violence, dead bodies, and language that are often featured in soldiers' war films often appall internet audiences. Army veteran David Grayson remarked how his wife was often uncomfortable with Hollywood's war movies, like the swearing, and he would have to tell her that “it's not even reaching the levels that are really there.” Grayson's wife and other civilians watching war-fighters' films from their time in Iraq and Afghanistan find them more unpleasant or disturbing because they are so clearly not representations. The movies made by war-fighters “project a visual ‘look,’ where the graininess of the image, infrared or video, must stand in for the grittiness of the mission” (Stewart 47). War-fighters' movies become more unsettling because nothing is dramatized; these war movies are more frightening because they depict a war-fighter's reality.

In addition to offering a perspective different from that of Hollywood, soldiers' war films capture the stories and places that embedded reporters and Hollywood recreations cannot reach. The variety of digitally distributed war movies made by war-fighters charts a broader map of the War on Terror. Iraq veteran Matt Young commented:

When I went over in 2004, we were in Fallujah and there were no cameras, no reporters with us. So it was good we had our own cameras. So we have all these pictures and movies and stuff that we've done because no one else would come there. (Young 2011)

Other than the geographical crevices that remain unrecorded or unrepresented, Hollywood is also incapable of capturing the emotional spaces and perspectives of war-fighters. While many war-fighters' movies feature combat or their daily missions, a sizeable portion are memorial tributes to fallen friends as well as tapings of stress-relieving comedy in warzones. Even the emotional plots and dialogue of Hollywood blockbusters are only attempts at evoking the grief or hilarity that are the source for war-fighters' movies.

War and Theatre

Theatrical performances of war have an impressive timeline, but their popularity has waned as television and movies replaced live performance as entertainment. The Greek origins of Western theatre are founded on the tradition of war performances: the Greeks held play festivals to consolidate political and martial power and prowess of the state.

“Dramatic art arose as a complement to, perhaps also as an antidote to, war” (Malpede xv). The ancient Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles were all war veterans, and the “majority of their plays are about the effects of war on its victims and, equally, on its victors” (xv). American theatre and military heritages draw heavily on the practices of the Ancient Greeks: written works by the men of this era make up significant portions of military and theatre canons; the war-fighters of the War on Terror are often referred and compared to Greek hoplites (West 2); theatres across the country are still staging *Oedipus Rex* and *Trojan Women*. Similar to the genesis of the movie industry, the beginnings of Western theatre are intricately bound to representations of war.

Theatrical performances of war, that is, war plays by veterans and performance reactions and trends to a war, have been present during every war in American history², though they have not always been welcome. Two years after declaring war on England, the Continental Congress banned plays in patriot-controlled territory, effectively shutting down theatres in every major city except for British-occupied New York (Richards xii). The aversion to theatre at this time reflected the struggling nation’s revulsion of all things seemingly British and anti-democratic. Within the camps of the Continental Army, however, performances were still staged. At Valley Forge, George Washington encouraged “a production of *Cato* among his officers.” When word of this performance spread to the Continental Congress, they extended the theatrical restrictions among patriots to include the Army and its soldiers (McConachie 128). American theatres reopened after the war, but relied on familiar European plays to fill seats. The use of

theatre during the Revolutionary War exemplifies how performances emerge during other conflicts in American history. Like those of Washington's officers, war performances are the products of veterans. War performances reflect on past wars and the innate nature of war; *Cato* centers on the martial and political conflicts between Cato and Julius Caesar. Perhaps most importantly, war performances are inherently political.

Theatrical performances of the Civil War followed the same themes of the Revolutionary War but also introduced new types of performances. In the Confederate states, theatre thrived, particularly in Richmond, Virginia. The most popular southern theatre troupe, W.H. Crisp Company, consisted of male actors who were veterans who'd been honorably discharged (Coulter 486). As well as featuring veterans as actors, theaters also began catering to larger veteran audiences (Mullenix 42). Staged tableaux vivants became a popular trend of war performances during this period; both Northern and Southern stages starred women costumed in togas, playing allegorical characters like the Goddess of Liberty, and depicting abstract scenes (Elbert 235; 240). Other than stages for war performances and war-fighters, theaters during the Civil War operated as political stages. Richmond theatre managers George Kunkel and Thomas Moxley opened their playhouse on the evening of November 6, 1860, and included a reading of the presidential election so that their regular audience might still enjoy the theatre without missing the political news (Mullenix 37). Theatre and war also fatefully collided in April 1865, when actor John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln in the Ford Theatre. This act of war was "a perversion of [the theatre's] mimetic mission,"

and reinforced the political nature of theatre and its prominence during wartime (Postlewait 108).

The rise of the film industry during the World Wars directly correlated to the theatre's decrease in popularity as well as its financial precarity. This is not to say that there weren't war plays staged, but rather to illustrate that the theatre lost its monopoly on war performances. The few performances that did gain popularity were large productions like the Broadway musical *Going Up* (1917), a comedy focused more on aviation than on war proper ("Going Up"), and *South Pacific* (1949). Patriotic pageants and spectacles, like those of Ziegfeld and Shubert's chorus girls during World War I, drew on the tableaux tradition popularized during the Civil War (Postlewait 116). Theatre during the World Wars recognized its need to adapt; the movie industry was better technically equipped to recreate the spectacle of war, so theatre shifted its focus and began to portray the effects of war on a smaller, personal level.

Theatrical performance during and emerging from the Vietnam War capitalized on the intimacy of live performance and the focus on the individual war-fighter instead of larger military units. Veteran-written or produced performances about the Vietnam War became particularly popular. The playwrights' commentaries in these scripts inevitably include "information about their military service right up front, as though to underscore what character after character says in film after novel after play: if you were not there, you cannot even begin to imagine what it was like" (Zinman 7). Veteran produced performances were critically recognized as well; each play of veteran Dave Rabe's Vietnam War trilogy, *Sticks and Bones* (1971), *The Basic Training of Pavlo*

Hummel (1972), and *Streamers* (1976), won a prestigious drama award.³ A decade after the war, the Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theatre Company produced a performance that presented the stories of veterans performed by veterans (Bennetts H6). These veteran performances highlight the new practice of theatre to laud the “private word” over “public pronouncements” (Reston ix). While war movies told epic war stories in sweeping cinemascope, theatre performances focused on personal stories about the effects of war.

This emphasis on individual reaction to large-scale politics is particularly evident in performances of the Vietnam War: Adrienne Kennedy’s *An Evening With Dead Essex* (1978) examines the lives of African-American soldiers who deal with racism in the newly integrated military; Tom Cole’s *Medal of Honor Rag* (1977) explores war-induced mental trauma. Vietnam War plays also revolve around war-fighters’ personal experiences with a home front that either doesn’t understand or is against the war, and by extension, the war-fighter, such as *Tracers* (1985) which centers on veterans’ interactions with civilians when they return home.

Gulf War stage performances, fewer in number than those of older and longer wars, generally revolve around war-fighters with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and their strained relations with civilian family and friends upon returning home. *The Gulf of Westchester* is exemplary of this tradition; Deborah Zoe Lauffer’s play is set on the eve of the current war in Iraq and forces a group of friends to confront issues of PTSD experienced by the two Gulf War veterans included in their circle. The gradual removal of war stories from the stage to screen that began with the emergence of

Hollywood continued through the Gulf War. Film's primacy of war performances continually challenges playwrights and theatre companies to find more creative ways of representing the experience of war. Storytelling has to find a way to compete with special effects.

Theatrical War Performances of the War on Terror

Staged war performances produced by veterans of the War on Terror revolve around the interaction between military and civilian persons. These performances expose civilians to the experiences of war. War-fighters' performances give veterans a forum to share war stories, encouraging the proliferation of discourses about both war and its effects on and between civilians and veterans. Performance in these instances is a mode of understanding and a common vocabulary: veterans' war performances and the ensuing discussions educate civilian audiences about the warrior's experience.

In order to transfer their war stories to civilians, veteran's war performances recreate and reveal the experience of war in ways unique to theatre. Similar to documentary theatre, in which "playwrights appear to make claims for a special veracity in rhetorically binding their work to its non-fictional sources," veteran war performances are inherently bound to the war-fighters who are creating, acting, and/or producing them (Favorini 32). *Surrender* is a war play that is not only co-produced by Iraq veteran Jason Hartley, but features Hartley as the drill sergeant who trains audience members for war. Hartley, with help from Josh Fox, develops an interactive war performance where the audience "dons fatigues, straps on weapons and goes through basic training, simulated

combat and homecoming over the course of three and a half hours” (Snook). Hartley, playing himself, teaches the audience-soldiers how to shoot and takes them through a simulated combat scenario in which they are forced to engage combatants; his role in the performance led New York Times online reporter, Andy Webster, to comment, “Hartley is not the gunnery sergeant from ‘Full Metal Jacket,’ but his experience and authority are unmistakable”. The role of Hartley as his war-fighter-self imbues the performance with an authenticity unachievable even by war documentaries because Hartley, unlike the soldier/actors in those films, is tangible to the audience. Because of Hartley’s physical presence in this war performance, *Surrender*, as Fox notes, is better equipped to “[address] the huge cultural gap between the military and the non-military” (qtd in Alter W6). The embodied experience of audience members in staged war productions like *Surrender*, and the presence of the veterans in both scripts and live performances, offer staged war performances an authority and authenticity that builds on the tradition of veterans and war performances.

Veterans’ war plays prompt discourses about the effects of war among military and civilian audiences. These performances rely on an intimate relationship between war-fighters onstage and their audience that is established by the conventions of narrative theatre. Narrative theatre, as defined by theatre scholar, Jill Taft-Kaufman, is a “group performance that features narrative as the primary expressive vehicle. Its format retains the narrative, which is usually delivered by the actors directly to the audience” (19). The emphasis on storytelling gives veteran performers, who might be new to acting or playwriting, a theatrical framework in which to insert their experience.

Narrative theatre's technique of breaking the fourth wall between audience and actors forces a confrontation between civilians and veterans. This uninterrupted line of speech by the veterans demands both military and non-military to interact with each other. In this way, veterans' stage performances of war operate similarly to tragic theatre, which "forces us to *be* in the presence of the huge emotions and offers communal solitude in which to take them in" (Malpede xix). Live performance initiates contact between the war-fighters onstage and the civilians in seats, but it requires the war-fighters to relate their experiences and the audience to absorb them. Their shared presence in the same building demands a corporeal recognition of the veteran and an emotional reaction to his performance. This acknowledgement of the war-fighters' experiences fosters communication between war-fighters and civilians.

Several theatre companies created by veterans and/or for veterans give war-fighters an opportunity to share their experience with the public. The United States Veteran Arts Alliance (USVAA) is a Los Angeles-based theatre company for veterans. Created in 2004 by Army veteran Keith Jeffreys, USVAA encourages both new works by war-fighters as well as staging popular plays of the Western canon- they host a summer Shakespeare program called Shakes and Vets- which are performed by all members of the community, regardless of military experience (Usvaa.org). These performing centers promote soldier and civilian relationships through performance: Veteran Artists "partners veteran artists with artists and activists to develop meaningful projects and programs," like their annual *Make Drag, Not War!*, a veteran advocacy performance that emerges from a collaboration between veterans and "dragtivists"

(Veteranartists.org); Veterans Center for the Performing Arts (VPCA), produces original works by veterans, with veteran and non-veteran actors and mentors, free and open to the public; A Rock or Something Productions uses theatre to reintegrate veterans back into civilian life. Theatre companies like these use performance as a means to close the social gap between war-fighters and civilians.

Another trend in theatre productions of the War on Terror are performances that adapt classical Greek plays in order to frame and provoke dialogues about the emotional effects of war on Americans fighting in warzones and on the home front.⁴ This popular performance trend harks back to canonical roots in the works of the ancient Greeks, the times in which performance and war traditions first intersected in the written record. In fact, *The Persians*, written by Aeschylus in 472 BCE, is the oldest surviving play; it retells the reactions of the Persians when they hear of their defeat by the Greeks at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE. These Greek plays are doubly analogous to performances about the War on Terror because they often center around battles fought in the same region in which we're currently fighting. Themes of war that drive these Greek plays find new relevance in performances about our current martial situations.

These Greek adaptations about the War on Terror center primarily around issues of trauma, particularly PTSD, that effect war-fighters and those they come in contact with when returning home. Theater of War, a project of Outside the Wire production company which performs Sophocles' plays to veteran and civilian audiences offered this explanation as to why they choose to produce ancient Greek works:

It has been suggested that ancient Greek drama was a form of storytelling, communal therapy, and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans. Sophocles himself was a general. At the time Aeschylus wrote and produced his famous *Oresteia*, Athens was at war on six fronts. The audiences for whom these plays were performed were undoubtedly comprised of citizen-soldiers. Also, the performers themselves were most likely veterans or cadets. Seen through this lens, ancient Greek drama appears to have been an elaborate ritual aimed at helping combat veterans return to civilian life after deployments during a century that saw 80 years of war. (Philoctetesproject.org)

Staged war performances adapted from Greek scripts highlight the universality of effects of war, drawing parallels between the Greek characters and modern contexts. Greek scripts, as “dominant tales” of war, offer today’s actors a *relevant* vocabulary, characters, and situations of a temporarily and spatially removed war that they use to encourage dialogue about the War on Terror (Thompson 162).

Theater of War productions feature dramatic readings of Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* which are followed by “a town-hall style audience discussion, which has been facilitated with the help of military community members” (Philoctetesproject.org). The plays are used to give audiences, which consist of both war-fighters and civilians, a referent to which they can allude when discussing how the war has affected themselves or loved ones. During one of the post-performance discussions, a female audience member, after watching *Ajax*, spoke aloud:

I am the proud mother of a Marine and the wife of a Navy SEAL, and my husband went away four times to war, and each time he came back, he came back like Ajax, dragging invisible bodies into our house. The war came home with him. (...) Our home is a slaughterhouse. (Kerr)

By presenting the psychological effects of this war through the images and phrases of canonical Greek texts, Theater of War performances promote difficult dialogues among their military and civilian audiences.

The Antigone Project is another performance that deploys a Greek text to organize its commentary about current conflicts. The Quinnipac University theatre's project first began in fall 2002, when a local PTSD Arts Council featured veterans performing original works about their war experiences. Theatre students under the guidance of faculty member, Crystal Brian, began working on a project in collaboration with veterans from several wars. The product of this community undertaking was *The Antigone Project*, which used text from Sophocles' *Antigone* performed by student actors set against "a second chorus" comprised of the digitally recorded interviews with veterans (Brian 6). The university revived the production in February 2010; *The Antigone Project Revisited* included new interviews with veterans from the War on Terror (among others) and a theatre student reading the letters written between herself and her veteran husband during his tour of duty (Siciliano). The project's commitment to community input reflected its goal to ensure that war not be "distanced from the public," and the theatre's duty to guarantee that never happens by presenting works about the war to the public (Siciliano).

The histories of performance and war are extensive, often intersecting and sharing the same players. Decades (or even centuries) of performing war on stages and screens have led to entertainment industries' monopoly on representational war and war-fighters. Veterans' stage performances of war have continually offered an alternative to mainstream, live venues like Broadway; however, the countless number of internet combat videos posted by veterans of the War on Terror challenges entertainment industries on an unprecedented level. Cinematic and stage war performances by, for, and about veterans are polyphonic productions that emphasize the individual or community effects and issues caused by a nation at war.

Notes:

¹ I define war-fighters' movies as those they film, edit, and publish themselves. Because of this, war documentaries where war-fighters film and movie professionals edit (like *The War Tapes*) do not qualify as war-fighters' movies.

² While there are many works on the collaboration between film and war in American history, there is no complete work that focuses on the intersection of war, war-fighters and theatre in American history.

³ Dave Rabe's *Sticks and Bones* won the Tony Award for Best Play, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* won the Drama Desk Award, and *Streamers* won New York Drama Critics Circle Award.

⁴ The popularity of Greek references in theatrical war performances is not unlike the popularity of the film *300*. They emerge from similar geographical and historical ties to ancient Greeks.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

War and war-fighters have become immortalized through cinematic (and to a lesser extent, stage) performances; generations of service-men and women are defined by actions on the battlefield artfully altered on the big screen. Hollywood has dictated the representation of wars and war-fighters since its genesis. World War II films like *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) taught war-fighters were as brave as Bogart and could sing like Bing; the Vietnam War in film, namely *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), depicted war-fighters who learn that war is hell and return home to find that national dissent isn't much better; Gulf war-fighters understand the after-effects of corruption, betrayal, and unnecessary violence, all the focus of *Courage Under Fire* (1996). Now the focus is on the war-fighters of the War on Terror, who, unlike their predecessors, have grown up watching these multivalent representations of war and war-fighters.

War films thrive on the physical and emotional costs of war endured by war-fighters, their military advisement on set, and, even their performances in order to make their films resonate with audiences. This is especially true for performances of the War on Terror, like *Generation Kill* (2008). In turn, war-fighters internalize these examples of soldiers reenacting their cinematic representations. This reciprocal relationship has instilled the film industry with the power to characterize war-fighters in lasting ways. The politics of cinematic infringement on war-fighters' identities is going unrecognized.

Audiences of war movies, civilian and military alike, accept these representations as mostly true, often because the military input on these movies offers a veneer of validation: what you're watching is real because we hired a military advisor, because it's based on a veteran's memoirs, because we cast the soldiers themselves.

These representations of war-fighters are personified agendas for the film industry and/or the military. *Act of Valor* (2012), for instance, stars "Navy SEALs as Navy SEALs on a covert mission that is based on actual Navy SEAL missions" (Miller). The film is less a blockbuster-although it's expected to pull big numbers opening weekend- and more a propaganda piece- it began as a recruitment video and the Navy got final edit privileges ("Hollywood movie"). The elision of war and entertainment industries is enacted at institutional levels but creates consequences on an individual level.

The scripted war implies a war that is understood: a war with an obvious enemy, a war with a localized front, a war of reproducibility. All of these are denied by the War on Terror. Instead, the scriptedness of the War on Terror emerges in its performances and its performativity. Denied their dramatic moments of war (what would seem to be the most theatrical moment, the destruction of Saddam's statue, has yet to be immortalized by film) war-fighters of the War on Terror reenact cinematic performances of earlier wars. They must occupy others' performances of war to validate their place in the warrior genealogy. The convergence of performance and the military also emerges in the combat training of war-fighters of the War on Terror. Their instruction is the scripted rehearsal of war, whether on the set of an Iraqi town in the middle of California

or the virtual reality of a flight simulation. The only scripts left to these war-fighters are those they create. Availability of recording technology, accessibility of dissemination sites, like YouTube, and adaptability of their theatrical military heritage and instruction allows war-fighters to produce and publish their own war performances.

Performance in the military is a double-edged sword. The military institutions' practice of referring or screening its cinematic victories causes war-fighters to conflate their identities with those of fictional characters. Rather than adapting to their current circumstances, war-fighters of the War on Terror relive movie battles. Their theatrical combat training and simulation instruction teaches that war is just like rehearsal and doesn't prepare them for the actual consequences of war. Inversely, it is this same performance-based training that helps war-fighters learn on-the-job without real-world tragedies. Their performance-heavy military heritage has also indirectly led them to deal with their own war experience by creating their own war performances.

Performances in and of the military battle over are the politics of identity and representation. War performances dictated by entertainment industries have the power to sway public opinion about war-fighters; war performances in the military have the power to mold and alter war-fighters. Disembodied institutions are managing the bodies of war-fighters. This tradition, however, is slowly being contested by the war performances of war-fighters of the War on Terror. The nearly infinite number of ever expanding home-made combat videos on YouTube and the plays about Iraq and Afghanistan created, produced, and published by veterans of the War on Terror are creating discourses on the effects of war on the individual and offering alternate stories

to the entertainment industry and the military's master narrative. These war performances are not all anti-military or even anti-War on Terror- in fact, most are very supportive of the military and its role and objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan- but simply offer civilians their images and experiences in lieu of actors' familiar faces or the facelessness of the military.

How the war-fighters of the War on Terrorism are perceived is ultimately how they will be treated. Heroes of World War II are dignitaries at every national ceremony or holiday while Vietnam veterans are often brushed aside, tainted by public sentiment and performance presentation during the war. The reputations of veterans of the War on Terror will be decided by their performances and the performances about them. I am taking this into consideration as I plan my ethnography-based performance about war-fighters of the War on Terror and their engagement with war performances. *The Scripted War* is performed research; I am exploring the same themes and topics of this written work with the bodies of actors and the stories of veterans. The National Theatre of Scotland's critically acclaimed *Black Watch* (2008), the story of a platoon of Scottish soldiers in Iraq as they tell and perform it during an interview with a theatre ethnographer, and Van Cougar theatre troupe's *Gonna See a Movie Called Gunga Din* (2012), which juxtaposes real veterans' stories against movie montages of war, are good comparisons for my performance project. Using my ethnographic interviews with Texas A&M student veterans, I've comprised a script that has veterans engaging with war movies in the ways they've described: they laugh at them, quote them, and use them to

explain their experience to others. *The Scripted War* encourages audiences to understand the cinematic influences on identity and perception of war-fighters.

There will always be war. War will always be the subject of performance. Audiences, civilian and military, will always watch these war performances. In the face of so much inevitability, it behooves us to understand the consequences of these war performances because they will always emerge as well. As adroitly as the military has learned to use performance as a tool, performance scholars must learn to use performance to find ways to aid the military and aid the veterans who return home.

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APPENDIX

THE SCRIPTED WAR

By Emily Piepenbrink
Draft of 2/18/12

*Actors in a semi-circle downstage. They are sitting on chairs and UIL set pieces of all different levels. Ethnographer is sitting in the semi-circle but slightly separated from the veterans. They are holding/drinking out of coffee cups, implying that they are all in a coffee shop. Behind them is a projection screen, it is a character of the performance; it interrupts, distracts, and hovers on the edge of the group. Throughout the performance, the veterans interact with the movies on screen, sometimes laughing at and talking back to it, other times visibly turning their back on it. Its dialogue is noted in **bold**.*

Each question from the ethnographer denotes the beginning of a new scene, but there is no lighting change to mark these, they flow naturally into each other.

Lights up. Veterans and ethnographer are drinking coffee and meeting each other.

Scene 1:

Ethnographer: So my research is looking at how veterans of the War on Terror, like you guys- and girl- use performances. Like which movies you like, which movies you quote, things like that.

Nods, acceptance from veterans.

So, I guess just to start us off, do...did y'all watch war movies while you were deployed?

Projection: Clips of soldiers watching movies from war movies: *Band of Brothers*-guys watching movie in a tent while they wait to ship out; from *The Pacific*-guys yelling at the movie; from *The Hurt Locker*-Kid selling DVDs to the soldiers; guys watching computer screen with movie from *Generation Kill*; etc.

Veteran 1: Yes, tons.

Veteran 3: Well, you see, you've got all these haji shops where you can get, basically, any movie you want. Some of them are movies that have just come out back home. They're all black market DVDs and sometimes the audio is crappy, but if it's good enough we'll watch it.

Veteran 4: What do you do when you're deployed at the division level in nice, cushy quarters? You buy movies.

Veteran 3: Yeah, my last deployment, we were still out on missions all the time, but we got completely spoiled. I had my own room with a TV and DVD player.

Veteran 6: Soldiers love to watch war movies even though they're there. We'd all sit around whenever we had some free time, and there'd be fifteen guys crowded around a tiny TV. And then some guy sleeping in the corner.

Laughter.

Veteran 2: I think war movies are a very ingrained part of the military culture. In fact, a lot of the ways I can remember my deployment, because I was deployed on four different ships, and part of the way I remember my deployment is based on which particular war movie was watched the most. On the *San Jacinto* it was *Gladiator*. On the *Truman* it was *Jarhead*.

Veteran 5: Yeah, we watch tons of movies and then we quote them. We quote ourselves, like we quote other military men a lot, and this is just an extension of that.

Veteran 2: I did know one guy in the Navy with me, and he almost exclusively talked in movie quotes. No, really. Like he would answer questions with movie quotes. It was really weird.

Veteran 1: Or if you were bored. You'd just say something random.

Veteran 7: I think I could quote something for you right now. When I was over, the big thing was watching *Band of Brothers*. Everyone's seen it. If you sat us down we could probably tell you everything that was going to happen and what everyone was going to say.

Projection: The projection prompts him with a scene from *Band of Brothers*.

V7 begins to quote along with the movie. V1 joins him. They also minimally act out what is going on in the scene.

Veteran 6: Yeah, everyone knows that one. I didn't get into war movies until after I was in. Everybody wanted to watch war movies while we were there. We watched tons of war movies. *We Were Soldiers* has all kinds of quotes in it. Right after you watch it, everything is right there.

Veterans become very enthusiastic when We Were Soldiers is mentioned. They clamor over each other to talk about it. The Projector is also racing to show clips.

Veteran 4: Oh, I really like *We Were Soldiers*. That's an excellent movie. It takes itself serious, but it has some comic relief.

Projection: "Good morning" clip from *We Were Soldiers*.

She acts it out:

"Good Morning, Sergeant Major."

Veteran 3 joins her. Acts out the part of Plumley.

Veteran 3: "How the hell do you know what kind of God-damned day it is?"

Veteran 1 & 4: "Beautiful mornin' Sergeant Major."

Veteran 3 & 6: "What are you a weatherman now?"

Veteran 3: That guy, Sergeant Major Plumley is iconic. I was in the 82nd when that movie came out, and that particular Sgt. Maj. Everybody already knew his name and history. There's only five people in World War II history who made all five combat jumps because everybody else who tried didn't live that long. So for somebody to go for all those, he was already a legend in the air borne community, and he was portrayed really well.

Veteran 5: That Sgt. Maj., anything he says you can quote. One part of the movie, he refuses to carry a rifle, he just carries a pistol. And he says:

Projection: Shows this scene.

He begins to reenact it.

"If I ever need a rifle they'll be tons laying on the ground." Because all of the guys around him will be dead. It's a lot of graveyard humor.

Veteran 1: If someone wanted to be someone from a movie, they'd quote them all week.

Veteran 7: Yeah, I really liked *Black Hawk Down*. I'd quote this one part all the time. Ummm, I don't know if I can say it in a public forum.

Movie Projection has no qualms providing the quote.

Projection: Clip from *Black Hawk Down*. Pilla, imitating Captain Steele, “Speak up. You say this is your safety? Well, this is my boot, son, and it will fit up your ass with the proper amount of force!”

Veteran 7 nods and smiles during the projection as though it is a person who just said the thing too inappropriate for the group.

Veteran 1: We did these “thunder runs” when I was in Iraq. The idea is from a tactic they used in Vietnam. We’d all load up in our Humvees and go on this show-of-force mission.

He steps forward a bit. Some of the other veterans get the idea and pull a few of the set pieces away and arrange them in a rectangle shape. They index a Humvee. Those three climb in and approximate holding guns and scanning their sectors.

Projection: Plays this clip from *Apocalypse Now*. It syncs up with the reenactment of the veterans.

Well, in *Apocalypse Now*, there’s that moment with Robert Duvall in the helicopters where they blast Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries.” So, we thought it would be pretty bad ass to do the same thing.

Veteran 1 joins them in the passenger seat.

So we hooked up some of our own speakers to the outside of our Humvee, and during one of our runs we played “Ride” as loud as we could from the speakers.

The veterans hum “Ride” along with the Projection clip.

Scene 2:

Ethnographer: So, it seems like all of these movies are about the Army. Does it matter then what branch of the Armed Forces you’re in or does their militariness transcend it? Or are there movies about your job that you really like?

Veteran 3: Well, I was in the Army in an Air borne division, and I can tell you that *A Bridge Too Far* is their mascot film. It is iconic. To the point that at every jump they play it in the pack ship. I’ve seen that movie so many times.

Projection: Trailer-esque clips of *A Bridge Too Far*.

The veterans, now back in their rough semi-circle enact the process of checking each others packs. It is quick, formulaic, and only lasts for a few seconds during Veteran 3's speech.

They have these huge warehouses with long benches because some of our jumps have five thousand people. So you go and you get your shoot, you gear up, and once you get jammed, you just sit on these benches. Airborne timelines are ridiculous, so at some point you are GOING to spend 4 to 6 hours in a pack ship.

Most of the veterans, bored, turn to watch the movie playing on the Movie Projector. The others have seen it too many times.

And they have TVs up all over the place playing movies. I swear, ninety-nine percent of the time, they're playing *A Bridge Too Far*.

Veteran 7: That's still an infantry movie though. I was in the air force and there's just not a lot of movies about it. (Laughing) I mean you've got *Top Gun*,

Projection: Cheesiest clips from *Top Gun*.

Veterans laugh at the clips. One sings, "How come you never close your eyes..."

but it's from the eighties. You just can't shoot a movie in the air the whole time. Or those of us who work on the ground, so much is shrouded in classification....

Veteran 2: I was in Navy intelligence, so there's obviously not a lot of movies about that. But I use bad movies to bullshit people and convince them that that's what I do. Like *Stealth*.

Projection: Clips from *Stealth*.

That movie with Jamie Foxx is ridiculous. Bad movie, bad war movie, bad Navy movie. I used that to mess with guys on the ship because that was about intel and that's what I did. Another movie, *Behind Enemy Lines*, is about Sarajevo.

Projection: Scene from *Behind Enemy Lines* described below.

There's a scene in that movie where Gene Hackman as Admiral Commander is trying to intel on where this guy is. He goes to the SCF (*pronounced skiff*), Secure Compartment Facility, and what's in there, whatever the hell it is, is not true to life. There's big monitors everywhere, it's like the CIA or NSA. So there's these Navy guys and they're like, "We're hacking into the satellite and rerouting it." And there's a civilian guy in the corner, cigarette in his mouth, like the smoking man from *X-Files*. (Laughter) It's completely crazy. So I tell

everyone it's just like that. (Sarcastic) We have a huge screen and we track people on the ground.

During Veteran 2's monologue, the others are laughing at what civilians think people do in the military. There's a clear distinction that these people are part of an exclusive group.

Veteran 4: That's something at least. Nobody would go see a movie about what I did. (Laughing) About what most of the Army does. I made maps of the areas for command, so I was usually behind a desk. What a terrible movie that would make. "Here's your coffee, sir;" guard duty; "Good you've got your SCF badge."

Veteran 6: Using a movie reference, to a good, realistic movie, is the best way to explain something. Because you can't understand it if you weren't there.

Scene 3:

During this scene the veterans react to the realism of wars on the screen. Some are distracted and pulled into the film, lines are given with divided attention between the film and the people around them. Others purposefully choose not to watch. Or only watch some.

Ethnographer: Okay, so there's a disconnect in the movies between what they show and what war is really like? So what is the most important thing about making a good war movie?

Veteran 7: Realism. War movies have to be realistic.

Projection: Quick scanning for "realistic" war movies. Settles on the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*.

Veteran 1: Absolutely, I can't stand war movies that feel like we're watching actors.

Veteran 3: It's the realism, and not just the realism of the special effects. It's the realism of who these people were, the characterization, and how they acted. When you look at *We Were Soldiers* it's a really gritty realistic portrayal of a horrific battle- so you've got realistic special effects but you've also got the realization of how these guys worked together.

Projection: Battle scene from *We Were Soldiers*.

Veteran 1: It matters definitely if the movie is accurate. If the movie isn't accurate, I'm going to turn it off pretty quickly.

Veteran 3: Yeah, because you know you're going to relate to the movies you know to be realistic. *Black Hawk Down*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers* those movies realistically portray what it means to be an infantryman. They show things like no one gets left behind, personal courage. Those aren't just slogans, they go beyond creeds. It's part of who you are and you're going to relate to that on screen. You're buying into something because you don't want it to happen to you. I won't leave someone behind because what if it was me? So when you see that portrayed accurately it stays with you. And you never want to watch a movie that fails to show that.

Projection: Clip of Anthony Espera from the *Generation Kill* talk-back. "I have to hold on to my own memories."

Veteran 1: Sometimes, the experiences in those movies are so real you feel like you're seeing your own tour all over again. Sometimes you really want that, and that's why those are good movies.

Projection: Scenes as they are described from *Black Hawk Down*.

Veteran 5: *Black Hawk Down* has been a very good friend to a lot of people I know. Especially the two Delta snipers, they really do a good job portraying the hopelessness of their situation.

Veteran 6: And *Black Hawk Down* is so real that I used it to explain to guys who I was training. We were air assault and jumped out of helicopters, so I'd say go watch *Black Hawk Down*, those guys, that's what we do.

Veteran 3: I've used movies like that- dealing with new soldiers and helping to show them things or to show consequences. We do a lot of first aid training, and so when you're talking about major arterial wounds, you end up talking about the femoral artery and bleeding out. The best identifying situation for that is in *Black Hawk Down*. You can go back to that scene and say this is what they were trying to do, this is how they did it, and this is what went wrong.

Veteran 2: As much as we like war movies and use them to point out what's real about what we do, military folks love to joke about how much those movies get wrong.

Scene 4:

Ethnographer: Really? So unrealistic war movies are enjoyable? Like entertainment?
They aren't always upsetting?

Veteran 6: Not always. You see something that's just not right, and sometimes it's really dumb. Mostly, you just make fun of it. Even TV shows where there's just a guy in a dress uniform. You have to look for what's wrong. We used to sit around the TV and everybody would fight to be the first one to point it out. We'd be yelling at the TV forever.

Projection: Montage of guys doing things that don't happen in the military.

Veteran 7: The worst one is when they take their shooting hand off of their gun. You would NEVER do that! But in the movies they do it all the time.

Veteran 3: I don't know. *The Hurt Locker* came out in 2010 while I was in Iraq and it really annoyed me. It bothered me because these guys are going out alone, which never happens, and their taking all of these stupid risks. People aren't cowboys anymore. People are risk-takers but we're very conscious of our risks.

Projection: Clip of Nunez from the movie *Basic*.

Veteran 4: I'm a little upset with the –as the Army says- females in movies. When they do show women they're like the girls you see in *Basic*, they're always hard as nails, tough ass, Mexican girls. That's kind of upsetting.

Scene 5:

Ethnographer: Yeah, I can see how that would be frustrating. A lot of the movies you're talking about are from other, older wars. So are these movies still relevant? Do you see a difference in the way films portray those war-fighters compared to the way they portray you?

Projection: A walk through American wars since WWII through the movies that emerged during the conflict.

The projections corroborate everything these guys are saying. We learn the changes about war-fighter representation by seeing them as well as hearing the veterans talk about them.

Veteran 1: I think each war had its own distinctive feel. World War II had the good guys and the bad guys meeting head to head. With Vietnam you have the platoons.

And now you have civilian warfare. Each soldier is going to come through the same training, act very similar, and they're all going to have that heritage, but in terms of fighting and showing that fighting, it's too different. You're not going to see the same thing in World War II movies, to Vietnam movies, to what you see now.

Veteran 6: Yeah, my family would ask if it was like *Saving Private Ryan* and I was like, "Nope, it's a whole different war. We don't do that kind of stuff."

Veteran 5: At the same time, I think any war movie is relevant. Because they were soldiers and we are soldiers. It was a different time, a different style of fighting, but we're still working off the same things. The first army was a volunteer militia and we're still volunteers.

The veterans are banding together as they talk about this. It feels as though they've all been thinking this for a long time, and are finally in a situation where they can tell a civilian that even though they look different than the Greatest Generation, they're just as capable and as "good" war-fighters.

Projection: Play these two speeches immediately after each other.

Veteran 7: I think the biggest difference is that we're volunteers. It shows up between *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Hurt Locker*. In *Saving Private Ryan* the captain is giving his speech and he's like "I have to be here." In *The Hurt Locker* he's like "I chose to be here. I chose to come here." That's the biggest difference. They had to be there, we chose to be there.

Projections: Two clips that show the environmental differences of WWII and War on Terror.

Veteran 4: In those World War II campaigns, everybody is scruffy and dirty, but we're getting a different kind of dirty. We're getting dusty and sandy and sweaty, and they're getting muddy and cold.

Veteran 2: It's almost not fair to compare us to the guys who fought in World War II. The morality of that war and why we were fighting and the victory were all clear. Most people believe that war was necessary and just, so those stories are easier to tell. But to make a movie now, while we're still there, with people really divided on the war is difficult.

Veteran 1: And we're a different kind of soldier. Like they said, we're an all volunteer military. That changes the dynamic of the military.

Projection: Montage of clean, wholesome World War II soldiers from movies.

Veteran 7: Exactly. I have yet to meet a veteran who's not tattooed. We have more thrill seekers now. World War II had a lot of drafted guys, who would have never chosen to be soldiers. They all look like clean-cut, church-going, all-American guys.

Projection: Montage of gritty, tattooed soldiers from movies about the War on Terror.

My generation, our generation, had the shock of 9/11 and was like, "Well, I'll go." The look of an all volunteer military is different because there has to be some crazy in us to get us to sign up.

Veteran 6: Those movies about those old soldiers and wars, they focus on Robert Duvall or Sean Connery as this over-the-top, dashing, debonair hero, and maybe that was the ideal of the time. But today's warriors, we view ourselves a little rough around the edges, so we can't buy into that same character.

Veteran 3: We don't just look different, we sound different.

Projection: Montage of cursing from movies about Iraq. It's the nuclear F-bomb. Clip of Person's fake letter in *Generation Kill*.

My wife says some of the profanity in these new movies is gratuitous, and I'm like, "No, it's not. It's not even reaching the levels that are really there." The other movies, the older movies that I don't identify with, it's a story about one person. Name someone other than Charlie Sheen in *Platoon*? Besides the fact that I don't like being represented by Charlie Sheen.

Scene 6:

Ethnographer: I think everyone can understand that. I know y'all like and dislike these movies for a number of reasons, but, overall, what do you think of Hollywood making movies about war and war-fighters?

The veterans are attacking Hollywood in this scene and so by extension the character of the movie projector. They get loud and aggressive. They point or look accusingly at the projector. The projector responds in different ways: sometimes the clips it shows are washed out, sometimes loud and competing with the voices of the veterans, sometimes corroborating what they say, sometimes mocking them.

Veteran 4: (Laughs) My first instinct is to say, "That's cute."

Veteran 1: Exactly. I'm inherently distrustful of Hollywood. I would say that if I'm watching a movie and it comes in on the wrong side of the fence...you've got to prove to me that you know what you're talking about. If I feel that it doesn't portray my brothers for the heroes that they are, the men of integrity that they are, it's gonna do nothing but piss me off. Is Hollywood's agenda entertainment and box office numbers or is it telling a story?

Veteran 7: Hollywood can either try to portray us negatively or try and portray us for our faults AND our strengths. But if they do the latter then everyone's just like, "Oh, they're trying for realism." And, apparently civilians don't want realism.

Veteran 3: Yeah, if you feel like you've earned a kind of respect and then you're portrayed in an unflattering way, that's frustrating. When Hollywood shows people serving in the military because they have to and they have no worth, that's very insulting. Especially for those of us who have lost someone over there. It insinuates that my friends have been killed for no reason. Or that the loss of their life isn't a terrible thing.

Veteran 5: Hollywood also portrays us as being too dumb to know why we're being sent somewhere, and that's disgusting. If there's any discussion among soldiers in a movie about why their fighting it's dumbed down and there's never any resolution. There are these horrible stereotypes that they continual use to portray soldiers in their movies.

Veteran 3: Like we're all a bunch of war-mongers.

Veteran 7: Bunch of good ol' boys going to tear up another country.

Veteran 6: The media being involved in the war makes all of this even more difficult. It may let people back home know what's happening, but war isn't a pretty thing. Even in the movies, you're not seeing pretty pictures of war because they don't exist.

Veteran 4: Everyone sees these portrayals of us and the war and decide to be against it.

Veteran 2: But Hollywood will keep making movies because there will always be more stories to tell about war and Americans love to see a waving flag. There's always going to be a market for that. Hollywood will always be able to make a buck selling the flag.

Veteran 7: Even then, with all of the movies and news people back home can watch about the war, a lot of people choose to ignore it. I think people are scared to see what's going on, are scared to see the things we see. That's why they don't want real realism. They want no part of the war, they just want it to be there.

Scene 7:

Ethnographer: So do you watch a lot of war movies now that you're back? I mean, now that you're not living it day to day, do you still like to watch war movies?

Veteran 5: I don't know, it's different to watch war movies now. I'll occasionally watch a movie about Iraq or Afghanistan and I end up putting myself in the character's situation. It's like I'm back there.

Projection: Playing the intro to *Generation Kill*. The guys are out in the Humvee, shooting, playing war.

The veterans react to this first clip similarly. They are overtly aware of what's happening behind them. Drawing them in. Some take quick glances over their shoulders.

You'll see a scene in a movie and BAM, there's something that happens to you.

Veteran 4: I've kind of purposefully avoided movies about Iraq and Afghanistan. Because the big one, about the explosives team, that was about my unit, when I was there.

Projection: The projector taunts her with a suspenseful scene from *Generation Kill*.

So it's like maybe I won't see that one. I'll get around to it eventually. I wasn't in any front line kind of things but still...

Veteran 6: No, I know exactly what you mean. That documentary movie, *Restrepo*, that was about my guys. Those were the guys in Iraq with me, and I got out just before they got sent to Afghanistan.

Projection: The projector taunts him with the scene of Restrepo's death.

Those guys, I trained them. It sounds weird, but those are my soldiers. Maybe I'll like it because I'll be able to see what it was like for them, but maybe I'll just wonder if things could have ended better if I was there.

Veteran 7: I'm a little nervous to watch war movies now too. Just cause the things I've seen or experienced over there, especially like....

Projection: The projector taunts him with the death scene at the beginning of *The Hurt Locker*.

When I'd just got back my dad was like, "We're gonna go put on *The Hurt Locker*." And I was like, "No. No, I'm gonna go sit outside." Right now, it's still very much on my mind. So I've been a little hesitant to turn those movies on.

Veteran 3: I've watched some movies about Iraq.

Projection: The projector plays a scene from either *The Hurt Locker*- where he is going back to Iraq- or from *Generation Kill*- where they are preparing to go to the front and their passing all of the wounded and dead on the road to Baghdad.

I watch some of them over and over again because they're so intense and cathartic. My wife will come in while I'm watching them and ask me why I'm sitting in a chair watching a show that makes me cry. (Speaking as himself, talking to his wife) "I just need to. Leave me alone. I'll be okay."

The show ends in an almost tableau. Some of the veterans are watching the screen in horror, some entranced, one has his head in his hands, and one is walking towards the screen. The projection plays for a few seconds longer than these actions then fades out. Black out.

VITA

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