The Combat Film

The Death and Rebirth of an American Film Tradition

Henrik Havdal Greve

A Thesis Presented to

The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

-North American Studies-

Supervisor: Mark Luccarelli

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MA degree

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2009

Acknowledgements

I would like to give a sincere thanks to my advisor Mark Luccarelli for his help and support during the process of writing this thesis.

Thanks to all family and friends for all support and guidance.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank Ida, who has stood by me during this process, and pushed me forwards when things were tough. I could not have done this without you.

Table of Contents

4

Introduction

Ever since I was a little boy and sat home watching old Hitchcock films that my father had recorded on video, I have been interested in film. When I grew older not only did I enjoy watching the films, I became intrigued by the production processes behind them. When I started studying North American Studies I became increasingly aware of the relationship between the American society and the film industry. In addition to my long standing interest in American films, it seemed to me an important subject to discuss because of the cultural importance of films to any society. Clearly popular culture is important when trying to analyze contemporary social history. Furthermore, Hollywood films are one of the biggest export articles from the United States, and have been close to a century. One can argue that popular culture is not important when trying to analyze contemporary social history. I do not agree with these critics. Films have had an impact on the world in several ways.

The main idea for this thesis came after viewing a documentary about the American journalist David L. Robb. The documentary told the story of his book *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, in which he claimed that the Pentagon had and has major influence over Hollywood as to how films should be made, or if they should be released at all. Robb claimed that because of Pentagon's influence in the production of the movies, free speech was impaired. He claimed that this practice in fact violated the First Amendment of the U.S Constitution. At first I found the topic interesting. Robb's argument that the Pentagon has so much power that they can stop a film from being made is no doubt an interesting thought. On the other hand, when reading the book I found the topic to be quasi-intellectual and conspiratorial. It is self-evident that if one wants to make a film that includes helicopters from the United States Army one has to expect that the supplier of these helicopters is in the right to decide if the portrayal of the supplier is in their favor. If it is not it, is in the Army's full right to deny the filmmaker's use of these helicopters. I would suggest therefore that this issue is not about the First Amendment, it is about public relations and money. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that the more material the filmmakers is allowed to borrow from the army, the more realistic the film becomes. However, this does not guarantee that the film is any better artistically, something that is shown in chapter two of this thesis.

Because I chose not to focus on Robb's book I therefore decided to take another approach on the subject. I started to look at the various standpoints from which combat films portrayed the American military forces. Films from the post-World War II period portrayed the American army in a positive light; by contrast films from the post-Vietnam War years portrayed the American military in a negative light. I asked myself which mechanisms decided how the films were portraying the military and how the audience reacted to these depictions. My argument is that the positive depiction of the military in popular films is part of what is called militarism.

Militarism has been used in many different contexts, and it is therefore important to specify how I will use the term. One of the definitions argues that the nation's strength and security is defined through military ideals and nostalgia for these ideals and it is this I will try to show through the study of the films.

1.1 Chapter One

The main purpose of this thesis is to identify three periods in American history where militarism was directly dealt with, either in positive or negative terms. The first chapter looks at the United States and World War II in connection with the foundation of the pro-war combat film tradition. This tradition was constructed out of the need for portraying the US Army in a favorable light and to create support for the military actions that were carried out during World War II. In connection to this the term *militarism* is discussed. This discussion is important because the term is used in different contexts, creating a need for clarification.

Thereafter the reason why the US entered into World War II is discussed, indirectly bringing up the subject of the portrayal of enemies in the war. This is done in order to explain how respectively the Japanese and the Germans were portrayed in the World War II combat films. Subsequently the term "good war" is discussed in relation to philosophical thinking. This is done because the term is widely used when discussing World War II in relation to later wars the US has been involved in, especially the Vietnam War. I then go on looking at the typical conventions and motifs that are used in the World War II combat films. Jeanine Basinger's *The World War II Combat Film* has been my main source in this part. *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) is used as the main film example. John Wayne plays the main character in the film, and I have chosen to use him as an example of the importance of film stars in

American cinema. As Wayne stars in both *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Green Berets* (1968), which is one of the film examples in chapter two, the chapter will end with this discussion.

1.2 Chapter Two

Chapter two will concentrate on the Vietnam War and two different films that have portrayed this war. I will at the beginning of the chapter briefly go into the difficulties of the Cold War before I proceed with looking at the shifting trends in the film industry and the discussion of whether some of these films constituted an anti-war film tradition. This discussion is necessary because of the clear existence of a pro-war film tradition.

I will then go on looking at the changes that were brought down upon the film industry caused by changes in society, particularly the Counterculture and the introduction of television in the American society. The war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement and the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were issues that created massive tension during the last half of the 1960s. The situation reached a climax in 1968 with the National Democratic Convention. This topic is a natural stepping stone to the Vietnam War. I will go into the underlying reasons of the war, including the French colonial rule of Indo-China.

The following part of the second chapter will concentrate on *The Green Berets*, a film directed by Ray Kellogg and John Wayne. The film was released in the midst of the escalation of the Vietnam War, and the only film that was released during the war. The film will be part of a contrastive analysis between a pro-war Vietnam film and an anti-war Vietnam film. As part of the analysis I have chosen to use *Apocalypse Now* (1979) as the other example. The film will be an example of the anti-war film wave of the 1970s. Both film analyses will contain a part where I look at how militarism is portrayed in the films.

1.3 Chapter Three

Chapter three will deal with what I call the reconstruction of the pro-war film tradition. This chapter will try to show how the 1980s and the 1990s was mostly dominated by pro-war films in an attempt to rebuild America's image of a strong military power with the intention of saving the world. The main literature source in this chapter is Susan Owen's article

"Memory, war and American Identity: Saving Private Ryan as Cinematic Jeremiad". In this article Owen argues that Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) is an example of American lamentation for the situation in Vietnam and the attempt to use World War II as a tool for rebuilding the American self-confidence. The chapter looks at political trends of the 1980s and 1990s in order to find the reasons for the creation of the pro-war films. It is important to look at the role of popular culture and the media in this time period. Thereafter I will analyze *Saving Private Ryan* and look at the return of World War II film conventions, with character analysis as an important part of the conventions. Finally I will look at how militarism in *Saving Private Ryan* is portrayed.

1.4 Literature and films

When searching for literature for this thesis I needed a wide variety of sources in order to describe the different aspects of my thesis. When looking at the historical context I have used *Inventing America. A History of the United States* as a main source. This book was useful when drawing up the big lines in American History. Paul S. Boyer and William Chafe have written books about the post-war period that is important in my thesis when we look at the process of militarism. Looking at the films I have used several different sources in the process of analyzing the films. The most central source is Jeanine Basinger's book *The World War II Combat Film*. This book identifies central conventions in the combat film, conventions that is used in most combat films about World War II. Another important source that is important is *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema* written by Robert B. Ray. This book is used to identify important events and issues in the film industry at different points in time.

Whether film is a sufficient historical source is a discussion that is traceable back to the origin of the medium. A literary source where the history is written down is looked upon as a more reliable source than a film. This argument is especially used when discussing popular fiction films. The issue that is at stake is that most films that are produced in Hollywood are pure entertainment and have no significant value apart from that. When history is dramatized on film it is only a tool in order to make money. Robert A. Rosenstone is a historian that argues that dramatic films about historical events can communicate history. He is part of a group of historians that wants to improve the way historiography is told. These historians use contemporary forms of expression to articulate history. The role of television and film has

become increasingly important in the 20th Century and is therefore important to look at when we study history. They play a vital role when we seek to understand the past. A good example is the television mini-series *Roots* (1977). The series won nine Emmy's and the series became very popular in the US for the portrayal of an African boy that is captured as a slave and brought to America. The series portray the boy and his ancestry up through history, and is considered to have made a lasting impression on how educational programs on television were made. Another example was the controversies that erupted when *JFK* (1991) was released. Oliver Stone's film about the investigation of the assassination of John F. Kennedy spurred a new inquiry on the Warren Commission's decision on the case. Another example that is more close to this thesis' narrative is the series of documentaries and television series about World War II, exemplified by Ken Burns' *The War* (2007).

My point is that film and popular television series have a big impact on how ordinary citizens learn and interpret the past. In the case of portraying militarism through films this is an important issue. In this thesis I will show how four popular combat films produced by Hollywood portrays and interprets important events in American history.

2.   The "Good War" and the Pro-War Combat Film

In 1968 much of the world viewed American conduct of the war in Vietnam in horror. If Americans saw the war as a conflict between two nations where the United States had an obligation to defend the one side, many other observers thought it was more complicated than that. Communism was in many American eyes something that would spread out to the rest of the world if the United States did not stop it. In retrospect that seems to have been a very slim excuse for going to war.

In 1964 Lyndon B. Johnson had been given full support from the US Congress to intervene in Vietnam in order to give American troops full protection from aggressive North Vietnamese forces. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution was a result of what appeared to be an attack on American vessels on patrol in the gulf. This resolution, according to Paul S. Boyer, provided the legislative basis for the coming war.[1] The US Army had under John F. Kennedy's command supplied South Vietnam with military advisors. This was done because the US had promised to give support to Asian nations in case they were threatened. However, the war quickly escalated under the command of Lyndon B. Johnson, when the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was passed. The incident in the Gulf of Tonkin was ultimately the episode that forced the American government and people into the Vietnam War. At the end of 1964 there were already approximately 23,000 American troops in Vietnam. Many of the events that happened during this time are traceable back to the 1940s and 1950s. The Vietnam War reflected a long standing tendency toward garnering public support for extensive military interventions.

The main point in this thesis is to look at the militarism of the American society through motion pictures, specifically combat films. I will first discuss the term in general before I look into how militarism is shown, first in *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), before I go on to look at *The Green Berets* (1968) in the next chapter. The reason I have chosen these films is because they are two examples of films that depict two very different wars in a similar way. *Sands of Iwo Jima* portrays the American Military's struggles against the Japanese army in

---

[1] Boyer, Paul S. *Promises to Keep*: *The United States Since World War II*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 45.

the Pacific during the Second World War. *The Green Berets* is a film about a team of Green Berets sent to defend an American base against enemy troops in Vietnam. The latter film sparked much controversy at the time of release because it was the only film made at the time that portrayed the Vietnam War in such patriotic and propagandistic ways.

In order to understand the conflict described in *Sands of Iwo Jima* we have to take a look at other conflicts with Asian countries up through history. I will specifically look at the conflict with Japan during WWII as an example, because WWII is a good example, and maybe the only example of a "good war" from the 20th Century. In discussing the existence of a "good war", we touch upon some very basic philosophical and psychological questions concerning violence in relations to war. I will look briefly at this topic later in this chapter.

2.1 Militarism

The term militarism and militarization are complex terms and I feel it is necessary to discuss these terms, in order to decide how to use them.

The Oxford Dictionary states that to militarize is to a: "equip with military resources" or b: "give a military character to something." The first definition coincides with the term mobilization, which is a concrete term that makes us think about the act of preparing for war; we make ready to go into battle. At the same time mobilization can lead to militarization; in this case militarization means the act of warfare.

An example of militarization can be the employment of civilians in war factories, producing material to be used in a combat situation. Catherine Lutz writes about militarization in the American society in "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis". She is an anthropologist that has done her field work in a so-called military city in Fayetteville, North Carolina. This is in my opinion a good example of militarization where the military presence provides the community better conditions in terms of financial and social welfare. We can draw a parallel to the Northern parts of Norway where the Norwegian armed forces play a major part in creating communities and welfare possibilities. If these military bases had not been there, the communities most likely would have fallen apart because of less chances of work, and the civilians would have moved to bigger cities.

It is obvious that militarism happens mostly when a country is involved in wars. When the United States entered the Second World War the American society changed drastically. Every part of society became focused on making sure the war would turn in favor of the Allies. This was possible because of the massive support from the public, and the need for war material on the European mainland. The United States quickly became the biggest supplier of weapons and goods to Europe. Naturally this had an impact on the everyday of American lives. But not only did they work in factories that produced material and goods to be used in the war, they also had relatives that fought in the war, either in the Pacific or in Europe or Africa. When every part of a society is so indirectly and directly involved in a war at the same time, it is bound to leave marks for decades to come.

Lutz divides between *militarization* and *militarism*. She argues that militarism is a more narrow term, pointing to a society's belief in martial values. It is also a political term where military values are argued to be important in the process of causing social change. Militarization on the other hand, brings to mind "the simultaneously material and discursive nature of military dominance."[2] According to Lutz, militarism is not a term often used about the US. It is such a term that is loaded with negative energy and we often think about other less democratic countries when we hear the term.

The second definition from Oxford is a more general term that refers to a how a society is influenced by military policies and actions. I am more interested in this definition of the term: that "militarism" gives the American society a military character. This is carried out in different ways. One way can be said to be a psychological perspective where thoughts and morality are influenced by policies and actions carried out by the military. One scholar that uses this definition is Jasmine Champenois. She is a feminist scholar who has written about political science and gender relations.

 Champenois uses Chenoy's definition where "militarization is a phenomenon where military values, such as the need for force to assert power; the necessity of gender differentiation and hierarchy, dominate society …all the institutions of society are saturated

---

[2] Lutz, Catherine. "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis, in *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 104, no.3, 2002: 723-734.

with violence and ideas of combat, battle fitness, martyrdom, victory, defeat, heroes and traitors and the 'with us' or 'against us' syndrome."[3]

If we look at these two definitions we can clearly see there are some disagreements to the usage of the terms 'militarization' and 'militarism'. Lutz uses the term 'militarization' about society's emphasis on martial values, whereas Champenois use it to describe a phenomenon, or a set of ideas. I will in my thesis use the term *militarism* in the way Champenois uses *militarization* because it is a more general term used to describe tendencies in society. I will argue that *militarism* is an ideology or the set of ideas, whereas *militarization* is the process of executing this ideology or ideas.

Militarism in the United States began after World War II with the National Security State. The laws and the institutions that were constructed during the post-WWII period had very important implications for how the American society looked at war and the military. Militarism, according to James Godbolt, grew out of the growing anti-communism in the 1950s, the need to contain communism and to ensure the spread of democracy to other countries, especially countries in the Third World. Senator McCarthy's witch-hunt for Communists had had its results – the anti-communist sentiments in the American society were strong. President Truman ratified during his presidency the National Security Act, which gave life to the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Department, which replaced the former War Department. [4]

In order to make use of militarism it was necessary to have a strong military power centre and to have the American people supporting the cause. The public opinion was important because if the American government was able to convince the American people that communism was wrong and evil it was easier to make them understand and accept the American military budget. The American military budget steadily rose from the Korean War up to the Vietnam War. That was the moment when Americans started to protest against the massive expenses used on the war against the North Vietnamese, and the fight against

---

[3] Champenois, Jasmine, "God Bless the Army?" in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 148.

[4] Godbolt, James. *USA i vår tid - trekk frå nyare amerikansk historie*. Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1994, 94.

Communism.[5] In the introduction of his book *The New American Militarism* Andrew J. Bacevich gives us a definition of militarism and how militarism affects American citizens.

Americans, he tells us, "…in our own time have fallen prey to militarism, manifesting itself in a romanticized view of soldiers, a tendency to see military power as the truest measure of national greatness, and outsized expectations regarding the efficacy of force. To a degree without precedent in U.S. history, Americans have come to define the nation's strength and well-being in terms of military preparedness, military action, and the fostering of (or nostalgia for) military ideals."[6]

What Bacevich means is therefore that it is a virtue to become a soldier in the US Army and that the only way to solve international crises is through military means. Champenois and Bacevich also share a critique of the romanticized view of the soldier and the nostalgia for military ideals. This view is what comes to light when we look at films about World War II. As we will see later in the chapter, John Wayne embodies for many Americans what is looked upon as a loyal and true American.

Bacevich argues that the New American Militarism started after the defeat suffered by the end of the Vietnam War because it was necessary to rebuild the American military's status in the society. We can therefore draw the conclusion that if there is something that is called a New American Militarism, there has to be an Old American Militarism. I will argue that this Old American Militarism started with World War II, and was strengthened in the post-WWII period, with the creation of the National Security State and the coming of the Cold War.

---

[5] Godbolt, 94-100.

[6] Bacevich, Andrew J. *The New American Militarism*: *How Americans are seduced by war*. Oxford University Press, 2005, 2.

2.2 The "Good War", Racism and the Pro-War Film

In order to understand the war in the Pacific in the context of pro- war films it is necessary to look at the typical pro war films produced in the years during and after World War II. In this context it is also important that we look at the difference between the conflict in Vietnam as opposed to the conflict between the US and Japan during World War II.

Japan was in the 1930s a country that hungered for more territorial control. In 1931 they invaded Manchuria, a part of China that at the time was independent from the Chinese empire. This was clearly a violation of international treaties and laws. The American ambassador in Tokyo wrote to Roosevelt that the Japanese army was probably the most efficient and powerful fighting machine of the time, and argued that Japan looked upon the US as a potential enemy standing in the way for Japanese expansion. Roosevelt ordered as a result in June 1933 $238 million to be used for building naval vessels in order to answer Japan's hidden aggression.[7]

Japan declared war on China in 1937 and argued that Japan deserved more land and resources because of the Western imperial presence in South East Asia. [8]As a result of Japan's aggressive actions in Asia, Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered an embargo, refusing to export natural resources to Japan, resources Japan desperately needed. This is, according to several historians, one of the reasons Pearl Harbor was attacked. The most obvious reasons is of course that the attack on Pearl Harbor prevented any help from the American fleet coming to the rescue to the South East Asian countries that was attacked by Japan.

Japan was at first reluctant to attack countries in South East Asia, but as soon as Hitler invaded Russia in 1941 Japan took action and invaded what today is Vietnam. Roosevelt and his administration tried first to convince Japan to withdraw, but when this failed they reduced oil and metal shipments to Japan. Forces within the Japanese government argued for a resolution with the US, but the Japanese army thought otherwise. They were worried that

---

[7] Maier, Pauline. *Inventing America: A History of the United States. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2003,* 791.

[8] Ibid, 791-793.

oil reserves would run out and therefore decided that if the US did not stop the embargo war would be declared on the US, England and Holland.[9]

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941 the US was forced into a war they initially did not wish to take part in. The idea of isolationism was very strong in the US during the first part of the 20th Century. Isolationism was an ideology started by James Monroe when the Monroe Doctrine was declared in 1823. It was in 1904 given an updated corollary by Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt argued that European countries had no rights intervening in other countries on the American continent, because of the political and economical instability colonization caused on these countries. At the same time Roosevelt's adoption of the Monroe Doctrine was a way of saying that the US had no interest in taking part in conflicts on the European continent. On the other hand, Roosevelt's corollary stated at the same time that the US could, as the only country, intervene with other American countries.[10]

2.3 The difference between enemies

During World War II the United States was involved in two different wars, the war in the Pacific Ocean against the Japanese navy, and the land war on the European continent and African continent against the Nazi war machine. These different wars caused casualties in great numbers, but one of the big differences between these two wars was the enemy and the depiction of the enemy. It is interesting to see in several television series about World War II that the war in Europe was called the fight against the Nazi regime, whereas the fight in the Pacific was a war against Japan. We can analyze this and look at the terms used about the enemy. The opponent on the European continent was an ideological danger controlled by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party, whereas the combat in the Pacific were against the Japanese nation. Although Hitler and the Nazis were a terrible opposition in Europe, they nonetheless were an enemy they could understand in terms of cultural similarities.

As for the Japanese the case was different. First, the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 stirred enormous anger among the American people. The fact that they had used

[9] Maier, 808-809.

[10] Ibid: 679.

Japanese immigrants as spies, and that it was a "sneak attack" gave the American government reason to treat Japanese citizens and immigrants differently. In fear of new attacks on the mainland after the attack on Pearl Harbor over hundred thousand Japanese from three different states, Japanese immigrants as well as Japanese Americans, were sent to internment camps located in the western part of the country.[11]

The Asian culture developed separately, and had always been different from western culture. It was therefore more difficult for Americans to understand the enemy they were facing in the Pacific war. It seemed as Japan did not adhere to the same moral and ethics as western countries. This became especially clear in later parts of the war in the Pacific, when kamikaze-pilots flew their planes into American naval vessels, or when Japanese soldiers stormed at the American forces during the fights on the islands of Guam, without any care for their own lives. This way of fighting made American soldiers fearful of the Japanese, something that was mirrored in American propaganda posters during the war, and as we are told in the documentary *The War* by Ken Burns.[12] The Japanese soldiers and leaders were depicted as ruthless, devious and cunning opponents, almost as animals. Most of the posters intended to boost the working spirit back home in the US; others focused on recycling scrap metal that was valuable in the production of war material. What we today can say about these propaganda posters is that they were highly racist and demeaning, especially towards the Japanese. The cartoon drawings of Japanese leaders or soldiers showing a Japanese soldier saying "Go ahead, please, take day off"[13], showing that the less Americans work, the better the result for Japanese in the war, were especially degrading. This was in contrast to the propaganda posters against the Nazi-regime in Europe, where the enemy was depicted as a dangerous enemy, but nonetheless more as humans. [14] The difference in propaganda made a clear difference between the two wars fought. In Europe the fight was against the Nazi regime; in the Pacific War it was a fight against the Japanese people.

---

[11] Maier, 839.

[12] Burns, Ken, *The War*, TV-documentary, released September 23, 2007, info found on http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0996994/releaseinfo, read November 24, 2008.

[13] Anti-Japanese Propaganda Poster: http://www.flickr.com/photos/headovmetal/1759847780/in/set-72157602730833017/, read April 23, 2009.

[14]Anti-German Propaganda poster: http://wpcontent.answers.com/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/77/Ww2_poster_oct0404.jpg/180px-Ww2_poster_oct0404.jpg, read April 23, 2009.

The main reason for the difference in depiction was the racist views on Asian Americans in the society. Towards the end of the 1800s great number of immigrants from Asia, notably Japanese and Chinese immigrants, entered the country. The great numbers of immigrants caused workers to fear they would lose their jobs, as well as the middle and upper class, who thought that the Asian immigrants would destroy their country. They were therefore never regarded as fully members of the American society.[15] This combination caused Americans, especially in the Western part of the country to react. They had a culture that was very different from the American, or Western form of culture. The Japanese immigrants were a people that took good care of their own culture. Most of the Japanese people who lived in America had relatives in Japan, and many were only working in the US to save money until the moment they were planning to move back to Japan. The combination of the cultural gap between white Americans and the Asian Americans, together with the attack from Japan on Pearl Harbor gave an institutionalized racism an opportunity to grow.

At least for American citizens World War II was divided in two. As we find out in the end of the thirteenth part of the television series *The War* by Ken Burns, when Germany surrendered there was a tremendous celebration in Times Square in New York, but there were whole cities where several of their citizens were still fighting in the Pacific Ocean against the Japanese war machine.

---

[15] Maier, 602.

2.4 "The Good War"

It is also necessary at this moment to discuss and try to define the term "good war". First, I have chosen to put "the good war" in quotation marks because it is a conflicted term which suggests that violence is good. War is a form of systematized form of violence; so-called political violence, as Jan Narveson calls it. He discusses war in his chapter of the book *Matters of Life and Death*: *New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy.* The theories presented in the book are complex and I will therefore try to present the theories in short form. First, to explain the term "political violence"; according to Narveson, political violence is

> …used behalf of political causes: to change a regime from its present form to something else, to bring about some general alteration of the life of the group in which it is wielded, or to effect some particular policy or program. Being political, it purports to have a *justified* aim: it is predicated on its programs and proposed alterations being for the *good* of people generally, or for the good of some group that deserves that good. But then, it must deserve it in the light of considerations acceptable to the generality of humans.[16]

This is a very broad definition. Political violence is something that is used to alter a bad situation into good, either for a group of people or a society. In other words, it includes any war with good or bad intentions, bad being e.g. Hitler's attempt to conquer Europe, and good being the Allies wanting to stop Hitler from conquering Europe. This is two sides of the same story, with different goals.

There are several questions related to the issue of war: we shall focus on the question of whether a "good war" is possible. A good war necessitates that the violence carried out in the war is justifiable in any way. Narveson refers to the Just War Theory that was formed by theologians in the middle Ages. This tradition poses two dilemmas that need to be solved in order to know what a justifiable or a good war. The first one asks whether a state is justified

---

[16] Regan, Tom (ed.) *Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Raleigh, McGraw-Hill, 1993, 156.

in participating in a war, the so-called *jus ad bellum*, or just cause. The second dilemma asks whether the behavior in the war is justified, the so-called *jus in Bello*, or just conduct.[17]

The first dilemma is the most central, asking whether a state has just cause for starting or entering a war. At this point it is important to acknowledge the difference between these two points; in a war there has to be an aggressor; a party that acts aggressive and causes the other party to defend itself. This makes us instinctively to think that at least the aggressive part is wrong in behaving violently or aggressive towards the other part. If we accept this premise, it is correct to understand that we acknowledge the right to self-defense. The idea of self defense is connected to the basic human right to life, and therefore has the right to defend oneself in case of danger. From this we can draw the conclusion that a war is just "only if it is necessary to defend the attacked party from aggression."[18]

If we look at this topic in the light of the term militarism and World War II we can draw some conclusions: First, the aggressive parties in World War II were Germany and Japan. Second, Japan attacked the United States; therefore they had the right to defend themselves. This makes the war carried out from the Allies' side a just cause because they carried out the right to self-defense. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the Allies also did carry out military actions that in retrospect were seen as unjust conduct.

The most controversial part of the Second World War was the use of nuclear weapons. Militarism and focus technological enhancements during the war led to new research on weapons technology. When Roosevelt granted funds to the research of this weapon in 1942 by recommendation from Albert Einstein, they were not aware of the massive damage this weapon could produce. This was discovered July 16, 1945, when they detonated the world's first atomic bomb, in the desert of New Mexico. Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, was eager to end the war, and therefore decided to use the bomb on Japan, "as soon as technically possible and without explicit warning"[19] If we look at this specific use of weapon in the discussion of just and unjust wars, we come to a clear conclusion. First, to use such a

---

[17] Ibid. 143-144.

[18] Ibid. 145.

[19] Boyer, 28.

weapon is unjust because the victims have no way of defense against it. Second, they used the bomb against civilian targets, which is another breach of the conventions of war.

When Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, World War II was finally over. But what kind of impact did the war have on American citizens and American culture? Even though there were high numbers of American casualties during the war, the country was not hit as hard as European countries. The American economy was also successful, providing care for the soldiers coming home to their families. Nevertheless, the use of the atomic bomb against Japan changed the way of thinking in the post-war years. The thought of what atomic weapons could do to American cities and citizens was frightening. This way of thinking had a massive impact on American culture for many decades to come.

Another side of the discussion of just and unjust wars is whether it was defensible that the United States intervened in the conflict in Vietnam. Granted, Narveson's definition justifies that to change a regime "from its present form to something else" is justified. What was not justified was the mode of warfare the United States used against the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong troops. I will look into this topic in the next chapter.

2.5 The Combat film of the Second World War

When looking at World War II in the context of popular culture and film I have chosen to look at *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Released on December 14, 1949, *Sands of Iwo Jima* had an estimated budget of $ 1 million, and earned approximately $3. 9 million during the initial release and a total of $5 million total gross income.[20] Jeanine Basinger has in her book *The World War II Combat Film* researched and analyzed a number of World War II combat films. She argues that the war movies made during the war created elements that are retraceable in later combat films, not only about World War II, but also Vietnam War films.

In her research of World War II Combat films Basinger has described the period from 1949 to 1959 as the third wave of combat films. The war was over and now possible to reflect over the things that had happened; it was possible to get closure on the war.[21] The

---

[20] http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0041841/boxoffice, Read September 20, 2008.

[21] This has become a fairly normal attitude when discussing films about difficult conflicts; it is necessary to have some distance in time to the subject before drawing conclusions even before the conflict has ended.

filmmakers became more conscious of the earlier films and began to use these films actively as reference when making new movies. This conscious use of genre made it possible to use the genre motifs from the older movies and in addition add other features to make the films up to date. The so-called second wave of combat films had laid the groundwork for the visual style and the narrative form, and the filmmakers of the third wave developed this further. This made sure that the audience understood it, and could read the film without any significant trouble.

2.6 Conventions and motifs in World War II-movies

In *Sands of Iwo Jima* we meet John Wayne's character in the role of Sergeant Stryker who has been set to command a rifle squad situated in the Pacific Ocean during World War II. We are quickly introduced to the different characters, comprised of the typical blended group of Americans from all over the country; this is done in order to show that the US Army consisted of people from around the country. It is a common convention used to make the audience identify themselves with the characters and make them understand that it could have been the audience that took part in the war. Robert B. Ray highlights Howard Hawks' movie *Only Angels Have Wings* from 1939 as an important film in this context. *Only Angels Have Wings* is not a war film, but for Ray it was a good example in analyzing what was typical for a war film. Ray argues that war films were part of a simplification process: "the combat pictures were essentially romances that magically resolved the tensions created by contradictory needs."[22] This simplification process came out of the very situation of war; when war erupts it is clear that the only thing to do is to promote peace. From this I understand that it was necessary to simplify the story in the films in order to make the audience understand that the situation the American people were in was normal. The audience was not to be terrified when going to see a movie. Therefore they simplified the films in order to project that the United States and their Allies was going to win this war. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* they also do this by giving John Wayne's character a troubled past. We find out during the film that he has a wife and child at home in the US who have left him.

---

[22]Ray, Robert B. *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930- 1980*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, 113.

This gives the character more substance; we understand why he is so hard on the soldiers under his command.

The first significant combat films appeared in September 1942 and were called *Wake Island* and *Flying Tigers*. The combat films that followed took many of their elements from these films. The first convention that we find is the introduction, which consists of some kind of tribute to the soldiers who lost their lives in combat who gave their lives (or rather hearts and minds) for the cause in the fight for freedom in both the Pacific and in Europe. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* this introduction consists of three motifs; the written dedication to the fallen soldiers[23], the use of the Marine Corps Hymn sung in the background, and a spoken narration describing the place and time. These are themes that very often are repeated in WWII combat films, for example in the coming example of *Saving Private Ryan*. They also appear in the Vietnam films we will look at later in this thesis, in more or less similar or dissimilar forms.

An important and much used way of storytelling in the film industry has been to use voice-over: often a character that is involved in the story that introduces the story to the audience. This was often used in *film noir* but also in combat films. This feature is according to Basinger one of the common conventions used in World War II combat films. The commentator is not used much in *Sands of Iwo Jima* but it proves that the film uses the same conventions that were common in World War II combat films.

Another theme that is used in *Sands of Iwo Jima* is the plot structure beginning with training camp and culminating into battle. This is where they meet their instructor who later becomes their idol: Sergeant Stryker. This is a theme that is used frequently in combat films in general. Other motifs used, like the mail-call was used to make the audience understand how it was to be in combat. The mail from home was usually the one thing that kept the soldiers running in the field.

According to Ray, *Only Angels have Wings* inhabits all the important motifs that became archetypical in the following WWII films: (1) a group of soldiers led by a strong leader; (2) the leader is an outsider that must prove himself to the leader and the rest of the group; (3)

---

[23] The fact that three of the cast members were participating in raising of the flag on Iwo Jima makes this dedication even truer.

the ability to lay all feelings aside in the face of danger; (4) the virtue of professionalism and last, (5) the threat to the maintenance of the esprit de corps posed by women. At least four of these motifs are present in *Sands of Iwo Jima*.

John Wayne plays the strong leader, Sergeant John M. Stryker, who is given the task of leading a group of men through training, for later to join in the fights against the Japanese Army in the Pacific Ocean. The group is comprised of both fresh recruits and veterans. The new recruits learn from the veterans that Stryker is a hard and war-trained officer, a person they will learn to dislike during the coming period.

As the film develops we learn why Sgt. Stryker is so hard on his men. There are two main reasons for this. His wife and child have left him, and he therefore takes his frustration and anger out on his men. The other reason is that he, as opposed to the recruits, has been in combat, and therefore knows what to expect from the enemy. He therefore pushes his men hard in order for them to prepare for the coming combat situations. This is a good example of Ray's motif of professionalism and stoicism in the face of danger or death. The training the soldiers receive from Stryker strengthens their capabilities in combat, and therefore gives them a better chance for survival. Another important feature in the films in the time between 1949 and 1959 was the use of real combat footage. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* this is done in such a good way that it is sometimes difficult to separate the real footage from the fiction. This, no doubt, improved the realism in the film.

A feature that broke with the conventions of World War II films was that the main character died. Granted, there was nothing unusual that the hero died, according to Basinger: this was essential to the combat film. John Wayne's persona and status as a film star was already etched into the audience's eyes. It was therefore unthinkable that Sergeant Stryker would die, only a few yards away from hoisting the flag himself (Fig.1). In this way Wayne's character becomes the martyr; the man that saved us from the enemy. This idea coincides with Champenois' definition of militarism; that society is preoccupied with "ideas of combat, battle fitness, martyrdom, victory, defeat, heroes and traitors and the 'with us or against us' syndrome."[24]

Figure 1: The picture taken from the film accentuates the struggle the struggle the soldiers go through before they finally could raise the American flag on top of Iwo Jima. Shortly before this still the main character is shot dead, highlighting the status of martyr. In this way the militaristic spirit is projected to the audience.

---

[24] Champenois, Jasmine. "God Bless the Army?" in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7:1, 147-150

2.7 John Wayne

It is important to take into account what impact the leading stars had in American cinema. John Wayne was one of the most celebrated. One can say that John Wayne himself attracted an audience of his own. The persona John Wayne created on screen was admired by many. Ronald L. Davis writes in his biography of Wayne about two different characters that admired Wayne in their own way. Ron Kovic, a Vietnam Veteran known for his book *Born on the 4th of July* saw John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima* as a boy and cried in the end when Wayne dies. This was what inspired Kovic to join the army during the Vietnam War. As Kovic became a paraplegic, he wrote in his book: "Nobody ever told me I was going to come back from this war without a penis… Oh God, I want it back! I gave it for the whole country…. I gave it for John Wayne."[25] Likewise, Garry Willis writes that Newt Gingrich always tried to walk like John Wayne, confirming how people from different parts of American society had Wayne as a role model.[26]

John Wayne represented what many Americans thought Americans should be like. In *Duke: the Life and Image of John Wayne* Ronald L. Davis writes that Wayne "believed in self-reliance, objected to the government's assuming a paternalistic role, and lamented the death of personal initiative and responsibility."[27] These are usually descriptions that are used to describe what every American strives for. This is maybe why Wayne is thought to be one of America's biggest movie stars. Gary Willis cited a polling done in 1995 where Americans were asked who they thought was their favorite star. John Wayne was on the top of the list, 16 years after his death.[28] He took part in 191 films during his career, both as an actor and in producing. [29]

---

[25]Davis, Ronald L. *Duke: The Life and Image of John Wayne*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, 8.

[26]Willis, Garry, *John Wayne: The Politics of Celebrity*. London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1997, 12.

[27] Davis, 277.

[28] Willis, 11.

[29] Imdb.com: http://pro.imdb.com/name/nm0000078/, read August 25, 2008.

John Wayne was born on May 26, 1907 in Iowa. He attended the University of Southern California, where he played football in his early years. He also tried to get in to the U.S. Naval Academy, but was not accepted.[30] He started his film career in 1929, in the middle of the Depression. His first role was as an unaccredited extra in the film *Mother Machree* (1929). He quickly became a much used actor, and from 1931 he starred in 5 films. This number rose as the years went on and a majority of the films were western films. Some of his major pictures and biggest successes were *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *Rio Grande* (1950), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *The Alamo* (1960), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and *The Longest Day* (1962). *Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Longest Day* were not western movies, but they were a minority in the group. During the beginning of his career he did not care about politics much. This changed, however during the post-war years. He became gradually interested in politics, and became an outspoken Republican in the 1940s, supporting Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon and Barry Goldwater. During the time he filmed *Sands of Iwo Jima* the political John Wayne was not that visible. That side of him became more visible up through the 1960s, and especially during the Vietnam War. We will look deeper into this aspect when we look at *The Green Berets* in the next chapter.

---

[30] Davis, 101.

3.   The change from pro-war to anti-war films

This chapter will concentrate on the Vietnam War period and the films relating to that war. During the decade, running roughly from the middle of the 1960s and into the 1970s, important changes affected the American society. Consequently, this period is a very interesting era to look at because many of the events and situations that began then have shaped the United States up until the present. It is also important to realize that the Vietnam conflict was part of the Cold War, which started in the post-war years. Consequently, it is important to look at the influence of the Cold War when analyzing the United States' intentions and actions in South East Asia, especially in the context of militarism. I will look at two films as examples of the portrayal of this war, two films which look at the war in very different ways. The first film is *The Green Berets* (1968); the other film is *Apocalypse Now* (1979). *The Green Berets* is the only film that portrayed the Vietnam War while it was still active. *Apocalypse Now* was made, like most Vietnam War films many years after the conflict had ended. These two films will be used as examples in a contrastive analysis looking at the militarism projected through combat films.

The transition from the Second World War to the Cold War was a period of distrust between the two superpowers. Soviet Russia and the United States were considered the winners of the war. During the post-war years several major events took place. The National Security Act which was ratified in 1947 founded what we know today as the Department of Defense. It was until 1947 divided in two separate departments; one called the Department of War and the other called the Department of the Navy. The National Security Act also founded the National Security Agency, an agency that focused on high level strategic issues, and the Central Intelligence Agency, that was given the task of carrying out espionage.[31] Naturally, the NSA was central in the Cold War years, as it established the position of National Security Advisor who answered directly to the President. The National Security Agency stated in 1950 that the Soviet Union was a society that was seeking to "triumph over the free."[32] The Soviet Union had for a long time trouble trusting the United States. Ever since

---

[31] Later the CIA was used to carry out assassinations and subterfuge.

[32] Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, 29.

the Bolshevik Revolution, when the US (and most of the other Western powers) sent thousands of soldiers to overthrow the regime, ties between the Russians and the Americans had been weak. During World War II when the US and the Soviet Union were allies the relationship had been upheld in order to "keep up appearances."[33]

3.1 Trends in film and the discussion of an anti-war film tradition

The Second World War had left deep marks in the movie industry as well as in other art forms. The negative thinking that grew after the war set its marks on the mood. There were different reactions to this mood. One type of film that became very prominent and left a mark on film production was *film noir*. The genre got its name when American films produced in the war years were released in Europe. French film critics called it "film noir" because of the pessimistic mood after the war to express disbelief and tell dark, violent stories with disillusioned anti-heroes. It is important to state that *film noir* was not a genre, but rather a style. This is because the many types of films that used the stylistic elements characteristic for the style. Some of the most famous films, *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Double Indemnity* (1944), and *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) were the best examples of a disillusioned America that had troubles coming to grips with the ongoing war. The golden period of *film noir* was from the 1940s through the 1950s. After that the style slowly faded away, only to be used as a model for later films that used the characteristic trademarks from the *film noir*. Antimilitary films were another trend in the film industry that appeared from time to time.

Apocalypse Now is regarded as one of the most important films amongst the films that created a turn against antimilitary films in the United States. The question of whether there exists an antimilitary film tradition is not a discussion that has been given much space, but I think it is important to look at this aspect, given the fact that a pro-war film tradition certainly does exist. With an antimilitary film I do not mean exclusively combat films, but also other films that directly or indirectly project an anti-military attitude. Therefore I define an antimilitary film tradition as a tradition of films that put emphasis on subjects with antimilitary attitudes. According to studies done in folk culture and folklore a tradition has to

---

[33] Boyer, 82-83.

be inherited from generation to generation over a considerable amount of time. Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary argues a tradition is "a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular of people". Of course a tradition does not mean absolute uniformity. Change does occur even within traditions. Researchers in the field of folklore and ethnology point out that since culture is usually passed down orally, the craft is subject to change over time. Perhaps a more important question is how extensive and long-lasting a cultural attribute must be to constitute a tradition. This has been a question discussed since the founding of the ethnological field.

I would say that the concept of a tradition could be applied to the art of film. We face the same question as folklore researchers have dealt with: How many times did a type of film has to be made before it was called a tradition? Ever since the silent era several motion pictures have been made that have taken a critical view on warfare and its consequences. *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) is one of the best known films from this period. The director Sergei Eisenstein made a film about the crew on the Potemkin that mutinied against their officers, followed by a battle with horrific consequences. The best known American film from the silent era that had an anti- military viewpoint was *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). This film describes a young soldier who becomes confused and angry at the war they are a part of. What is interesting with this film is that it was an American production that portrayed soldiers on the German side of the First World War. These two films are some of the earliest accounts of fictional films that had an anti-military attitude. A contrast to these films was *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), made by D. W. Griffith. This film is considered to be, on one side, a film that portrays Americans as brave and successful when going to war. At the same time the film is openly racist, made in a time when African Americans were considered as second class citizens of the US. Another film made by Griffith was called *Hearts of the World* (1918). This film was released one year after the end of World War I, and depicted in the same way as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) depicted African Americans, a negative image of the German soldiers. This film, according to Gilbert Adair, was a film that convinced pro-German audiences in the US they were wrong. Adair also argues that the film used trademarks that became well-known characteristics in later combat films.[34]

---

[34] Adair, Gilbert. *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket.* London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1989.

To sum up the discussion of an anti-war film tradition it is safe to say that the number of films that have been made and the lack of consistency is the reason why we can conclude that a full-blown anti-war tradition does not exist. However, the waves of anti-war films produced in Hollywood reappear from time to time, depending on the role the US plays in a given war, and the support it gets from the public.

3.2 Loosening of the rules within the film industry

Another relevant issue in the context of combat films is the shifting cultural milieu of the American cinema. In this respect, American cinema had become freer to be critical because of changes in the climate of American public opinion. The popularity boost of the television in the 1950s had caused a decline in the number of audience going to the movies. 35 million households in the US had television by 1956.[35] In the same decade the Hays Code, also called the Production Code was banished. This gave the filmmakers an opportunity to create films that on the one hand tried to get the audience to the film theaters, and on the other hand, gave them more liberty to portray scenes or situations on film that were forbidden in the time of the Production Code. Even though the mood in the last part of the 1960s was mostly negative because of the Vietnam War there were positive tendencies in American society. In the film industry the tendency to ignore reality grew stronger than ever. This resulted in the demise of the studio system; the studios were turned into pure financial organizations that exclusively focused on making money: "By the end of the decade the studios were no longer interested in making films; they had assumed merely the marketing and financial end of the process."[36] This transformation of the studio system gave the directors more power to decide how to make their films. The studios had of course financial control of the production, past production routines were gradually changing into a scene where the director stood in the spotlight. As mentioned over, the end of the Production Code led to more relaxed principles regarding sex and violence in films. This resulted in a boom in the production of pornography, but it also gave filmmakers the opportunity to portray elements in human relationships that earlier had been forbidden. One of the most influential directors that came out of the 1960s, and one who is relevant to this thesis was Stanley

---

[35] Ray, 132.

[36] Quart, Leonard and Albert Auster. *American Film and Society Since 1945*. New York, Praeger Publishers, 1991, 78.

Kubrick. His film from 1957, *Paths of Glory* was an anti-war film about World War I, a trend Kubrick continued throughout his career. In 1964 *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* was released. It was initially planned to be a precise adaptation of Peter George's novel *Red Alert* but Kubrick found out during the process that he wanted to make a more comic film with black humor instead.[37] *Dr. Strangelove* was a film that satirized the Cold War in the midst of the Cold War. The fear of atomic war that in the 1960s was underlined by the Cuban Missile Crisis is in the film ridiculed and disarmed with the use of black humor. Another film that shook the grounds in the film industry was *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). The depiction of violence in the film, combined with unusual use of humor and music made the film an atypical and popular film at the end of the decade.

3.3 The Counterculture and the Film Industry

By the end of the 1970s, the American people had gained some distance from the war in South East Asia; Hollywood released a string of films concerning the traumatic experience in Vietnam. These films were both combat films, but also films describing life in America for citizens affected by the war. *Coming Home* (1978) directed by Hal Ashby, starring Jane Fonda and Jon Voight is one of the best known films that portrayed how the Vietnam War affected the American people at home. Hal Ashby was together with Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg the group of rising directors that stood behind the new wave of movies released in the end of the 1960s and the 1970s, also called the New Hollywood. These directors challenged the norm of film production that was the prominent norm at the time, and some of them also became the biggest directors up until the present. [38] The increasing importance of auteur-ship in the film industry played an important part on how the audience interpreted the film industry. Even though the role of the film stars still were important when promoting a film, the role of the filmmakers had become just as important. The tendency to promote a film on the basis of who directed the film gave the directors more power.

---

[37] Ibid, 81-82.

[38] Biskind, Peter. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, 512.

This group of actors, producers and directors picked up the disenchantment with conventional life that characterized the counterculture in the 1960s and were no doubt influenced by the anti-war sentiments that were common at the time. In 1969 the Woodstock festival was arranged, a festival that celebrated "3 days of Peace and Music" where Martin Scorsese was assistant director and editor in the production of the film *Woodstock* (1970).[39] This makes it clear that Scorsese was a part of the Counterculture as well as the film industry.

Another important influence came from photo-journalism. At the end of the 1960s when American television started to broadcast live footage from the war in Vietnam the film industry got an unexpected competitor in showing violence to the American people. The footage that showed American forces blindly bombing the jungle in South East Asia, the use of napalm and Agent Orange – all these pictures made the war more and more gruesome to the American people. The directors and the group of actors earlier mentioned stood in strong opposition against the older generation of conventional film makers. They grew up in the postwar years, highly influenced by the threat of the bomb and the cynical mood that characterized this period. A new wave of movies that based its stories on realism as opposed to dream-like stories appeared at the end of the 1960s and followed through in the 1970s. These films signified the end of the earlier mentioned Production Code that was established in 1930 that sought to protect moviegoers from bad language and to prevent the "corruption of the mind."[40]

3.4 The New Hollywood

The change that occurred when "The New Hollywood" was ushered in during the 1960s and 1970s is the reason for the shift in the treatment of the Vietnam War in film. The films permitted the audience to see militarism in American society. It is therefore necessary to explain the significance of the pro-war films in the same period, in this thesis represented by *The Green Berets* and *Patton*. What did they represent in a time of a general anti-war

---

[39] This is the original poster from the festival, a poster with clear peace symbols in the fore front: http://www.solarnavigator.net/music/music_images/Woodstock_music_festival_poster.jpg, read January 30, 2009.

[40] This notion can be seen in context with the Great Depression, where it was seen as necessary to protect the people from anything that could be seen as negative or depressive.

atmosphere? The answer is that the conservative powers in American society were standing strong, a fact that can be seen in the war films discussed in this thesis. *The Green Berets* were an exception in the collection of pro-war films of the 1970s, which exclusively concentrated on depictions of World War II. Because of the negative signal the Vietnam War gave it was seen as risky to release films that depicted the war in South East Asia. They were therefore camouflaged as World War II films, in this way portraying the Vietnam War as a necessary war. In this context was *Patton* a good contribution to the pro-war films of the 1970s. I argue that the release of *Patton* in the midst of the Vietnam War can be seen as a sign of the strong position of conservatism in the film industry at the time. The film was popular at the time of release, earning $28 million in theatrical rentals in the United States.[41] It is also argued that Richard Nixon repeatedly saw the film a number of times, short time before he ordered the bombing of Cambodia in 1970.[42] General Patton was in addition depicted as the last general of his caliber. This draws a parallel to Susan Owen's argumentation in her article "Memory, War and American Identity: Saving Private Ryan as Cinematic Jeremiad". Owen argues that *Saving Private Ryan* is a film that looks back to World War II in order to demonstrate the necessity of war, an argument that also can be used in the case of *Patton*.

To sum up the discussion of pro-war films of the 1970s, I argue that pro-war films was made in the first half of the 1970s, camouflaged as World War II films. Additionally it is important to emphasize that the pro-war movement was present in the United States at the time, making it possible for the film studios to produce and release pro-war films.

3.5 Film and Culture

It is important to decide what film represents in term of the culture. Film is a product of the surrounding culture and society, but at the same time it stands independently from it. If we look at the latter case the film is a creation by the director, the producer, the actors, and the film company.

---

[41] http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0066206/boxoffice, read May 6, 2009

[42] Ray, 68.

It is therefore of great significance to decide how a film is a product composed of these two factors; the culture and the producers. On the one hand a film is influenced by the society and political discussions and decisions. In a time where militarism is established combat films have a tendency to describe a more pro-militarist view. On the other hand a film is a creation of the director, the writer and the producer. These elements can lead to two different turns in the film: a) that the film becomes a manifestation of the political and social tendencies in society or b) that the director wants the film to go against the conventions of society, thus presenting a more critical look at the issues the film deals with. Criticism of political actions is an important part of any society and is necessary in order to reflect on important issues.

The dispute against the latter argument is that the issue I am dealing with is films produced in Hollywood. An important feature in this context is that in order to release a film one needs support from a major film company and a distributor. If a film is critical to the opinions of the majority of a society, there is a chance that the film will be denied support because the film company risk losing money used on the film. This is a tendency that may lead to less critical films released in a time of political and social unrest. I argue that this is an important reason for the low number of anti-war films about the Vietnam War released at the time of the war.

On the other hand we can use *The Green Berets* as an example of the opposite. The film was released in the midst of the escalation of the Vietnam War, with the goal of supporting the American forces in Vietnam and the decisions made by the White House administration. The film was supported by the film companies because they meant the film was able to earn the money that was spent, something it also did. A great deal of the honor can be given John Wayne who co-directed and starred in the film. The film has been described as Wayne's personal project, a fact that implies that Wayne did not care about what the rest of the world meant about the Vietnam War.

In order to understand the reason for why the filmmakers started to produce films with antimilitary attitudes it is important to know what caused the Vietnam War. I will therefore look at the historical background for the war in South East Asia.

3.6 Historical context: America in the turbulent 1960s

In 1963, when the United States moved armed forces into Vietnam the country had already been shaken to ground by the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas in November 22, 1963. A year before the Cuban Missile Crisis had created fear of a new world war across the globe. The year after the Civil Rights Movements reached its peak. These events had shocked the nation and brought on a polarized nation that eventually climaxed in 1968. This was the year when the war in South East Asia escalated. The Tet Offensive in January that year surprised the American army in Vietnam when the North Korean forces together with the National Liberation Front mounted a surprise attack on American forces during an informal cease-fire. The Vietnamese forces held the city of Hué for two weeks before American forces took it back after massive bombing campaigns. One month after the Tet Offensive the My Lai Massacre took place, where an American platoon massacred a village, killing more than three hundred civilians. Back home the Tet Offensive was portrayed as a victory for the American forces in Vietnam. The combination of the news coverage of the war and the American military's outspoken argument of victory sparked a surge of protest movements on university campuses and high schools. In addition to the grass root movements against the President's actions, the Democratic Party itself parted on the issue of the war. Both Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy launched election campaigns that opposed Johnson's stand, something that eventually forced the President to announce his decision to not seek the presidency in the upcoming election. The split inside the Democratic Party was among other things the reason for the riots outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. Earlier that year the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy became a sign of the violence that was to come. When riots broke out in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention the nation was already divided on the issues of Civil Rights and the Vietnam War. This gave the Republican Party an easy path toward the presidency. Richard Nixon profited from the public's revolt against the war and the trouble in the Democratic Party, and won the election by a landslide.[43]

---

[43] Boyer, 306-311.

3.7 The Background for the War in Vietnam

The American war in Vietnam has roots back in the time when Vietnam was ruled by France. The communist nations in Asia recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in January 1950. This was seen as a provocative action in the eyes of the US and other countries that fought against the spread of Communism. The idea of containment started when the conflict in Korea in 1950 escalated. President Harry Truman sent American troops to the conflict in Korea, but at the same time he committed $20 million in military aid to France, who fought against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. France saw the colonies in Indochina as a rich and valuable possession and refused therefore to give up the power of these colonies to the Vietminh. In November 1946 a French cruiser bombed the city of Haiphong and the first Indochina War broke out. The US was in this situation an ally of both France and the Vietminh, and was therefore unsure of what to do. The relationship with France was already weak after World War II, but at the same time it was very important to keep France close in order to contain Communism in Europe. The US was in effect fighting the Cold War on two fronts; in Europe and in South East Asia.[44] Consequently, as war raged in Korea President Truman and his administration continued to try to prevent Communism breaking into Vietnam. Therefore the US urged France to promote independence in South Vietnam; unfortunately the pleas fell on deaf ears. France threatened that if the US did not continue to help them in their task of keeping Vietnam in French hands, France would leave the European alliance.[45] This caused the US to become even more involved in the conflict in South East Asia. At this moment in time President Eisenhower introduced the well known theory of the "domino effect" regarding communist expansionism. As the tension between the French colonial powers and the Vietminh forces grew France urged the US in 1954 to assist French forces against the Vietminh. Vice President at the time, Richard Nixon supported the idea of dropping a nuclear bomb on the Vietnamese, an action he also suggested a few weeks before the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1972. The containment of Communism in both Europe and Asia proved difficult for the US. As France struggled in

---

[44] Chafe, 245-246.

[45] Chafe, 247.

Vietnam Great Britain had left the countries in the Mediterranean and the US was therefore forced to deploy forces in both Europe and, a few years later, in Vietnam.[46]

3.8 War film paradigms

There are many things Vietnam war-films have in common with WWII-films, but also many differences. In his article "The War about the War: Vietnam Films and American Myth" Leo Cawley has compiled a list of conventions that are typical for World War II films and Vietnam War films:

> A moral impulse is behind every American War. Wars are undertaken by Americans, even if the cause is mistaken, as crusades. Individuals "prove" themselves by personally participating in combat, which teaches truths impossible to learn elsewhere. The foreignness of the enemy is a sign of evil, although "foreignness" needn't be evil if the foreigners have acquired the cultural traits of Americans. Americans themselves are better, friendlier than other nationalities, and want nothing selfish in their relations with foreigners. But if there is a conflict, Americans are inherently better at violence and will win. And so on.[47]

Cawley's list is highly debatable, something he makes clear in the discussion of the list. The list is used to discuss parameters that World War II combat films and Vietnam War films not have in common. The first point on the list brings up a very interesting point. Moral is, according to Cawley, a common ideal that is brought up in any American War film, and especially in World War II and Vietnam War movies. Cawley argues that the difference between the uses of morality in WWII films as opposed to in Vietnam War movies is that in Vietnam it is given "important, even decisive, military consequences". He argues that brutality awards military advantage, meaning that the brutality is a necessity when dealing with brutal enemies. Cawley states that this became an often used trait in later films about Vietnam, especially in *Rambo: First Blood* (1982). By this example he argues that the US has in the past fought wars on film without resorting to unnecessary violence and brutality. It

---

[46] Ibid. 247-248.

[47] Dittmar, Linda and Gene Michaud (Ed.). *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film.* Rutgers University Press, 1990, 70.

is always the enemy who is depicted as gruesome, without taking any consideration to their fellow soldiers, especially in the films about WWII.

3.9 The Green Berets and the pro-war film tradition

The Green Berets was released in 1968 and was directed by Ray Kellogg and John Wayne. It was the only feature film that came out during the war.[48]

As early as 1965 John Wayne contacted the White House for approval on making a film about the American forces in Vietnam. John Wayne had through his career as an actor and as a civilian supported the government in all their actions regarding foreign policy; as Lawrence H. Suid describes as "My Country Right or Wrong". Suid continues referring to the dialogue Wayne had with the Pentagon when requesting help with the production, saying that Wayne cited his extensive film career as a reference. Wayne's career, he argued, was proof of the support he had shown to the American forces.

What is it that makes *The Green Berets* an interesting war film? In itself it is maybe not that interesting but because the film was released in 1968 it is interesting. The producers went against the trends of the time and released a pro-Vietnam War film in the middle of a time when the war was at its most unpopular. Despite the anti-war feelings in the US at the time of release, and the bad reviews it received in the media, it still did perform well at the box office. The movie had an estimated budget of $7 million, and earned $9.7million.[49] There are many possible reasons for the film's financial success. The most obvious reason is John Wayne himself. He was still at the time a big movie star, something that attracted audience. Another reason can be the proportion of pro-war audience in the US. The anti-war movement in America was big but it is important to acknowledge that a great number of people supported the war in Vietnam. The American society was greatly divided over the war at the time.

The Green Berets starts accompanied by the song *Ballad of the Green Beret*. The song was written by Robin Moore, the same man who wrote the book the movie is based on, together

---

[48] Several documentaries were released, such as Hearts and Minds (1974), which received an Academy Award in 1974.

[49] Imdb.com: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0063035/business, read July 16, 2008.

with Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler, a Vietnam veteran. This beginning is one of the motifs Jeanine Basinger refers to as one of the most typical in WWII combat movies. This song was in fact a hit single at the time of release in 1966. Using a hit single in a film is a common feature that ensures that the audiences recognize the song, creating positive feelings that may be transmitted to the film. This is a method that is very commonly in our time, but also fairly often used in the 1960s and 1970s. Other films that used this marketing method included *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *The Sting* (1973). The latter film is an example where the instrumental music was written especially to the film, even though the music is popular without the film. This is an important factor when looking at the film industry of the 1960s. It is a fact that the film industry suffered when television was introduced to the American people in the 1960s. Entertainment could be enjoyed at home, and the numbers of people going to the cinema declined. Therefore, any other form of popular culture that could be incorporated into the film became a useful tool in order to get the audience into the movie theaters again.

The film's plot concerns a group of Green Berets (U.S. Army special forces) being sent to Vietnam to take part in the fighting against the Communist forces of North Vietnam as well as the Viet Cong. John Wayne plays the part of a colonel that commands these troops. From the very beginning of the film we clearly understand the filmmakers' intentions. We meet the main characters in a training camp where a group of civilians and journalists are given a tour of the camp, as well as an opportunity to ask the soldiers questions. One journalist asks a sergeant if he can give him an answer to why the US is "fighting this ruthless war". Sergeant Muldoon answers that "foreign policy decisions are not made by the military. A soldier goes where he is told and fights whomever he's told to." In other words, Sergeant Muldoon is the US Army's role model soldier: a soldier who does not ask questions and sacrifices himself for the greater good, no matter what the intentions are.

The Green Berets can be divided into several parts. One of the most interesting parts is the beginning of the film. This is where we learn the main message given by the authors of the film. The American journalist in the beginning of the film is portrayed as ignorant, impatient and unwilling to accept the answers the soldiers are giving him. A good example is when a female journalist interrupts a sergeant explaining the terrible crimes committed to Vietnamese civilians, such as killing innocent women and children. "Yes, I guess horrible things happen in war". Implicitly, then, the My Lai Massacre, an event that happened during

the production of the film, was justified by the filmmakers. It is as if the filmmakers try to justify what was done by the American soldier in the village of My Lai. Of course, terrible atrocities were carried out by both sides in the war. The political message conveyed by the filmmakers is the necessity of casualties in order to achieve the goal. Ronald L. Davis refers to Wayne's statement that the intentions of making *The Green Berets* were "to make an exciting motion picture about the bravery of the men in the Special Forces, not to make a controversial film about the war".[50]

In the same scene in the training camp a housewife at one point stands up and wonders why she has not read of these massacres in the newspapers, at which point Sergeant Muldoon quickly answers: "Newspapers! You could fill volumes with what you don't read in them," receiving a good hearty laugh from the visiting civilians. This can again be seen in light of the My Lai Massacre that happened on March 16, 1968, four months before the release date of the film. It became known after the war that the American government withheld information from the media about several situations where American forces were involved. Of course, the passage in the film was not directly a comment about the My Lai Massacre; the film was probably under production without any chance of commenting on a situation so close to release date. The coincidence nevertheless places the film in a bad light.

As the scene continues the journalist asks Sergeant Muldoon why he thinks the US should be involved, arguing that South Vietnam never had any free elections and the lack of a constitution, whereupon the Sergeant answers: "The school I went to taught us that the thirteen colonies, with proper and educated leadership, all with the same goal in mind, after the Revolutionary War, took from 1776 to 1787, eleven years of peaceful effort, before they came up with a paper that all thirteen colonies could sign: Our present Constitution."[51] The Sergeant argues that South Vietnam is fighting to achieve the same goal the United States fought for during the Revolutionary War, and that it takes time to for a country to construct a Constitution that everyone will agree on.

One big difference between *The Green Berets* and any combat film from the WWII era is that the latter had a clearly defined goal, with a clearly defined enemy. It seems that the

---

[50] Davis*, 279.*

[51] Quote taken from *The Green Berets.*

producers of *The Green Berets* had to convince the audience that what the US were doing in South East Asia was the right thing to do. This might confirm why the use of political argumentation in the film is much used. The question one might ask is if the filmmakers had to go to this step. It is reasonable to ascertain that the people who went to see *The Green Berets* already had made up their mind about the war.

Looking at the film from a general point of view there is something stylistic about the language and the jargon used. They glorify the military way of speaking and make it a kind of an involuntary comic relief. When we look at World War II films, i.e. *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, this jargon is used frequently, but the difference is that it feels more natural in those films – in *The Green Berets* it feels out of place. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* the dialogue runs more natural. The military jargon is used in military contexts, in contrast to *The Green Berets*, where it is used excessively.

3.10 *The Green Berets* and Western films compared

In the combat scenes in the middle of the film where the Viet Cong attack the camp the film resembles more of a western movie than a war movie. A film like *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) is an appropriate comparison, where a group of cowboys take upon them to defend a little village south of the Mexican border against a group of bandits. The portrayal of Colonel Kirby and his men are strikingly alike. The western film is one of the most American of all film genres, and John Wayne was the most epitomic of all the American western film actors. It is therefore not strange to argue that he used his experience from the western films as inspiration for *The Green Berets*. To take *The Magnificent Seven* as an example, we meet a group of cowboys that accepts a mission to defend a Mexican village against a group of villainous bandit that are ruining their lives. They teach the villagers to fight, and finally kill the bandits and save the inhabitants. This they do with seemingly no profit other than good will and gratitude. It seems as if this is the same mission Colonel Kirby and his men are up to in *The Green Berets*. There are several elements used in *The Green Berets* that are familiar to elements in western films. First, the attack on the American base in the film is very similar to scenes we know from American westerns where hordes of American Indians attack the American settlements or forts. Second, the typical motif of

defending the defenseless South Vietnamese civilians against the Viet Cong reminds us of the already mentioned scenes from *The Magnificent Seven*.[52] It is important to acknowledge that the elements listed are not motifs that are common in combat films in general. It is my argument that the producers of the film used these elements because they thought this would be appealing to the public and also recognizable to the audience who went to see a film starring John Wayne.

3.11 Militarism in The Green Berets

The aspect of militarism in the Vietnam War movies is prominent. There are however different ways of visualizing militarism from film to film. *The Green Berets* is, as mentioned earlier, a very patriotic film with high dependence on military effects and symbolism. The film switches between being humoristic and serious. If we look back to the discussion of militarism in the first chapter, Bacevich argues that militarism has a prominent place in American history. The romanticized view on soldiers and the fostering of and the nostalgia for military ideals has always been important, and this is also the case in *The Green Berets*. Colonel Kirby in the film is a hard, but at the same time, noble and just officer. Sergeant Muldoon is a soldier that follows orders to the point and never stops to think about the effects of his actions. It is of course important to take into account the importance of military discipline, which is important when a war is carried out.

Lawrence H. Suid writes in his book *Guts and Glory: The Making of The American Military Image in Film* that after the release of *The Green Berets,* film makers were discouraged to make any more films about the Vietnam War for many years. However, Hollywood continued to produce many films about World War II. It is interesting to see this movement backwards in time because it seems like they turned to WWII because it was a war that was a "safe war"; meaning that it was something that people could look back on and remember when the US Army were heroes. From July 1968, which was the time of release of *The Green* Berets, until August 1979, which was the time of release of *Apocalypse Now,* forty-three films about World War II was released.[53] During this time only a handful of films were

---

[52] Ray, 306.

[53] http://pro.imdb.com/search/run?query_id=1279762&view_sort=year&view_count=all. Read November 6, 2008.

made about other conflicts. Among these were twelve films about either the war in Korea or the War in Vietnam. The most known of these films are *M*A*S*H** (1970), *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *The Boys in Company C* (1978) and *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978). We note that the films listed, apart from *M*A*S*H** were released in the late part of the 70s. All these films projected an anti-war attitude.

3.12 Critics and reception of the film

When *The Green Berets* was released it stirred up massive protests through the world. A good example of this can be read in the Danish book *Blekingegadebanden*. This is a book about the communist movement in Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s that evolved into a group that carried out criminal actions in order to support the Palestinian cause. According to the author, Peter Øvig Knudsen, the demonstrations in Denmark reached a climax when *The Green Berets* was released in Denmark. We can read about members of the socialist group taking part in demonstrations that transforms into violent confrontations with the police. This shows how much anger "The Green Devils", as the title of the movie was translated into, aroused not only in the United States, but other parts of the world.[54] Another example of the same kind is from Gilbert Adair's book *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket*. He refers to several movie theatres where the film was picketed. Eric Pace wrote in the New York Times about "John Wayne's 'Green Berets' Under Leftist Attack in Paris". In this case several movie theatres were showing the film, where protestors were standing outside. French authorities dispatched uniformed and civilian police officers in case of hostility.[55]

In the US the film also received bad critique from the media. Renata Adler of the New York Times reviewed the film June 20, 1968:

> "THE GREEN BERETS" is a film so unspeakable, so stupid, so rotten and false in every detail that it passes through being fun, through being funny, through being camp, through everything and becomes an invitation to grieve, not for our soldiers or for Vietnam (the film could not be more false or do a greater disservice to either of them) but for what has happened to the fantasy-making apparatus in this country.

---

[54] Knudsen, Peter Øvig: Blekingebanden:Den Danske Celle, 100. Gyldendal, 2007.

[55] The New York Times, published August 2, 1969, read February 2, 2009.

> Simplicities of the right, simplicities of the left, but this one is beyond the possible. It is vile and insane. On top of that, it is dull."[56]

Adler had criticized the film because she felt the politics Wayne tried to present was wrong, and it is quite probable Adler, together with many other film critics were dissatisfied with the White House. It seems to me that most of the critique against the film focused on the simplification of the war that was portrayed in the film. They did not expect that Wayne would step up and criticize the administration for their work in Vietnam, but it seems they were not prepared for such a simpleminded portrayal of the war.

Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times argued that "The Green Berets simply will not do as a film about the war in Vietnam. It is offensive not only to those who oppose American policy but even to those who support it." Later in the review he states that they maybe could have believed the film in 1962 or 1963 because most Americans at that time did not care about what was going on in South East Asia. He reminds us that by the time the film was released the American population had already seen the televised pictures from the war, making John Wayne's film hard to believe.[57]

Roger Ebert was probably a bit more precise in his critique of the film than Adler was. He points out that the film is not believable because it was released in a year when the American people were fully aware of the situation in South East Asia. Wayne had probably good intentions when he made the film; he wanted to provide the American people with a "feel-good" film about the Vietnam War, at a time when he felt the country needed it most.

---

[56] New York Times:
http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?_r=1&res=990ce1d8163ae134bc4851dfb0668383679ede&scp=1&sq=The%20Green%20Berets&st=cse&oref=slogin, read July 17, 2008.

[57] Roger Ebert website: http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19680626/REVIEWS/806260301/1023, read July 17, 2008.

Only John Wayne could end a movie about the [Vietnam] war by walking off in triumph into the setting sun, albeit a sun setting in the wrong direction.[58] The picture Suid is referring to is the last picture in the film, where Colonel Kirby takes the little Vietnamese boy's hand, and follows him into the sunset (Fig. 2):

Figure 2: The little boy, whose surrogate father has been killed in action, wonders what will happen to him now that the war is over, when Colonel Kirby replies: "You let me worry about that, son. You're what this is all about". The still is an example of the filmmaker's attempt to use militaristic spirit to show support to the war in Vietnam.

In a time when it seemed like the heroic image of the American soldier was breaking up because of the Vietnam War, World War II was a safe haven for Hollywood film makers. In 1970 Twentieth Century-Fox released *Patton*, a biographical film about General Patton, a

---

[58]Suid, Lawrence H. *Guts and Glory: The Making of the Military Image in Film.* Kentucky, the University Press of Kentucky, 2002, 367.

legendary officer who served in the US Army during World War II. Although a controversial character in reality, he seemed to provide a good image for America in a tense and difficult time. General Patton, played by George C. Scott, was a tank commander who fought in North Africa, Italy and Normandy during the war. In the movie he is portrayed as the ultimate soldier and officer, boosting the morale of the soldiers, at the same time beating them if they behaved any other way he felt necessary. In this way he stands out as a complex character with both positive and negative traits, much like any other human being. It is worth mentioning that Francis Ford Coppola wrote the script for *Patton*, only a few years before he started working on *Apocalypse Now*. One of the most important aspects with *Patton* was that it was a film about World War II, but it feels like a film about the Vietnam War. It seems like even though Patton was a hard and brutal general, he still had sympathy for his soldiers. In my opinion *Patton* can be interpreted as a film that justified the Vietnam War. Patton was the officer who made the tough decisions; decisions that were unpopular, but still had to be done. *The Green Berets* fit in under this description in the way that it was released during the Vietnam War and had a clear opinion concerning the war.

3.13 Apocalypse Now and the Anti-war film wave of the 1970s

Even though the number of pro-war film exceeds the number of anti-war films the wave of anti-war films in Hollywood during the 1970s is well known. During the period from 1975 until 1979 many movies were released that focused on the Vietnam experience. The two films that competed for the attention were *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter*. *The Deer Hunter* was in many ways a more sober and realistic film portraying the Vietnam War. As opposed to *Apocalypse* it described and portrayed the experience of young men coming home from Vietnam having difficulties adjusting to the normal society. When we meet Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) in *Apocalypse Now* he is already passed that point. He has come to terms with his addiction to war and warfare.

In 1979 *Apocalypse Now*, one of the most anticipated films of the decade was released. Francis Ford Coppola had for a long time worked on the film, encountering major problems during production. The estimated budget for the film was $31,500,000. When the film came

out it grossed $83,471,511.[59] Together with *The Deer Hunter* this film was one of the most anticipated films in the late part of the 1970s. This was partly because of Francis Ford Coppola's work on *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), but also because the American people needed a closure on the Vietnam War. One of the reasons for the delays in production was because of the weather; it was filmed in Indonesia during the raining season and this caused problems for the film crew. Another unfortunate incident happened when lead actor Martin Sheen suffered a heart attack. Coppola was dedicated to make the film, something that brought the film crew and the actors to exhaustion.

Coppola's outspoken intention with the film was anti-military, but not anti-American. In fact, Coppola decided to make the movie because he did not think anybody else could do it. The Vietnam War was, according to Peter Biskind a topic that nobody dared to handle. He therefore took upon himself this task to portray the Vietnam War before anyone else did.[60] In other words, he was looking for fame and wealth and not wanting to make a point about the Vietnam War. In my eyes this proves that the dedication about a topic is not always just idealistic, it is also about money and fame.

3.14 Apocalypse Now analysis

Apocalypse Now depicts Captain Willard, a US Army soldier who is ordered to go into Cambodia on an undercover mission to assassinate Colonel Kurtz, a US Army officer gone insane. He is transported up the river by an Army vessel with a crew not informed of the details of the mission. The film was loosely based on Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness* from 1902. His book tells the story of Captain Marlow who is assigned to collect ivory deep in the jungle of Congo. He is also asked to find and bring with him a man named Kurtz, who is rumored to be operating as an ivory collector. Conrad's novella takes place in colonial times, when big parts of Africa were under control by European colonial states. In the case of Congo it was Belgian colonizers who controlled the country. Conrad describes a

---

[59] Imdb.com: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/boxoffice, read December 9, 2008, and Box Office Mojo: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/oscar/movies/?id=apocalypsenow.htm, read December 9, 2008. Imdb.com did not have the gross income for the theatrical release in 1979, only the new release in 2001.

[60] Biskind, 2007.

land that is destroyed by the colonizer's presence. The inhabitants in Conrad's novel are often savages, for example several crew members are cannibals.

Apocalypse Now can be said to be a depiction of what militarism can do to a society. Militarism corrupts the society and tricks people into believing that war solves any problem that might arise. The aspect of colonialism is used in the scene where Captain Willard and the crew on the boat meet a French family that resists moving from their house.[61] The head of the family invites the crew to dinner, engaging in a discussion about the presence of American forces in Vietnam. The French man sees it unnecessary that the US is present in Vietnam, but this is only because that the country should belong to France!

The film starts with a picture of a jungle with distant sounds of helicopters approaching. Suddenly the jungle explodes and goes up in flames, while Jim Morrison's vocal on the song "The End" starts.[62] One can see this sequence as a bizarre variation of Jeanine Basinger's motif of war movies, in harsh contrast to the jovial "Ballad of the Green Berets" in the beginning of *The Green Berets*. It is as if the director comments on the nature of war directly, as if it is "the end". We can clearly see the symbolic difference between *The Green Berets* intro-song and the introductory song in *Apocalypse Now*. "Ballad of the Green Berets" is very patriotic and militaristic, whereas "The End" is a very negative, pessimistic tune. After a while Captain Willard's face is visible upside down, and we find him in his hotel room, where he utters the famous line "Saigon. Shit I'm still in Saigon." The camera circles around the hotel room where we understand that Willard has been in for a long time. We also get information that he has divorced his wife as an understatement. Willard is a person that is uncomfortable regardless where he is, except in the jungle: "Every time I was here I wanted to go there, and every time I was there I just wanted to go back to the jungle." Willard is a character that has become a stereotype; a character that because of the war becomes addicted to it, and is having trouble adjusting to the normal life back in the States (Fig 3.).

---

[61] This scene was left out of the original theatrical release, but it is interesting in the sense that it poses questions about the war, and about the French colonial power.

[62] The song was written by"The Doors" with Jim Morrison as lead vocalist.

Figure 3: Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) is the personification of a soldier who has become overcome by war to the extent that he becomes the enemy which he is ordered to assassinate.

To me *Apocalypse Now* is a film with two sides. On the one hand it is a motion picture that captures the terrible situation the United States was in during the Vietnam War. It describes how the American soldiers are affected by the warfare and how the officers in the US Army behave. An example of this in the film is Lieutenant Kilgore. He is in my opinion a caricature of an officer who has lost his mind in the process of the war. On the other side it is a film that portrays a journey into the wild that makes the crew on the boat insane. The depiction of drugs is also an important part of this film. It seems to me that the drugs are a form of escape from the reality in the jungle.

Leo Cawley referred to earlier is useful when looking at *Apocalypse Now,* especially Cawley's second point of individualism. Cawley argues that this individualism is a common falsification in combat films. This image of the lonesome soldier is very common in American culture, in literary culture as well as in film. Ever since James Fenimoore Cooper's novels about Natty Bumppo came out in the 19th century, individualism has been a praised and cherished idea in the American mentality. With the exception of World War II

films the individualism has been a common feature in American combat films. There are
several examples of this in the Vietnam combat films. Robert De Niro's character in *The
Deer Hunter*; Sylvester Stallone's character in the *Rambo* films; and basically all the films
Chuck Norris has starred in; they all fight the war alone. Warfare is dependable on
cooperation between soldiers, and therefore the individualism that is common in these films
is unrealistic. *Apocalypse Now* falls into this category. Even though Captain Willard is a part
of the crew on the boat that takes him up the river towards Colonel Kurtz, he is nevertheless
standing alone when it comes to completing his mission.[63]

When we look at *Apocalypse Now* in the context of war film conventions we find that the
film inhabits many of the typical conventions of the World War II films. Many of the
characters are present in both World War II and Vietnam films, the soldiers get mail from
home, and the officers are looked upon as hard but good-willing. The issue that divides the
Vietnam combat films from the World War II combat films is the mood and atmosphere that
is present in the films. The presence of an underlying tension of pessimism and negativity is
present in all the Vietnam combat films of the 1970s. This is no doubt affected by the
pessimistic mood that the Vietnam War made on the American society. Casualties on both
sides of the war were high, creating a gloomy mood that weakened the American people's
thoughts on the cause of the war, and the world's look on the United States.

3.15 Militarism in *The Green Berets* and *Apocalypse Now*

The Green Berets and *Apocalypse Now* project the term *militarism* differently. One cannot
be proud of militarism in a democratic society. In *Berets* we find that militarism is used to
argue that the soldier who fights for the freedom of the Vietnamese is somebody America
should be proud of. The war is fought for the greater good, and the US has always fought
wars the right ways. The film is patriotic and highly militaristic, a common trait in American
combat films, where war is seen as a defense of freedom. However, it is also ludicrous and
unintentionally ridiculous, and is in my opinion a good example of a film that portrays the
Vietnam War in an unfavorable light.

---

[63] Dittmar, 70-71.

Apocalypse Now projects militarism in a different way. In this film war is the absolute hell. In this way the film allows the audience to see what war can be, and therefore identifies war as an outgrowth of militarism. Officers are either projected as neutral, or completely insane. Colonel Kurtz, who is Captain Willard's main target, has also gone crazy because of the violence and the militaristic environment he is in.

Another film about the Vietnam War which is interesting to look at when we see *The Green Berets* is *Full Metal Jacket,* released in 1987, directed by Stanley Kubrick. Kubrick made several films that take a satirical glance at the United States at war. The most comical and satirical of them all is perhaps *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* from 1964. *Full Metal Jacket*, on the other hand, is a more brutal and bloody motion picture portraying the Vietnam War. Actually, it satirizes the earlier Vietnam War films. We can see this in a dialogue from a quiet point in the film, where the main character, Private Cowboy, sit and talk to the other soldiers:

> Sergeant Joker: *Is that you, John Wayne? Is this me?*
>
> Sergeant Cowboy: *Hey, start the cameras. This is "Vietnam: The Movie."*
>
> Private Eightball: *Yeah, Joker can be John Wayne. I'll be a horse.*
>
> Donlon: *T.H.E. Rock can be a rock.*
>
> T.H.E. Rock: *I'll be Ann-Margret.*
>
> Doc Jay: *Animal Mother can be a rabid buffalo.*
>
> Crazy Earl: *I'll be General Custer.*
>
> Private Rafterman: *Well, who'll be the Indians?*
>
> Animal Mother: *Hey, we'll let the gooks play the Indians.*[64]

Kubrick is making fun of John Wayne's earlier films, both his war films, and his western films. The Vietnam War is compared to a western film, where the soldiers are cowboys on the frontier and the Vietnamese are the Indians, trying to stop them from stealing their land. Ann-Margret is a Swedish born actress, who was a big sex symbol in the 1960s and 70s. She

---

[64] http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0093058/quotes, read July, 10, 2008.

participated among other things in the entertainment tours in Vietnam to boost the morale of the soldiers. She is a symbol of patriotism in this satiric dialogue from *Full Metal Jacket*. I will therefore argue that Kubrick's use of this part in the film underlines my argument that *The Green Berets* resemble more a western film than a combat film.

The next chapter will look at how the American society changed after the Vietnam War and how the presidents and the society of that time handled the Vietnam Syndrome. I will look at these changes through the combat films as examples. The main film that will be analyzed is Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*.

4. The reconstruction of the pro-war film

This chapter will look at a period in American history that goes from the end of the 1970s up until the end of the 1990s, focusing on *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) but also looking at other combat films that came out during this period. There are many reasons for picking *Saving Private Ryan* as the main film example. First, the film received much attention at the time of release, mainly because of the vivid visual style evident at the beginning of the film, which depicted the landing on the beaches of Normandy. Second, the discussion in academia about the film became extensive after the film's release. The discussion was varied, but the main topic was based on the relevance of the film in the context of previous combat films and their portrayal of different wars in a historical context. The discussion of the film in relation to the Vietnam War became especially interesting. Susan Owen, Professor in the Communication and Theatre Arts Department at the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma were one of the main participants in the debate. I will look at her article when analyzing the film. Additionally I will look at Robert Burgoyne's book *The Hollywood Historical Film*. In this book the author argues that film has the ability to "establish an emotional connection to the past". He argues that the historical film can be described as a genre, a genre that started in the early days of the film industry and has developed up to our time.

 The Green Berets and *Saving Private Ryan* are two very different films in style, but they both try to justify why the US fought the Vietnam War and World War II. In contrast to *Apocalypse Now* that criticized militarism in society, both *The Green Berets* and *Saving Private Ryan* do the opposite. They urge the American people to stand behind the nation's actions in difficult times. In effect we might say that militarism becomes necessary in order to reach the objectives of war, and these films are used to underline the point of militarism.

In this chapter I will argue that during the post Vietnam period, the United States was attempting to recover from the war by rebuilding its self confidence. Susan Owen writes in her article "Memory, War and American Identity: Saving Private Ryan as Cinematic Jeremiad" about the ability of American popular war films to restore American identity through the rhetorical form of the jeremiad. In order to look at how we can use the jeremiad in the discussion about *Saving Private Ryan* it is important to know what a jeremiad is. According to Owen a jeremiad has in the field of American literature and public address

three basic functions: "to name the covenant (the special people), to make public lamentation for a decline (a falling away from a promise), and to imagine redemption (connect the past to the future)". [65] First, the special people she refers to are Americans with a sacred quest. Ever since the principle of Manifest Destiny in the middle of the 19th Century the belief, together with American Exceptionalism, has contributed to what has been recognized as the American way of life, or the American Creed. The American Creed was originally a document written by William Tyler Page in 1917, the same year the United States declared war on Germany and entered World War I. The document states the declared rights for the nation and its population:

> I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed; a democracy in a republic; a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon the principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes.

> I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies.[66]

This declaration is important in the context of war, and especially interesting in context of *Saving Private Ryan*. The duty to "love your country... and to defend it against all enemies" is especially prominent in the film.

Second, "to make public lamentation for a decline" is in my opinion something that was necessary after the Vietnam War, although not carried out by the whole of American society. Some still believed that the war was not such a big failure as many thought. Nevertheless, the fundamental notion in society was to admit the mistakes made in Vietnam and then to move on. It was in that case necessary to work through the mistakes, and make sure they were not repeated. According to Owen, lamentation constitutes a big part of *Saving Private Ryan*. Lamentation is identified through film as a destabilized national myth. This national myth is based on the principles of the Founding Fathers, mainly the three principles of life,

---

[65] Owen, Susan. "Memory, war and American Identity: Saving Private Ryan as Cinematic Jeremiad" in *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19:3252.

[66] http://www.usconstitution.net/creed.html, read March 11, 2009.

liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The lamentation then is based on the belief that these principles were breached when the US sent American soldiers to fight a war many looked upon as a civil war between two Asian countries.

Third and last, "to imagine redemption" in Owen's words, is to find a way to reconcile with the past. Uncomfortable truths from past history are hard to escape from, and it is necessary to find a way to "make good" the faults done. One way is to admit the wrongdoing; another alternative is to create an atmosphere where it is possible to look back to the actions done and reconcile with it. The film industry has during its long history chosen the last one. We will come back to this topic later in the chapter.

In her article Owen argues that the Vietnam War created a crisis of national identity that still is noticeable in American society. This identity crisis was visible in many places. In the political sphere it was evident in George H. W. Bush's inaugural address, in his speech to the American people on the eve of the Gulf War in 1991, and in American combat films. In his inaugural address George H. W. Bush spoke of the difficulties the Republican Party and the Democratic Party had in Congress:

> And our great parties have too often been far apart and untrusting of each other. It's been this way since Vietnam. That war cleaves us still. But, friends, that war began in earnest a quarter of a century ago, and surely the statute of limitation has been reached. This is a fact: The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory. A new breeze is blowing, and the old bipartisanship must be made new again.[67]

It is evident in this speech that Bush was at the time aware of the damages the Vietnam War had made on American society and projected the message that it was time to move on. In his address to the American people on January 5, 1991 on the eve of the Gulf War he emphasized the importance of efficiency when invading Iraq, and referred to memories of losing friends in battle:

> I've seen the hideous face of war and counted the costs of conflict in friends lost. I remember this all too well, and have no greater concern than the well-being of our men and women stationed in the Persian Gulf. True, their morale is sky-high. True, if

---

[67] George Bush Presidential Library and Museum:
http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=1&year=1989&month=01, read April 14, 2009.

they are called upon to fight the aggressors, they will do their job courageously, professionally and, in the end, decisively. There will be no more Vietnams.[68]

Both these passages are evidence of the identity crisis America went through in the 1990s. Bush states that when the US becomes involved in another war it is imperative that the actions done will be wiser than the actions done during the Vietnam War.

Owen argues further that the Vietnam syndrome stands in opposition to the traditional "American metanarrative of unified national identity." In the introductory part of her article Susan Owen refers to the 1972 presidential election when George McGovern urged the American people to "Come Home". The question Owen asks in the context of McGovern's plea is how he could expect Americans to "come home" when people had stopped believing in the definitions of America. Owen calls McGovern's slogan jeremiadic rhetoric. This rhetoric is commonly used to correct "contemporary conditions gone awry".[69] In other words, when the American people stopped believing in the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness it became useless for McGovern to call them home to something that was non-existent.

Owen argues in her article that the secular American jeremiad "emerges prominently" in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan,* in part, as a rhetorically skillful response to the post-Vietnam crisis of national identity. She argues further that Spielberg both acknowledges and appropriates the crisis, offering viewing audiences a "way home" to mythic America. In a 1998 interview with Steven Spielberg in *Newsweek* the director acknowledged his childhood attachment to American war films. Later, at the age of fourteen he made his first film that was a compilation of battles he had seen in films in his youth. These battle scenes were essentially scenes with "lots of glory and lots of dying." Spielberg then argued that when the Vietnam War started and the news broadcasts were seen on television all over the US, the combat genre weakened. The massive amount of footage from the Vietnam War was damaging for the combat film in the way that it became ridiculous when looking at the real footage of the war.

---

[68] George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum: http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2596&year=1991&month=01, read April 14, 2009.

[69] Owen, 249.

Owen identifies three characteristics in the interview with Spielberg that is comparable to the functions of the jeremiad. First, the post-Vietnam crisis consists of the notion that the larger goals for fighting the war were no longer an issue in the Vietnam War. The only reason the soldiers in the field fought the war was to survive and to save the man next to them. This is identified by Owen as an entailment of the Vietnam legacy. *The Deer Hunter* (1978) is a good example of a film that projects this notion. The characters travel from their home town, a town that has nothing to offer in terms of a future. The next time we see them they are taken captive by Vietnamese soldiers and forced to play a game of Russian roulette, where they risk losing their lives if they do not escape. Characters in the Vietnam combat films express lamentation "through cinematic depictions of grief, trauma and anxiety."[70] Examples of this are Captain Willard's (Martin Sheen) crying and injuring himself in the beginning of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Nick's (Christopher Walken) voluntary entry into a Russian roulette tournament in *The Deer Hunter* (1978). In other words, it coincides with the rhetoric of the jeremiad; it makes a public lamentation for a decline. This means that the Vietnam War fell away from its promise; the fight for the greater good was impossible for the soldiers to see and therefore had no other option than make an attempt to get out of the battlefield alive.

Second, Spielberg argued that no film maker could tell a morally unambiguous story about war after the Vietnam War, and therefore argues that *Saving Private Ryan* was a morality play, which means a drama that presents a moral lesson, where the main characters inhabit abstract qualities that enhance the morality. It is at this point important trying to understand Spielberg's argument. A film that is morally unambiguous is a film that takes one side of a conflict. It does not reflect on the situation of the other part.

We cannot on the other hand rule out the possibility that films can be both morally unambiguous and at the same time project support to new wars fought. In the case of *Ryan* and World War II there is a general agreement over the cruelty and the horror in that war, but at the same time it was seen as a necessary evil in order to reach the goal of defeating the Nazis. If we look at the Vietnam War films it is evident that most of the films projected an anti-war statement. At the same time we cannot dismiss the notion that militarism is used to portray characters in a favorable light.

---

[70] Owen, 254.

Spielberg argues that it is impossible to tell a one-sided story about war because there is always more than one side to the case. This is in my opinion an attempt to imagine redemption and connect World War II to Iraq and the new wars of empire. Every filmmaker after the Vietnam War had to reconsider their methods and try to learn from previous mistakes.

Third, Spielberg expressed in the interview admiration for the soldiers who fought to free the world. In this way he "named the special people" the people with the sacred mission. World War II has always been a widely circulated theme in literature and film. Precisely because Spielberg argues that the stories of these "dogfaces" need to be told at this moment in time is an urge to look back to the past where American bravery and life was appreciated.

4.1 American Political Trends in the 1980s and 1990s

It is important to look back to the 1980s, especially looking at the film industry of that decade. More importantly, the political decisions and decision makers of that time also contributed to the global and domestic situations that dominated the US during this time. At the end of the 1970s the United States was still recovering from the failure of the Vietnam War. The corruption that was exposed during the Watergate trial and the following resignation of President Nixon led to a new negative wave in American society. The suspicion against government combined with the resentment against the situation in South East Asia, and other domestic issues led the nation into a period of negative decline.[71]

Because of Richard Nixon's actions Gerald Ford had a difficult task when he took over as president. Ford, as one of few presidents to rise to the title without being elected, failed to rebuild the confidence in the American people after the Watergate scandal. When Nixon resigned one year had passed since his reelection. Initially Ford came across to the nation as an honest man and humble man, and offered fresh blood to the nation. However, the public did not approve when Ford issued a presidential pardon to Nixon, resulting in falling approval ratings for the president from 72 percent to 49 percent. Only three years after he became president he lost the 1976 election to Jimmy Carter.

[71] Boyer, 366.

When Ronald Reagan took part in the presidential election in 1980 it was clear that America was dissatisfied with their incumbent president, Jimmy Carter. Carter's presidency had been a tough period, most notably because of diplomatic troubles and an economic crisis. Energy prices skyrocketed and the hostage situation in Iran made Carter's presidency hard to swallow for most Americans. Reagan brought with him a positive attitude into the election and made Americans believe in their country again. "Let's make American great again" was a fitting slogan for a presidential candidate that strived to take over for Jimmy Carter. The fact that Reagan was able to announce the liberation of the American hostages in Iran on the day of his inauguration gave him an even better position in American eyes.

In Ronald Reagan's inaugural address he referred to a soldier named Martin Treptow, who was killed in action during the First World War. According to Reagan's speech a diary was found on Treptow's body. In the diary he had written a pledge to himself: "America must win this war. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone." Reagan continued in his speech remarking that this kind of courage was not necessary in the 1980s. After all, the US was not involved in warfare of the same kind as Treptow was. What Reagan urged Americans to do was to believe in themselves and their own possibilities to achieve their goals.[72] We can draw some conclusions from this excerpt. The obvious reason to use it was to boost the American confidence in a difficult time. Another underlying reason can be that Reagan used the story of a war hero to bring back the picture of militarism in American society. In this way the issue of heroism was re-introduced into American society in many ways. This was especially the case when it came to media projections.

Ronald Reagan was a loyal American who had been an actor in his younger days, and used his rhetorical and speaking abilities to capture the audience. He used humor to pacify his political opponents and obtain contact with the people. On the other side Reagan's federal spending increased the annual federal deficit from $74 billion to $185 billion in 1984. The deficit was caused especially by the increase of the defense budget combined with tax cuts. The deficit in turn caused many Americans to experience severe economic problems.[73]

---

[72] Ronald Reagan Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981, found on the website of Ronald Reagan's Presidential Library: http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12081a.htm, read February 26, 2009.

[73] Boyer, 407-409

Reagan's foreign policy can be characterized as aggressive. The US interventions in global conflicts became more intense in Reagan's second period. The fight against Communism continued, now on another continent: Latin America. At the same time the confrontational tone against the Soviet Union continued. The combination of population growth and the inability to cope with wealth and poverty issues had led the nations in Latin America into military coups and violence.

Ronald Reagan did put an emphasis on military spending during his two presidential terms. The Cold War was still going strong, and hostile situations in Latin America proved it necessary to still uphold the economic support to the military. This changed when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union in 1985. Gorbachev was intent on reconciliation with the West, focusing on *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* as the two main goals for the Soviet Union. At the same time the US struggled with a massive deficit caused by enormous military spending. Congress therefore decided to decrease the Pentagon's budget.

Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush was less fortunate in the way that he was in office at the time of Desert Strike, a war that in one way was successful for the United States, but at the same time, was one of the reasons why George Bush only got one term in office. When George H. W. Bush came into office he faced a deficit left by the Reagan administration. In addition to that he had to cope with Reagan's incomplete work on the issue of Panama. Reagan had deployed forces into Panama in an attempt to overthrow Manuel Noriega, without success.

The situation that received most attention during Bush's presidency was the Gulf War. On August 2, 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Iraq's neighboring country Kuwait. The US, starting under Ronald Reagan's presidency, had supplied Saddam Hussein with weapons and technology during the war between Iran and Iraq. However, when Iraq invaded Kuwait this changed drastically. Bush officially compared Hussein with Hitler and argued that the war was a threat to the stability of the Arabian region and that Iraq violated international law. With the support of the United Nations Bush received support from Congress to invade Iraq. The war first started with massive bombing raids on January 12, 1991 and continued a month later with a ground invasion. In contrast to the Vietnam War the Gulf War became a spectacle on TV. The footage that was aired on CNN and other major news channels appeared more like a scene from a science fiction film than reality. The Pentagon had

learned from previous mistakes in Vietnam and strong restrictions were put on press access to the combat field. The only pictures that were released from the conflict were footage of so-called American smart bombs hitting targets in Iraq, rebuilding the image of the US Army as an aggressive military power.

Nine years after the war the film *Three Kings* (1999) was released. It told the story of a group of soldiers taking part in the Gulf War, who decide to steal gold that was stolen by the Iraqis during the invasion of Kuwait. The film takes a critical look at the American role in the war in the way that it argues that the civilians were not cared for, because of what was considered the more important task of protecting the oil wells. This can stand as an example of the failed policies of George H. W. Bush in Iraq.

When Bill Clinton was elected in 1992 the Cold War had just been declared over by Mikhail Gorbachev and the world looked brighter than ever. Clinton also marked a turning point because he was the first president that had not fought in World War II.[74] Clinton did initially put little focus on foreign affairs in his presidency. The peace process between Israel and Palestine was the most important issue Clinton took part in, until the war in Yugoslavia escalated. In Dayton, Ohio the leaders of the factions in Yugoslavia met to sign a peace treaty, and where Clinton commissioned 20,000 US troops to observe the process of the cease fire. This would prove to be more difficult than expected, something that was evident when Nato bombed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. Nevertheless, military spending under Clinton's presidency was record low, from 1985 to 1997 the military spending fell with 38 percent to just over three percent in 1997.[75]

4.2 Popular Culture and Media's role in the 1980s and 1990s.

The importance of television and popular culture became even more prominent in the 1980s. Television was looked upon by the American people as their "most believable" news source. According to Boyer, television in the 1980s focused on easy entertainment. The key word was escapism. Escapism became in fact big business in the 1980s. I use the term "escapism"

---

[74] Boyer, 449.

[75] Boyer, 467.

because it seemed that the American people were not interested in anything else than light entertainment. Television shows focused on violence and sex. Music videos and the coming of the CD (Compact Disc) became highly popular. Improvements in technology made it possible for ordinary people to own their own computer. All these factors made critics worried that the society became blind to the real society. Nevertheless, this escapism continued into the 1990s and our time.

Escapism stood in contrast to the films in the 1970s that took a stand against the Vietnam War. *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Coming Home* (1978), *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978); all these films projected an anti-war message. *The Deer Hunter* approaches the theme with a look on how a little town reacts when three of the residents go to Vietnam. In 1978 *Coming Home* was released, a film about a woman who falls in love with a paralyzed Vietnam veteran, while her husband is still in Vietnam fighting the war. The film reflected the producer's need to make an anti-war statement. *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978) tells the story of a unit of military advisors in Vietnam who find similarities between the American involvement in Vietnam with the conflict between France and Vietnam a decade earlier.

Most of the combat films from the 1980s focused more on the entertainment value of violent combat, without considering the serious sides of war. One good example is the series of "Rambo" films starring Sylvester Stallone.[76] Boyer calls them a "comic strip version of the war in which America triumphs as the national mythology held that it should."[77] Many critics agreed with this analysis. However, many reviewers argued that the Stallone films amounted to an attempt to rebuild the reputation of the Vietnam veterans. The question we must ask is how "Rambo" prepares us for a film like *Saving Private Ryan.* Gaylyn Studlar and David Desser analyze the issue of guilt in relation to lost wars. They compare America's failure in Vietnam with other country's failed actions, e.g. Germany's issue of resolving the Nazi era. This feeling of guilt can, according to Studlar and Desser, be the reason for the number of Vietnam films in the 1980s. They also acknowledge that because of the nature of film production, films that are released cannot say to be a reaction to such a feeling. They instead argue in the words of Sigmund Freud that these films are proof of a nation's

---

[76] The series of films consists of *First Blood (1982), Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985), Rambo III (1988).* In addition to these films a third sequel, *Rambo* (2008) was released, but is not part of this study.

[77] Boyer, 427.

ambivalent feelings about the war, a notion that is a necessary ingredient in the creation of guilt.[78]

Studlar and Dessar argue that the combat films of the 1980s turned the discussion of whether the United States should have fought in Vietnam, into a debate of how the veterans of the war should be treated. *First Blood*, which was the first film in the "Rambo" series, portrays how John Rambo tries to adapt to society after coming back from Vietnam, only to find that nobody understands him. He is arrested for vagrancy, followed by mistreatment from the police officers. The film gives us the impression that Vietnam veterans were not understood and cared for in the US after the war. In 1989 *Born on the 4th of July* was released, the biographical film about Ron Kovic who became paralyzed in Vietnam and becomes an anti-war activist.

Another film that is worth mentioning in this category is *Top Gun* (1986). The film was seen by many as a recruitment tool for the US Air Force. The special effects and the action scenes were seen as the most exciting to date. The other scenes were seen as dull and uninteresting. Nevertheless, the film was a massive success, with an estimated budget of $15 million and a gross of approximately $176 million. According to Barry London who was head of distribution for Paramount Pictures, the film worked in several different levels. He argued that some of the film's popularity could be credited to the move towards conservatism in America at the time. Because of soaring negativity toward the US in the rest of the world patriotism became a natural reaction.[79] London did have a point. The Iran-Contra scandal and the increasing deficit caused the country to become more conservative, at least on the issue of economy. [80]

Studlar and Desser argue that the Vietnam War films in the 1980s consisted of two waves: (a) the right-wing films and (b) the more realistic films that were released in the last part of the 1980s. The realistic wave consisted of *Platoon* (1986), *Hamburger Hill* (1987) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). The other so-called right-wing films consist of *Uncommon Valor* (1983), *Missing in Action* (1984) and the "Rambo" series (1982, 1985, and 1988). These

---

[78] Dittmar, 102.

[79] Suid, 500.

[80] Boyer, 418.

right-wing films embrace the militaristic ideology of right wing policy but at the same time demonstrate distrust of the government. For instance, in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* John Rambo's mission is to initially take pictures of a camp where American soldier from the Vietnam War is held. Rambo insists on rescuing the soldiers, something the representative from the American government prohibit. He argues these soldiers are to be seen as missing in action, and will not be rescued because the government refuses to appropriate money for the mission, and in order to maintain international relations.[81] This was seen as critic against the government's economic treatment of the Vietnam veterans. This tendency is in contrast to the combat films from the 1940s. These films portrayed the policy of the administration as right and just. Any distrust that is shown in these films is usually focused towards the officers. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) the soldiers are dissatisfied with the treatment they get from Sergeant Stryker (John Wayne), only to understand at the end of the film that he does this in order to make them survive the battle.

4.3 Saving Private Ryan

In terms of national memory both Spielberg and reviewers of *Ryan* position the Vietnam War and American representations of it as an implied factor when looking at later combat films. In other words we look at every combat film released after the Vietnam War in light of the Vietnam War.

Saving Private Ryan was released on July 24 1998. The film was a part of a new wave of combat films that focused on two different parts of World War II. *The Thin Red Line* (1998) focused on the battle of Guadalcanal attempting to keep the Japanese army from conquering the Pacific Sea. This film focused on the hellish nightmare war can be, and put less emphasis on patriotism than *Ryan* did. Nevertheless, it is an important film to mention when looking at this period. I will discuss this film later in this segment.

Saving Private Ryan had an estimated budget of $70 million. The film earned during its opening weekend $30 million, and had by May 21 1999 grossed $216 million in the US alone. The film received outstanding reviews, was nominated for eleven Oscar awards and

---

[81] Dittmar, 105

won five.[82] 54 years had gone since the invasion of Normandy in 1944 but it seemed the world was not tired of another film about World War II. The aspect that many of the men who took part in the invasion of Normandy in 1944 were still alive at the time of release was important for the film's success. When the film was released it stirred up memories in the many veterans that were still alive at the time. I myself remember interviews with a War veteran from Norway who had participated in the invasion, saying that he started crying when he saw the beginning of the film.

Steven Spielberg who directed *Saving Private Ryan* had earlier in 1993 directed and produced *Schindler's List*, a film about a German businessman who employed Jewish prisoners in his factories and rescued many of them from death. There is a link between these two films in the way that they portray World War II in contrasting ways. *Schindler's List* portrays all the gruesome actions that were done by the Nazi regime, while *Saving Private Ryan* is a film that portrays the glorious, and at the same time horrific actions on the battle field that was necessary to American victory over the Nazis. Both films urge the audience to remember the war, but at the same time there is a difference. The main difference is that *Saving Private Ryan* is trying to make the audience forget the Vietnam War. The film takes the spotlight off the lost war in Vietnam and focuses instead on World War II. The goal of this is to make the audience forget the "bad" war and remember the "good" war. It is important to acknowledge the fact that Vietnam was a war the US lost, while World War II was a victory. *Saving Private Ryan* presents redemption by remembering the time before the social and political upheavals that dominated the 1960s and 1970s.[83]

4.4 World War II combat film conventions

In order to identify the known parameters that signify a combat film I have again chosen to use Jeanine Basinger's book about World War II combat films. As in the other films it is important to look at the introduction. The beginning of *Saving Private Ryan* harkens back to World War II combat films of the 1940 and 1950s. The first picture we see in *Ryan* is the

---

[82] Awards to Saving Private Ryan: http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0120815/awards, read April 15, 2009.

[83] Owen, 260

faded picture of the American flag hanging on the flagpole. This is in my opinion a version of the theme of saluting the soldiers who fought in WWII. It is in this context interesting to see the use of color in this scene. The colors of the flag are faded; a feature that emphasizes that World War II took place over fifty years ago. This image is repeated in the last scene of the film, telling the audience that even though the war happened fifty years ago it is important to remember what these men did in order to prevent the world from being taken over by the Nazi regime.

In the next scene we see an old man on the American funeral grounds in France. We later learn that this is Private Ryan, the character the film revolves around. He breaks down in front of a grave, whereby his family comes to his aid. These two scenes combined are important in the context of the many families who were influenced by the war, and why it is important to remember the war. Another central element of the combat film genre is the undertaking of a military objective. In the case of *Ryan* the objective is in the beginning to land on the beach in Normandy. As the story unfolds the soldiers receive the prestige mission from the military command to find one soldier and bring him back home. These conventions are consistent with other World War II combat films and therefore confirm my argument that *Saving Private Ryan* is tied to the patriotic combat film tradition of the post-World War II-era.

Saving Private Ryan is a film about the American contribution to the invasion of Normandy in the summer of 1944. Tom Hanks plays the part of Captain John H. Miller who, after he has lead his men during the Omaha beachhead assault, gets a mission to bring back one soldier who is dropped somewhere in the French countryside. General George C. Marshall discovers that the soldier's brothers have been killed under different circumstances during the war. Marshall decides that Private Ryan will be rescued and sent back home. When Captain Miller gets the mission the soldiers under his command do not understand why they are sent to save one man when they all would be set in danger because of this. Under several circumstances Captain Miller's command is put to the test, including a situation where several of the soldiers are on the brink of mutiny against their commanding officer because of the nature of the mission. When they finally find Private Ryan, he refuses to go with the squad back, realizing that if he does so he will leave the only brothers he has left; the men in his squad (Fig.4).

Figure 4: Private Ryan (Matt Damon) on the right, arguing that he should remain on the battlefield amongst the only brothers he has left. The scene projects the notion of brotherhood within the army, thus promoting the idea of military ideals.

The discussion of whether *Saving Private Ryan* is an antiwar or pro-war film is interesting to look at because, in my opinion, the film addresses both notions. On one hand, the film depicts war as inherently evil and gruesome. This is already shown to the audience from the beginning of the film, where we take part in the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. The visual form of the introduction is set in the first person, which makes us realize what the soldiers on the French beaches went through. The scene starts onboard the landing vessels where we see the soldiers stand trying to prepare themselves for going ashore. Some of them vomit, while others pray. We are briefly introduced to some of the main characters: Captain John H. Miller (Tom Hanks), Sergeant Mike Horvath (Tom Sizemore) and Private Daniel Jackson (Barry Pepper). These characters will prove significant later in the film. Two of these characters are veteran fighters, something we learn in different ways. Captain Miller's hands shake uncontrollably, a reaction we can assume comes from earlier missions. Sergeant Horvath is portrayed as more controlled. Private Jackson is unlike the other soldiers completely calm, kissing the cross around his neck. Immediately after opening the doors of the landing vessels, the soldiers in the first line are shot to death by German machineguns. The visuals are stunning and horrifying, enhanced by the use of hand held cameras. The

combination of filming and sound enhances the gruesome setting, where the only way to survive is to move onto the beach, even closer to enemy fire. When enemy mortar fire hits close to Captain Miller, he becomes shell-shocked. The audience is set in the first person perspective and in this way we "experience" how the situation is like. The camera goes into slow motion and we see soldiers trying to find cover, another soldier going around in shock looking for his missing arm, and others who becomes engulfed in flames. When Miller regains control he is contacted by Sergeant Horvath, and the scene continues.

The first 20 minutes of the film is extremely graphic, underlining Spielberg's attempt to portray the landing on Omaha Beach. One can ask whether this amount of violence on film was necessary to portray the landing on the beach. Other films have been made about the invasion without using excessive violence to make a point. Lawrence H. Suid speculates as to whether Spielberg used violence to attract viewers to the film. The audience of the 1990s was more used to violence on film and therefore Spielberg had no choice but to outdo other filmmakers.[84] The argument is valid but the issue is a bit more complex than Suid argues. One has to recognize that the violence on the actual invasion no doubt was horrific, and Spielberg's intentions were to recreate the situation the soldiers experienced. In this context it is interesting to look at *The Thin Red Line* (1998) directed by Terrence Malick. The use of realism and violence is prominent in the film. *The Thin Red Line*, together with *Saving Private Ryan*, uses violence as an effect to underline how terrible World War II was. *The Thin Red Line* is on the other hand a very different World War II film compared to *Saving Private Ryan*. Where the latter film has a stronger focus on the large picture of why they fought the war, *The Thin Red Line* is more focused on the insanity and the chaos of war. The film resembles more the combat films of the 1970s where the anti-war sentiments were strong. Malick's portrayal of how soldiers turn insane because of the massive presence of death and destruction is overwhelming. The resemblance to *Apocalypse Now* is striking in this regard. *Apocalypse Now* portrayed the awfulness and horror of the Vietnam War, *The Thin Red Line* does the same about the war in the Pacific. The soldiers experience horrific scenes, where they are surrounded by death, while they are pushed around by brutal officers. Any moral ambiguity (a balance between good and evil) that usually is present in combat films is absent in *The Thin Red Line*.

---

[84] Suid, 628.

Looking at the first twenty minutes of *Saving Private Ryan* is no doubt an example of how gruesome battle is. Moral ambiguity is not visible in this section of the film. But, as the film goes on, we understand that the film is telling the story of why this war was fought. The underlying reason is of course opposing Hitler's Nazi regime against laying the world under his feet. The main reason to fight the war for the men in the film is ultimately to go home to their families and "earn" their lives, to quote Tom Hanks' final line. This reason is tied to the beginning of the film where we see General Marshall quote a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to a woman who lost her sons in the Civil War. The letter expresses grief over the loss the woman has undergone, while it honors the important cause her sons have fought for: "We pray that our heavenly father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom"[85] The letter does in other words acknowledge that sacrifices must be made in order to win such a war, and while the death of family members is hurtful it is important to remember the reason why they died: to rid the world of the evil powers that threatened the world.

4.5 Character analyses

There are several important characters in the film. We recognize the type of characters from other World War II and Vietnam combat films. The main character, Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks, is portrayed as a character with many sides. He is on the one hand, an officer who is marked by the terrors of war, visible in his trembling hand, a feature he tries to hide from the soldiers under his command. At one point he breaks down in tears, also something he tries to prevent his fellow men to see. It is clear that he tries to divide the private person from the soldier. He is mythologized by the soldiers in his squad because they do not know anything about him. When he finally tells them that he is a school teacher they realize that he is in fact as much human as they are. This aspect of the story is consistent with Basinger's conventions of combat films: "Conflict breaks out within the group itself. It is resolved through the external conflict brought down upon them"[86] Captain Miller solves the conflict

---

[85] Owen, *270.*

[86] Basinger, 69.

by explaining to his soldiers that the only way to get home from the war is by accomplishing their mission:

> Sometimes I wonder if I've changed so much my wife is even going to recognize me, whenever it is that I get back to her. And how I'll ever be able to tell her about days like today. Ah, Ryan. I don't know anything about Ryan. I don't care. The man means nothing to me. It's just a name. But if... You know if going to Rumelle and finding him so that he can go home. If that earns me the right to get back to my wife, then that's my mission.[87]

Captain Miller explains in this way Spielberg's argument that war becomes a fight that is fought only to stay alive; the main mission of freeing the world from the Nazi regime becomes a trivial detail. In this way he is able to convince the soldiers to continue the mission.

Corporal Upham (Jeremy Davies) is a corporal who is included in the squad because of his skills in German. He is later in the film portrayed as a moral ethically righteous person, who argues against killing a surrendered German soldier. Nonetheless, in the end of the film he is portrayed as a coward who is unable to save his fellow soldier on the squad from the German soldier he saved from execution. Private Reiben is a character in stark contrast to Corporal Upham. He is a stereotyped character who is in opposition to his superiors, and is from Brooklyn. This character is a generic character that is repeated throughout combat films, both in World War II and Vietnam combat films. The whole of the United States is usually present in varying degrees, but the characters from Brooklyn are always present. Jeanine Basinger tells us: "In the war film, Brooklyn is a state unto itself, and is almost present one way or another."[88] I argue that the character is generic because it is a feature that is repeated throughout the pro-war film tradition. This is significant because it is verification of *Saving Private Ryan*'s use of classic World War II combat features. It is reasonable to argue that *Ryan* has more in common with classic World War II combat films than combat films released in the same time.

---

[87] Passage taken from *Saving Private Ryan.*

[88] Basinger, 68.

Another character important in order to shed light on the issue of militarism in the film is Private Jackson. He is the sniper of the team, and is deeply religious: "God gave me a special gift, made me a fine instrument of warfare."[89] He is true to his officers up to the point where a German prisoner is set free instead of shot. He is, like the majority of the group, in the concept of "eye for an eye", that when Medic Irwin Wade dies, it is only just to take the life of an enemy in order to reestablish balance of power, so to speak.

Leo Cawley argues, as referred to in the second chapter that a "doctrine of restrained ferocity" is in place in later combat films. This means that as opposed to early World War II films later films about this war show more violence from the American's side than earlier. We can see this in this chapter's main film example; *Saving Private Ryan.* Early in the film after the soldiers have landed on the French beaches American soldiers executes a group of German soldiers, seemingly just because they can.

The director of the film, Steven Spielberg argued that in one way *Saving Private Ryan* could be seen as a morality play. A morality play is defined as a drama where the main characters inhabit certain qualities that enhance the moral lesson. In many ways this analysis is correct because it asks the question of whether it is proper use of force to save a group of eight men in order to save the life of one man. This question is asked many times in the film by different characters. The dilemma is present during the film from beginning to end. In my opinion it is a plot twist that indirectly questions the necessity of war. The morality play that is played out in the film is asking the question of why war is necessary. I argue that the mission of saving Private Ryan is a symbolic act that fosters the nostalgia for military ideals.

Another important aspect with this part of the plot is that the officers in the squad are also negative to the mission. At one point in the film Captain Miller discusses the mission with his Sergeant: "This Ryan better be worth it. He'd better go home and cure some disease or invent a longer-lasting light bulb or something. 'Cause the truth is, I wouldn't trade 10 Ryans for one Vecchio or one Caparzo."

The two names mentioned in this quote were soldiers that Miller had lost in earlier missions and underlines the notion that Miller had no understanding of the mission he was ordered to do. Nevertheless, he follows orders, like a soldier should, thereby preserving the military

[89] Quote taken from *Saving Private Ryan.*

chain of command. The chain of command is also referred to later in the film where Private Reiben wonders if Captain Miller sometimes "gripes" (i.e. complains). He tells the Reiben that he gripes to his commanding officers and never to the soldiers under his own command.

4.6 Militarism in Saving Private Ryan

Chenoy defines militarism as "a phenomenon where military values, such as the need for force to assert power; the necessity of gender differentiation and hierarchy, dominate society …all the institutions of society are saturated with violence and ideas of combat, battle fitness, martyrdom, victory, defeat, heroes and traitors and the 'with us' or 'against us' syndrome."[90] In *Saving Private Ryan* martyrdom is shown through the deaths of Private Jackson who is the sniper of the team, and Captain Miller himself. Corporal Upham is in this context the traitor who defends the German soldier from execution and in the final battle is unable to save a fellow soldier from the same situation. Private Jackson on the other hand, is a true martyr, dying for the cause he believes in. Captain Miller dies, saying to Private Ryan that he should "earn this"; a line that tells us Miller dies in order to save Ryan, hereby becoming the martyr in Chenoy's definition.

In the ways discussed in this chapter I therefore argue that *Saving Private Ryan* rebuilds militarism through projecting the issue on film. The definitive morale in the film is that war is hell, and there is no place like home. But the necessity of the war is present in order to deserve to go home. Champenois argues that militarism is a term used about nations that go against the values of democracy. Andrew J. Bacevich argues that "[A]mericans have come to define the nation's strength and well-being in terms of military preparedness, military action, and the fostering of (or nostalgia for) military ideals."[91] This argument is valid when we look at *Saving Private Ryan.* The film is a good example of a narrative that fosters the nostalgia for military ideals. Although it shows us that war is hell it also argues that war is sometimes necessary in order to maintain a way of life that is desirable.

---

[90] Champenois, 148.

[91] Bacevich, 2.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analyzed four combat films that have portrayed American military forces in two different wars, World War II and the Vietnam War, by focusing on four representative films: *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *The Green Berets* (1968), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). I chose to look at these films because they depict World War II and Vietnam and the difference between these two wars. The depictions in the films are vital to understanding how the two wars were fought, and consequently why the films were made and how they were received.

These films reflect respectively positive or negative tendencies in American society as played out in American history. I argue that the combat films used as examples in this thesis are illustrations of how the representation of war in film has changed according to how the wars have been received by the American people. I have simultaneously analyzed how audience has been influenced by political decisions carried out by the government. As a part of the political decisions I have analyzed how militarism has influenced American society and consequently the message of the films.

A central issue I have dealt with in this thesis is militarism. The term describes a process where a society is focused on the use of military symbolism and where military ideals are seen as an asset. Militarism, or militaristic sentiment, was exploited by the U.S. federal government during and after World War II. Accentuating the heroism American soldiers performed during the war and singing the praises of martial values, helped maintain support for the enormous war effort. During the Vietnam War the government tried to rely on militarism again, but it failed. Part of the reason for this was that World War II was a war in which the enemy was clearly identified and the objective of the war was clearly stated. Consequently, during and after World War II militarism in the American society was most visible and accepted. World War II has also been called "the good war" or "the last good war". The term implies that the government succeeded in using militarism as an instrument to preserve support during World War II, but failed when the same method was attempted in later wars.

By contrast, Vietnam was a guerilla war with an unclear objective; this caused mistrust to rise within the American society. The years that followed the war became a time filled with corruption and social unrest, partly caused by the Vietnam War. Because of the unusual

warfare in Vietnam and the growing discontent in the United States the government's attempt to use militaristic spirit backfired and the call for a change in foreign policy gathered momentum.

The extent to which the government could rely on militarism or a militaristic spirit in the American people is evident in the difference between the depictions of the main enemies during World War II. It was necessary to discuss this because the wars fought against Japan and Germany was two very different wars. First, the "sneak attack" on Pearl Harbor took the Americans by surprise, and was the most important reason why the United States went to war. Because of broad cultural differences Japan was seen in many ways as a more terrifying and inhuman enemy. The use of suicide bombers made the war in the Pacific an even more terrible reality for the Americans. These factors made the propaganda against the Japanese forces a reason to depict the Japanese population as monstrous. The exercise of will the Japanese soldiers showed when participating in battle was something unfamiliar and frightening. The significance of these issues implied that the propaganda had the effect of raising the fighting spirit of the American people, hence allowing the militaristic spirit to rise. The same militaristic spirit is depicted in Sands of Iwo Jima where the audience is shown the brutality of the Japanese army.

The Sands of Iwo Jima was used as an example of a World War II film that depicts the American effort in fighting the Japanese forces on the island of Iwo Jima. The film displays the patriotism that existed in the post-war years, a patriotism that was stimulated by the successful propaganda machine in the United States, an issue I dealt with when debating the different portrayal of the enemy.

By contrast films that portrayed the Vietnam War were sharply divided into pro-war film and anti-war camps as represented by *The Green Berets* and *Apocalypse Now* (1978) respectively. *The Green Berets* used the same motifs as in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, but with less luck. In 1968 these conventions had become so old fashion that they were out of place. Not only was the film outdated in a way, it was also released in the worst possible time for a pro-war film. By that time the majority of the American people thought that the United States should withdraw from the war but the producers of the film stood firm and supported the government's decision through this time.

Apocalypse Now was a film that I argued was more in agreement with the mood of the American society of the late 1960s and 1970s than *The Green Berets*. It was a film that touched on feelings that many Americans felt about the Vietnam War. The mission that the main character is commanded to carry out, seems as futile as the war itself, hereby emphasizing the meaningless of the war itself. The main character is depicted as scarred and emotionally ruined by war, which accentuates the pointlessness of the war. The fact that the film was released four years after the end of the war is an indication of the wounds the war had caused, and the need for reflection on the war. The main character can be seen as a personification of this pain. This emphasizes the feeling of hopelessness and the opposition against militarism that dominated the post-Vietnam period.

Though it seems clear from my analysis (in Chapter 2) that a full-blown anti-war tradition does not exist in American cinema waves of anti-war films produced in Hollywood reappear from time to time. This shows that throughout 20th century American history, militaristic values often face opposition from and sometimes rejection from the public.

It seems to me that the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s played an important role on how film was made. During this period the tendency to market films as products of independent film makers created a notion where filmmakers were given freedom to create films without interference from the film companies. This is reflected through the anti-war film movement in the 1970s. The group of directors that was a part of "the New Hollywood", who stood for the majority of the anti-war films, sympathized with the counterculture and their opinions, and became influenced by their views rather than the opinions of the American administration.

The Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal caused the American people to stop believing in the politicians and this was reflected in a shift in American culture. Furthermore, the Cold War was still going strong and this combination led to a series of films that was suspicious of government and authorities in general. Towards the end of the 1970s Hollywood started to make films that took a stand against the actions done in Vietnam. *Apocalypse Now* was one of the most anticipated films in the end of the 1970s. This was partly because of Francis Ford Coppola's work on *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), but also because of the American people needed a closure on the Vietnam War.

The events of the 1970s were hardly the last word, however. By the 1980s the reconstruction of the pro-war film began. Stimulated by Ronald Reagan's emphasis on the military and the Cold War, it keyed into American society's attachment to the military as an institution. The series of *Rambo*-films that was released in the 1980s recalled American belief in military heroes and at the same time provided an opportunity to forget the disastrous war in South East Asia. Susan Owen argued that this was especially performed in *Saving Private Ryan*, which was my last film example. *Saving Private Ryan* is an example of *cinematic jeremiad*, which means that the film laments the mistakes done in the past by looking back to World War II, a war that was successful. Owen argued that the lamentation was performed not only in film, but also in politics. In George W. H Bush's speech to the nation on the eve of the Gulf War he stated that "there will be no new Vietnam". In *Saving Private Ryan* the lament is shown through the use of classic World War II film conventions and classic World War II characters.

I argued in the introduction of this thesis that film is a valuable contribution to how Americans interpret and learn history. Militarism in any society is not a desirable element but sometimes it is inevitable. It is inevitable when a country is in the process of going to war that is widely believed to be necessary or inevitable. When Japan and Germany declared war on the United States it was necessary to produce more weapons and promote the need for support for the American troops that took part in the fighting. When the Vietnam War escalated it was necessary to do the same. The difference was that the Vietnam War was for many a war where the goal for the war was unclear and even unwarranted. The films I have analyzed in this thesis are examples of popular films that have shown that militarism has been a part of the American society at different times in history.

When I look back at the work done in this thesis I cannot help thinking that the movement between pro-war films to anti-war films and returning to pro-war films is a motion that is still going strong. The period between 1998 and up until today has been filled with films from both sides. After September 11, 2001 a surge of patriotic films was made, a tendency that enforces my argument that the film industry profits continues the tradition of pro-war films when the United States is part of the war. In contrast, when the war in Iraq was proven to be fought under false premises the film industry made films that were more critical to the war. This is therefore proof that the circulation of pro-war films and anti-war films continue. An essential finding in the context of the combat films is the distinction between the

productions of the pro-war films as opposed to the anti-war films. The anti-war films of the 1970s were produced by independent producers and directors. The counterculture and the transformation of the film industry gave the directors more power over their own projects, and therefore had fewer obligations to answer for a higher authority which greatly magnified their ability to reinforce anti-militarism in American society. On the basis of this argument I therefore suggest that the anti-war films of the 1970s were almost unique; the pro-war films made in earlier decades were in general more based on the combat film genre's convention and they therefore became more generic. After the transformation of the film industry gradually more power were given to the director. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* is a product of this transformation: It utilizes the power of the director to make a unique film while it upholds the genre conventions of the classic combat film.

Selected Bibliography

Books

Adair, Gilbert. *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket.* London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1989

Bacevich, Andrew J. *The New American Militarism*: *How Americans are seduced by war*. Oxford University Press, 2005

Basinger, Jeanine. *The World War II Combat Film*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003

Biskind, Peter. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007

Boyer, Paul S. *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1999

Burgoyne, Robert. *The Hollywood Historical Film*. Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2008

Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2007

Davis, Ronald L. *Duke: The Life and Image of John Wayne*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1998

Dittmar, Linda and Gene Michaud (ed.). *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. Rutgers University Press, 1990

Godbolt, James. *USA i vår tid - trekk frå nyare amerikansk historie*. Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1994.

Knudsen, Peter Øvig. *Blekingegadebanden: Den Danske Celle.* Gyldendal, 2007.

Maier, Pauline. *Inventing America: A History of the United States. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2003*

Quart, Leonard and Albert Auster. *American Film and Society Since 1945*. New York, Praeger Publishers, 1991

Ray, Robert B. *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930- 1980*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985

Regan, Tom (ed.) *Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Raleigh, McGraw-Hill, 1993

Robb, David L. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*. New York, Prometheus Books, 2004

Rosenstone, Robert A. *History on Film/Film on History*. London, Pearson Education Limited, 2006

Suid, Lawrence H. *Guts and Glory: The Making of the Military Image in Film*. Kentucky, the University Press of Kentucky, 2002

Willis, Garry, *John Wayne: The Politics of Celebrity*. London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1997

Articles

Champenois, Jasmine. "God Bless the Army?" in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7:1, 147-150

Lutz, Catherine. "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis" in *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 104, no.3, 2002: 723-7

Owen, Susan. "Memory, war and American Identity: Saving Private Ryan as Cinematic Jeremiad" in *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19:3, 249- 282

Web-pages

Anti-Japanese Propaganda Poster:
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/headovmetal/1759847780/in/set-72157602730833017/] Date accessed 09.04.23

Anti-German Propaganda poster:
[http://wpcontent.answers.com/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/77/Ww2_poster_oct0404.jpg/180px-Ww2_poster_oct0404.jpg] Date accessed 09.04.23

George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, Inaugural Address:
[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=1&year=1989&month=01] Date accessed 09.04.14

George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, Radio Address to the Nation on the Persian Gulf Crisis:
[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2596&year=1991&month=01] Date accessed 09.04.14

Info on John Wayne's film career: [http://pro.imdb.com/name/nm0000078/] Date accessed 08.08.25

New York Times, review of *The Green Berets:*
[http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?_r=1&res=990ce1d8163ae134bc4851dfb0668383679ede&scp=1&sq=The%20Green%20Berets&st=cse&oref=slogin] Date accessed 08.07.17

Poster for Woodstock Music Festival:
[http://www.solarnavigator.net/music/music_images/Woodstock_music_festival_poster.jpg] Date accessed 09.01.30

Roger Ebert website, review of *The Green Berets:*
[http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19680626/REVIEWS/806260301/1023] Date accessed 08.07.17

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Inaugural Address:
[http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12081a.htm] Date accessed 09.02.26

U. S. Constitution Online, "The American's Creed:

[http://www.usconstitution.net/creed.html] Date accessed 09.03.11

Film facts and box office statistics:

Awards given *Saving Private Ryan:* [http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0120815/awards] Date accessed 09.04.15

Box office statistics *Sands of Iwo Jima* [http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0041841/boxoffice] Date accessed 08.10.20

Box office statistics *Patton:* [http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0066206/boxoffice] Date accessed 09.05.06

Box office statistics *The Green Berets:* [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0063035/business] Date accessed 08.07.16

Box office statistics *Apocalypse Now:* [http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/boxoffice] Date accessed 08.12.09

Box office statistics *Apocalypse Now:*
[http://www.boxofficemojo.com/oscar/movies/?id=apocalypsenow.htm] Date accessed 08.12.09

Box Office Mojo, business statistics *Apocalypse Now:*
[http://www.boxofficemojo.com/oscar/movies/?id=apocalypsenow.htm] Date accessed 08.12.09

Release info on *The War, TV-Documentary by Ken Burns:*
[http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0996994/releaseinfo] Date accessed 08.11.24

Search done on films released portraying World War II between July 1968 and August 1979: [http://pro.imdb.com/search/run?query_id=1279762&view_sort=year&view_count=all] Date accessed 08.11.06

Quote from *Full Metal Jacket:* [http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0093058/quotes] Date accessed 08.07.10

Appendix A, Films and TV-series Mentioned

Alamo, The (US, John Wayne, 1960)

All Quiet on the Western Front (US, Lewis Milestone, 1930)

Battleship Potemkin, (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, Russia, Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1925)

Big Sleep, The (US, Howard Hawks, 1946)

Birth of a Nation, The (US, D. W Griffith, 1915)

Bonnie and Clyde (US, Arthur Penn, 1967)

Born on the Fourth of July (US, Oliver Stone, 1989)

Boys in Company C, The (US, Sidney J. Furie, 1978)

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, (US, George Roy Hill, 1969)

Coming Home, (US, Hal Ashby, 1978)

Deer Hunter, The (US, Michael Cimino, 1978)

Double Indemnity (US, Billy Wilder, 1944)

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, (US, Stanley Kubrick, 1964)

First Blood (US, Ted Kotcheff, 1982)

Flying Tigers, (US, David Miller, 1942)

Full Metal Jacket (US, Stanley Kubrick, 1987)

Godfather, The (US, Francis Ford Coppola, 1972)

Godfather: Part II, The (US, Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)

Go Tell the Spartans (US, Ted Post, 1978)

Hamburger Hill (US, John Irvin, 1987)

Hearts of the World (US, D. W. Griffith, 1918)

JFK (US, Oliver Stone, 1991)

Longest Day, The (US, Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki, 1962)

Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, The (US, John Ford, 1962)

Magnificent Seven, The (US, John Sturges, 1960)

Maltese Falcon, The (US, John Huston, 1941)

*M*A*S*H* (US, Robert Altman, 1970)

Midnight Cowboy (US, John Schlesinger, 1969)

Missing in Action (US, Joseph Zito, 1984)

Mother Machree (US, John Ford, 1928)

Only Angels Have Wings (US, Howard Hawks, 1939)

Paths of Glory (US, Stanley Kubrick, 1957)

Patton (US, Franklin J. Schaffner, 1970)

Platoon (US, Oliver Stone, 1986)

Rambo (US, Sylvester Stallone, 2008)

Rambo: First Blood Part II (US, George P. Cosmatos, 1985)

Rambo III (US, Peter Macdonald, 1988)

Rio Grande, (US, John Ford, 1950)

Roots (US, Marvin J. Chomsky, John Erman, David Greene, Gilbert Moses, 1977)

Schindler's List, (US, Steven Spielberg, 1993)

Sting, The (US, George Roy Hill, 1973)

Thin Red Line, The, (US, Terrence Malick, 1998)

Three Kings (US, David O. Russell, 1999)

Top Gun (US, Tony Scott, 1986)

Uncommon Valor (US, Ted Kotcheff, 1983)

Wake Island, (US, John Farrow, 1942)

War, The (US, Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, 2007)

Woodstock, (US, Michael Wadleigh, 1970)

Appendix B, Pictures used

Figure 1:

Still picture taken from *Sands of Iwo Jima* (US, Allan Dwan, 1949)

Figure 2:

Still Picture taken from *The Green Berets* (US, Ray Kellogg, John Wayne, 1968)

Figure 3:

Still picture taken from *Apocalypse Now Redux 2001* (US, Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

Figure 4:

Still picture taken from *Saving Private Ryan* (US, Steven Spielberg, 1998)

Appendix C, Film Facts

Sands of Iwo Jima

Directed by: Allan Dwan

Production country: US

Production year: 1949

Script: Harry Brown, James Edward Grant

Original music: Victor Young

Produced by: Edmund Grainger

Running time: 100 min

The Green Berets

Directed by: Ray Kellogg, John Wayne

Production country: US

Production year: 1968

Script: James Lee Barrett, Robin Moore

Original music: Miklós Rózsa

Produced by: Michael Wayne

Running time: 141 min

Apocalypse Now Redux (2001)

Directed by: Francis Ford Coppola

Production country: US

Production year: 1979 (Redux version 2001)

Script: John Milius, Francis Ford Coppola

Original music: Carmine Coppola, Francis Ford Coppola

Produced by: Francis Ford Coppola, (Redux version Kim Aubry)

Running time: 153 min (Redux version 202 min)

Saving Private Ryan

Directed by: Steven Spielberg

Production country: US

Production year: 1998

Script: Robert Rodat

Original music: John Williams

Produced by: Ian Bryce, Steven Spielberg

Running time: 170 min