

THE FACES OF WAR:
REPRESENTING WARRIOR ARCHETYPES, MASCULINITY, AND RACE
IN MODERN WAR FILMS

by
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The Faces of War: Representing Warrior Archetypes, Masculinity, and Race in Modern War Films

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This thesis examines examples of character archetypes in films of modern war. War films throughout the history of the genre have relied on a particular characterization of the American soldier/warrior to garner support for various war efforts, and to create and maintain a myth of America at war. Since the 1920s war films have met with considerable critical and commercial success. The representation of soldiers fighting for the nation was most consistently defined in the post-war years following World War II. Decades of filmmaking established American soldiers as morally right. This trend continued through the Vietnam War as war continued to see representation on film. The films of contemporary war present character archetypes that contradict those of previous wars, particularly concerning soldiers and their enemies. Three attributes of a modern archetype appear: the revised soldier/warrior, the representation of American hegemonic masculinity, and the Arab “enemy.” Each of these aspects of modern war films critique, complicate or revise entirely the conventions established by previous decades of war films. New soldier/warrior archetypes subvert the myth that was promoted by soldier representation during and after World War II by presenting soldiers as morally ambiguous and ethically questionable. Masculinity has always been among cornerstones of the American military foundation, and these films often problematize the necessity of that construction of the military masculine. Finally, racial representation of America’s enemies has been reductive in order to differentiate between Americans and their enemies, whether or not they are white Europeans, Asians from the Far East, or Arab Middle Easterners. Films made since Operation Desert Shield/Storm offer characterizations of the enemy that are not so one-dimensional as the films of World War II and Vietnam, and sometimes draw parallels between the ideologies of Americans and American soldiers and the enemies that they fight. Films of modern American warfare are experiencing an aberrant reception history compared to the war films of the past, because these films refute the American National Myth concerning the U.S. military, its soldiers, and the wars that they fight.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

American war films have experienced a generally successful reception throughout film history domestically, even though the production of war films has seen periods of waxing and waning. American war films since Desert Storm appear as an aberration in the history of the genre, often experiencing mixed receptions of critical and/or commercial natures. I intend to argue that the mixed reception histories of modern war films is most directly related to the presentation of a warrior archetype in direct contradiction to the archetype set forth by the war films of the past. Additionally, some of these films fail to complicate representations of masculinity and race in such a way that is critically interesting to potential audiences.

With a history as long as that of cinema there have been multiple iterations of the representation of war. In 1898 filmmakers saw fit to make simple representations of the Spanish-American War for audiences making their way to the theater to see the latest invention of moving pictures. A quarter of a century later the first films appeared that began to focus on the experience of soldiers. Films like *The Big Parade* (King Vidor, 1925), *What Price Glory?* (Raoul Walsh, 1926), and *Wings* (William A. Wellman, 1927) attempted to show the soldier experience honestly, while also attempting to critique the nature of war. These early representations provided the beginnings of a national war myth complete with heroes and heroics characterized by a hegemonic masculinity.

The coming of World War II led to the most successful and formative years of the war film genre. Proof of the success of this particular subset of war films can be found in the sheer number of films made during the war years (at least 147 feature films were made between 1939

and 1945 concerning war) and well after.¹ Furthermore, World War II receives the most consistent and popular treatment in war film production. World War II Films have been made well into the late 20th century, like *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), and *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1998), and into the 21st century with films like Clint Eastwood's companion pieces from 2006: *Flags of Our Fathers*, and *Letters from Iwo Jima*. The layout of this sub-genre of the war film as established by Jeanine Basinger in her book *The World War II Combat Film: Analysis of a Genre* suggests a reliance on character representation, specifically with the creation of an American warrior archetype and an enemy in opposition to it, to contribute to the American cultural imagination of war.² With the films of this period we begin to see the insistence of this warrior archetype with an emphasis on morality, integrity, duty, selfless sacrifice, and masculinity. Such an insistence can be seen in films, such as *Bataan* (Tay Garnett, 1943), and *Destination Tokyo* (Delmer Daves, 1943).

The Korean War (June 1950 –July 1953) has seen little representation in films, because public opinion was not favorable for that war.³ So, World War II films continued to be the most popular format of the war film through the Korean War. Hollywood responded to emerging criticisms of war because of the war in Korea by producing films set during World War II, like *From Here to Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) and *Stalag 17* (Billy Wilder, 1953). Films like these criticized war, which was common public sentiment at the time, and the actions of soldiers during war. William Holden appears in *Stalag 17* as Sergeant J.J. Sefton, an anti-hero and an

¹ I have taken this figure of the number of features made between 1939 and 1945 from a list of titles that I cataloged as I did research for this paper.

² The “cultural imagination of war” is referred to by Guy Westwell's *Short Cuts: Introduction to Film Studies – War Cinema* to describe how Americans perceive war as it takes place far from home.

³ The Korean War is often referred to as “The Forgotten War” in journalistic accounts and in military and film scholarship.

opportunist, that profits from questionable ethics as his fellow P.O.W.s attempt to orchestrate sabotage and escape. Holden plays a similar character in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957). The appearance of these characters played by Holden continue to appear throughout the Korean War in order to complicate the American warrior archetype by illustrating that heroes take many shapes, such as war profiteers like Sefton.⁴ What doesn't change in this period is that heroes, whether they have ambiguous morals or questionable ethics, always make the transition back to the attributes common to the archetype as established by the films produced during World War II.

Public distaste for the war in Vietnam (November 1955 to April 1975), like the war in Korea, meant that few war films would be made in those war years. John Wayne's *The Green Berets* (1968) was the only feature fiction film released during the Vietnam War that was set in the war itself. Taking cues from strategies used in the Korean War, some filmmakers made films that avoided the negative public discourse of Vietnam by setting their films in Korea or World War II. Additionally, the time between a war's end and these film's productions provided a level of hindsight that contributed to notions of rehabilitation in the aftermath of war. *Pork Chop Hill* (Lewis Milestone, 1970) and *M*A*S*H* (Robert Altman, 1970) stand out as two of the best examples of war films produced during the Vietnam War. *Pork Chop Hill* adheres more closely to the established warrior archetype of the World War II film, but still attempts to provide a commentary on the sacrifices of war, and questions whether those sacrifices are necessary. *M*A*S*H* more overtly subverts the warrior archetypes of the past with warriors who concern themselves more with drinking, fornicating, and gambling than with the business of war. Films, like these, of the Korean War made during the Vietnam War also begin to introduce complicated

⁴ Another example of the American soldier opportunist can be seen in *Battle of the Bulge* (Ken Annakin, 1965) in the Sergeant Guffy character played by Telly Savalas.

presentations of military masculinity. *M*A*S*H* provides several different performances of masculinity. The soldiers depicted in that film understand masculinity to be different things. For example the characters of Hawkeye, Trapper, and Duke (Donald Sutherland, Elliot Gould, and Tom Skerritt, respectively) associate masculinity with a more relaxed lifestyle like perfecting martini recipes and fixing football games between different military units. Critiques of military masculinity's links to sexual performance, to public usefulness, personal efficiency, and competition become prominent in this era of war filmmaking.

Similarly to Korea, stories about the Vietnam didn't appear in film until the years after the war was over. When Hollywood began treating this subject it was in response to the recession of the war into memory when filmmakers were ready to look back on that turbulent time with reflection, grief, and reparation. The films in the post-Vietnam era focused less on individual or group heroics, and more on the affected psychology of soldiers that fought. *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) and *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986) depict the actions and events surrounding individual soldiers while providing unique introspection into their characters. Captain Ben Willard and Chris, respectively, share their experiences of trying to assimilate to the military's masculine ideal, and the audience witnesses the unraveling of their psyches as they either fail or miss their opportunities. Other films of the period dealt more closely with the veteran's return home from war. The emergence of PTSD in the postwar years introduced an entirely new aspect of war that filmmakers desired to recreate.⁵ In *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989) examined the continued role of traumatic memories and events on the lives of soldiers even after they have been removed from war. These films focused as much on their critiques of government and

⁵ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was first recognized as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980.

policy as they did on their representations of wounded and emasculated soldiers. Still, what these films lacked was a realistic portrayal of the enemy. The Vietnamese often appeared in the same manner that the Japanese did in films of the Pacific theater in the 1940s. As primitive savages with a nefarious cunning they are stripped of their agency. The enemies of America are often represented in extreme stereotypes. The Germans during World War II were represented as professional murderers often wearing the insignia of Hitler's SS, and the Koreans – and later the Vietnamese – were assigned the old stereotypes of the Japanese from World War II in order to establish the Communist threat in Southeast Asia.

In this thesis, I contend that the presentation of soldier archetypes changed drastically in the last ten years of the 20th century into the beginning of the 21st. The escalation of Operation Desert Shield to Desert Storm on January 17th, 1991 ushered in a new a new type of war film: the Gulf War film. The war only lasted 100 hours, so the fantastic true stories readily available for adaptation didn't exist in numbers as they did for previous wars, but some well-received films were still produced, such as *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996), and *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999). In these films it is clear that war films are increasingly representing the complications of masculinity and gender integration in the military, as well as the problematic representation of Arabs, an entire ethnic group that encompasses more than 265 million people from 22 countries.⁶

Throughout this history of war films the soldier is always represented to some degree as virtuous. Even soldiers that have behaved questionably achieve some kind of retribution. Those that don't are symbols of accusation against the government and military policy-makers for risking the lives of Americans for their own selfish goals. But, with the invasion of Afghanistan

⁶ These figures come from Jack G. Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* published in 2001. (pg. 2, note 4)

in 2001 after the September 11th attacks, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003, the depictions of American military personnel have taken a dramatic shift. American soldiers are often bereft of the heroic traits provided in the war films of the past. Those soldiers that are attributed some redeeming qualities rarely reach a satisfactory redemption in the end of their narratives. These refutations of the warrior archetype developed over decades of war films is often met with resistance from audiences, especially because these representations carry an underlying implication that the American people – the members of the audience – are in part responsible for the creation of those kinds of soldiers in the real world. For this reason audience responses are often poor for films of this type, like those that I examine in my first chapter of analysis. Conservative critics panned the films, claiming that they sympathized with the enemy insurgency in Iraq. And each film experienced considerably low domestic box office receipts – *Redacted* (Brian De Palma, 2007) and *Battle for Haditha* (Nick Broomfield, 2007) both experienced domestic box office returns of less than \$100 thousand, and *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007) only recouped its \$23 million budget because of worldwide ticket sales.⁷

Over the next three chapters my argument will take the following shape. In the first chapter of my analysis I argue that the construction of warrior archetypes in films about the war on terror results in an indifference in the audience, and poor reception. To do this I draw on the warrior archetype as it is presented in three films: *Redacted*, *Battle for Haditha*, and *In the Valley of Elah*. In *Redacted* the critical focus falls on lower enlisted men stationed in Iraq. Through my analysis of the way the film depicts these men I intend to show that they appear in contrast to the predominant soldier archetype created and established by the films of World War II and the Vietnam War. The audience becomes indifferent to this film, because the soldiers depicted

⁷ Information about budgets and grosses for each film can be found at <http://boxofficemojo.com>.

therein appear immoral and without conscience. *Battle for Haditha* also has lower enlisted men at its narrative center as it depicts the actions of a Marine platoon before during and after a massacre of dozens of innocent Iraqis. However, I argue that even though the actions of these enlisted men are foregrounded that the film intends to criticize the officer corps of the United States military, specifically through their absence and/or ineptitude in leading their soldiers. This undoes the work of past war films that introduced officers who were self-sacrificing and put the needs of their soldiers before their own. Similarly, in *In the Valley of Elah* the focus is turned from the soldiers depicted to the people of the United States who turn a blind eye to the traumatic experiences of soldiers brought on by war. As a veteran of the Vietnam War, the film's main character occupies a liminal space between soldiers and civilians. Through his representation as a composite of all Americans he serves as a critique of the American civilian tendency to turn a blind eye to the plight of soldiers that fight for them. Together these three films force their audiences to look at soldiers in a new, perhaps more realistic way, and examine their own understanding of soldiers and war. This implicates the audience in the atrocities committed by soldiers and the trauma soldiers go through, and perhaps the last thing an audience wishes to experience in the viewing of any film is individual or collective guilt for actions and events depicted therein.

In my second chapter I dissect the performance and display of masculinity as it manifests itself in American soldiers by analyzing two films: *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005), and *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008). *Jarhead*, which is set around Operation Desert Shield/Storm, depicts the boredom that soldiers, specifically a Marine named Anthony Swofford (the film is based on his memoir of the same title), experience during the months of stagnation that preceded the invasion of Iraq in 1991. Over the course of his training and during the waiting in the desert

Swofford, and his peers, must continually perform a hegemonic masculine ideal. Ultimately the film critiques the military's construction of masculinity, showing that masculine construct to be unnecessary and inefficient. All of the masculine posturing that takes place is revealed to be for naught as when war does come these men cannot exercise their "masculinity" in combat. This is in part because the war only lasted 4 days, but also because the technological superiority of the United States defeated Saddam and his army faster than the ground forces could. In *The Hurt Locker* I analyze the masculinity exhibited by its character Sergeant First Class William James. As a higher ranked non-commissioned officer in the Army the film suggests that his masculinity is not a conscious performance, but one of reflex or instinct established by military indoctrination. His constant attention to the instruments of war, his reckless nature, and his addiction to adrenaline-filled scenarios suggest that he has been successfully trained in the masculine pursuit desired by the United States Military. I say pursuit here, because these films often prove in the end that a "true" or "perfect" masculinity is unattainable.

In my chapter entitled "The Unknown Enemy" I switch focus from the representations of American soldiers to that of their enemies in two films: *Rules of Engagement* (William Friedkin, 2000), and *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999). In this chapter I present a taxonomy of Arab representation in the American war film that establishes three subset characterizations: the compliant Arab; the religious/fanatical Arab; and the complex/nuanced Arab. Those Arabs depicted in *Rules of Engagement*, an ideologically conservative film, are of the stereotypical religious/fanatical subset. The extreme stereotypes of these characters are sparingly used in the film, but effectually point to another villain in the film – a liberal politician bent on dismantling the military hierarchy and its values. This tactic has been heavily criticized for its inaccurate portrayal of Arabs, but I assert that these kinds of portrayals are somewhat necessary to

encourage the change exhibited by *Three Kings*. In *Three Kings*, in contrast, Americans appear more negatively than Arabs. To continue the establishment of my taxonomy this film presents the complex/nuanced Arab. Through this film's presentation of Arabs that challenge American soldiers in a non-threatening way, the Arab characters are given agency that was previously unknown in war films, or in any films for that matter. With that agency Americans and Arabs are forced to coexist peacefully. What's more is that they are able to do so willingly and successfully. In these two films opposite representations of Arabs there is a similar theme, and that is that Arabs often share many "American" ideals, such as ambition and liberty. These films promote a closer examination of the enemy who is ideologically opposed to America, and not "just Arab."

CHAPTER 2

THE NEW AMERICAN WARRIOR:

CHANGING ARCHETYPES IN AN ESTABLISHED GENRE

War films have had a long history of popularity, because of the warrior archetype's close relationship with national myth, especially in America.⁸ After World War II a mythology began to form surrounding the United States' role as a world power. Most strongly this myth promoted an idea of America and Americans as benevolent and right. The defeat of Nazi Germany and Japan seemed to signal the approval of God in America's interventions around the world. The narratives of war were central to asserting the moral righteousness of the nation as a whole, and war films played a significant role in disseminating that message.

The construction of a warrior archetype was key to the formation of the war film as a genre of American film, and it continues to shape the way audiences receive films with a narrative of war. A soldier, sailor, or airman's navigation of obstacles and traumas is central to the conventions of the genre. Portrayals of soldiers on film have always reaffirmed that the United States has been righteous in action, virtuous in its cause, and most importantly moral in its character. The soldiers depicted in the films of World War II perhaps best exemplify these traits, as seen in *Bataan* (Tay Garnett, 1943), *Battleground* (William A. Wellman, 1949), and *The Longest Day* (Darryl F. Zanuck, 1962), because they were needed to fight the fascism and imperialism of Germany and Japan, respectively. During Vietnam warrior identity underwent heavy scrutiny by the nation and the world after repeated scandals and atrocities, and a death toll

⁸ Later in my chapter entitled "The Unknown Enemy" I will refer to this myth as the Conservative Myth.

⁹ Refer to Straw: 2010, p. 92, Briley: 2009, p. 400, and Cashill: 2007, p. 6 for commentary on the similarities between *Redacted* and *Casualties of War*.

that was rising higher and higher. Afterwards films about Vietnam began to appear and the soldiers depicted within were given some redemption, like *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986), *Casualties of War* (Brian De Palma, 1989), or any of the “Rambo” series of films, as they were shown to be powerless in their roles in the war only following orders or doing whatever was necessary to survive. The films of the modern war (Desert Shield/Storm to the present) differ from earlier films about previous wars because they do not offer closure or redemption for those soldiers shown committing some of the worst violent acts. It is because of this that Laurie Calhoun suggests that “noble” warrior virtues are erroneously ascribed to soldiers today (Calhoun: 2011, p. 385).

Films have continued to become more complex as access to imagery and information from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has become so widespread that it is difficult to both create a “complete” or “accurate” representation of the war on terror, and to remain true to the conventions established over more than fifty years of filmmaking concerning the warrior’s identity. I intend to argue that this deviation from the standard convention that we continue to see in films about the war on terror is part of why audiences in large numbers are *not* seeing these movies. Warrior archetypes have shifted in American war films from one of honor to one of moral and ethical ambiguity. The films of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars often present American soldiers as vicious, immoral, and capable of unspeakable actions. They are often psycho- or sociopathic intent on exercising their advantage over a foreign, occupied people. They commit senseless acts of violence to include rape and murder with boredom as their motivation. Their advanced weaponry and technology is often rendered useless with the unorthodox warfare techniques of the insurgency in Iraq, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Frustrations and feelings of impotence drive them to behave like crazed sex and violence starved adolescents ignorant of the

consequences of disregarding the value of human life. Three films exemplify my argument that audiences are indifferent because of these newer films' treatments of the warrior identity:

Redacted (Brian De Palma, 2007), *Battle for Haditha* (Nick Broomfield, 2007), and *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007).

The American warrior archetype was conceived and solidified in the more than two decades of filming that took place during and after World War II. Soldiers were shown to be duty-bound, honorable, self-sacrificing and held human life in the highest regard. During this time the idea that soldiers were capable of brutal acts of violence against civilians was inconceivable. Soldiers in the films about Vietnam deviated from that standard of righteousness established in World War II. However, because most films about Vietnam were made after the war was over, the narratives of those films accepted those flaws as a part of the "rehabilitation" process that reflected on the war going on at the time. As Guy Westwell proposes, these narratives of return from the war in Vietnam recuperate American credibility (Westwell: 2006, 64). The films of Iraq and Afghanistan, partly because those wars have not reached their conclusions, do not have narratives of closure or rehabilitation, thus their soldier depictions are displeasing to audiences that have become accustomed to inspirational films of war.

These three films together suggest that no one is free from blame in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, or the crimes and atrocities committed as a part of those wars. In *Redacted* low-level soldiers are shown to be wholly at fault for their own actions. Officers are responsible for the actions of their subordinates, especially when those officers are absent from the battlefield in *Battle for Haditha*. And *In the Valley of Elah* removes the distance left between the audience and their indirect role in the Iraq War by openly associating complacency and indifference with guilt.

Conservatives have heavily criticized the “family” of three films that I have chosen. They have been labeled “bin Laden films” and “Iraq bad-apple films,” because their negative soldier portrayals have been interpreted as anti-American, pro-terrorist rhetoric (Hattenstone: 2008). This is interesting because the soldiers represented in these films resemble those seen in some films during the Vietnam War. *Redacted* is exemplary in this regard, because its director, Brian De Palma, also made *Casualties of War* (1989). In *Casualties* Michael J. Fox plays Eriksson, a soldier in Vietnam who witnesses his squad kidnap, rape, and murder a young Vietnamese girl. Eriksson cannot fail to report the actions, and because of his diligence his squad is punished for their crime. *Redacted* is an almost explicit remake except for two things: in *Casualties* the rape of the young Vietnamese girl takes place after a kidnapping and a forced march through the jungle; and the officers in *Casualties* are more explicitly interested in covering up the crime with Eriksson’s character being told by two officers in his chain of command to drop his inquiries.⁹

Redacted was originally meant to be a documentary about the rape and murder of a 14 year-old girl, Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi (named Farah in the film), and the murders of her family, but legal hurdles forced De Palma use “documentary techniques” to tell this “fictionalized tale” (Baumgarten: 2008). The film itself is split into “pastiche” that intend to privilege the audience with primary source accounts of Alpha company’s activities in Samarra, Iraq.¹⁰ There are ten instances of these pastiches supplied by De Palma. There are the video diary

⁹ Refer to Straw: 2010, p. 92, Briley: 2009, p. 400, and Cashill: 2007, p. 6 for commentary on the similarities between *Redacted* and *Casualties of War*.

¹⁰ This term is defined by Richard Dyer (2007) in *Pastiche* and used by Mark Straw to describe how the different segments of the film expound upon the nature of war and invoke the formats that they exist in, i.e. first person video allows us to witness “first-hand” these events while also acknowledging the role that first-person video-taking has played in the storytelling of the war on terror on a larger scale. And, the actual events depicted in this film occurred in Al-Mahmudiyah, Iraq (Straw, 2010, p. 92).

segments of Salazar (Izzy Diaz), *Barrage* – a faux French documentary of American military checkpoint procedures -- Arabic (seemingly meant to mimic Al Jazeera) and European news broadcasts, Security camera footage, footage shot with an embedded journalist, crude videos posted to an Islamist extremist web site, YouTube and other video blog posts, two-way video chat a la Skype, the depositions of soldiers B.B. Rush (Daniel Stewart Sherman) and Reno Flake (Patrick Carroll), and the recording of soldier Lawyer McCoy's (Rob Devaney) homecoming. This long list makes clear De Palma's desire to depict how fractious any representation of the war is destined to be with American culture today getting as much information as possible as quickly as possible from the internet and other media sources. The pastiches structuring *Redacted* suggests two things to which audiences might react negatively. Firstly, the "intimate" nature of some of the video footage (the hidden and security camera recordings) imply that the images seen are unbridled and uncensored, so all of the occurrences of violence seem actual. This contributes to my more central argument that the warrior archetype has changed from one of honor to one of questionable morals and ethics. And secondly, with the references to media that every member of the audience consumes several times every day, the film implicates the audience in what is happening on screen. By witnessing the events as Salazar does from behind his camera the audience is complicit in what takes place.

What is at stake in this film and the others, whose examinations follow, is whether or not the American soldiers depicted achieve redemption. McCoy's recounting of his experience during his welcome home suggests that he has satisfied his conscience by doing the right thing and seeing that Rush and Flake were brought to justice. But, unlike *Casualties of War*, this film does not offer closure to the audience. McCoy's tears melodramatically show that he still feels a powerful guilt over not doing more to stop the crime as it was taking place. McCoy most closely

resembles Eriksson from *Casualties of War* upon his return from service, as both men are physically unharmed, but still intensely scarred by their experiences. The bridging of time in the end of *Casualties* allows for some narrative closure and redemption on behalf of Eriksson. McCoy does not experience such redemption. He is only left with the guilt and tears of his inaction. He can only feel shame and leave the audience devastated for their involvement in what they've just seen.

In the highly stylized French faux documentary-within-a-film entitled *Barrage* the viewer is given a vital piece of information that these soldiers were probably never given: more than half of the Iraqi population is illiterate.¹¹ A later scene will also reveal to the audience that Iraqis who approach the checkpoints also misinterpret hand signals, so when soldiers signal "stop" the Iraqis sometimes misinterpret them to mean "go." The ineffectiveness of signs printed in English and Arabic and less than universal hand signals eventually results in the most extreme of circumstances when Flake must shoot at a car that is speeding through the checkpoint. In Flake's attempt to disable the vehicle he inadvertently kills a woman whose husband is driving her to the hospital to deliver their child.¹² This ultimately shows how powerless Americans are in affecting their own situations, and how "under immense psychological pressure" they act out by performing their duties in disrespectful and aggressive ways. How the soldiers act out appears less innocent as the film progresses and in one scene, from the *Barrage* pastiche, Rush gropes at

¹¹ *Barrage* for the purposes of this film is translated from the French into checkpoint, not dam.

¹² Rules of Engagement differ from unit to unit, but it is unlikely that any unit would have escalated immediately to killing the driver of a vehicle for not stopping at a checkpoint. It is more likely that there would have been at least two more steps to their operating procedure: a warning shot fired at the side of the road; then firing at the engine block to disable the vehicle; then shooting to kill the driver.

a teenage girl – the girl that Rush and Flake eventually rape and murder – on her way to school under the auspices of searching her for weapons or the like.

De Palma removes the Iraqis from his film except for in a few key moments, like the Arabic newscasts from the hospital where the man is mourning the recent death of his pregnant wife and unborn son, or the interview with Farah's father after the rape and murders, where it is absolutely necessary, because he intends for us to focus on the Americans. In their positions of privilege typical of the war film genre the Americans appear to behave with less and less virtue, and with more and more immorality. The repeated sequences in the barracks with Salazar and his fellow soldiers reinforce this as continued exposure reveals seedy thoughts and psychotic ideas.

The repeated return to the soldiers in their barracks clearly establishes the newest iteration of the warrior archetype I am proposing. This is a warrior who is absent of the traits clearly set forth by the films of World War II and without the redemption or rehabilitation provided by the war films of Vietnam. These scenes “introduce” the audience to Rush and Flake as hyper-aggressive and hypersexual beings. On their deployment only one of these pathologies has the potential to be exercised as is seen in Flake's firing upon the Iraqi car and killing one of its passengers. The other lies dormant, repressed and unsatisfied. Rush and Flake can only fulfill their desires by committing violence. We shall see that that violence takes several forms, and is not solely directed at enemy Iraqis, but the civilian population as well as fellow soldiers inside of Alpha Company. While the ready outlet for aggression is present here the absence of women in an all-male infantry unit makes the opportunity for sexual release rare, if not nonexistent.¹³

¹³ The military's General Order No. 1 for deployed soldiers prohibits certain behaviors, like sex between soldiers, and between soldiers and civilians. See Cucolo III (2009) for a complete outlining of these soldier restrictions.

It is in one of these scenes as well that Flake is established as an immoral, cold-blooded killer. When asked what it was like to “(blow) away his first civilian” Flake clumsily brags not only about his proficiency at “making the introductions” between the Iraqis and Death, but also about his complete lack of remorse or guilt at taking an innocent life. He hides behind the rules of engagement, but this is certainly not a sufficient justification of his actions. McCoy reaffirms this as he accuses Flake, and Rush who comes to Flake’s defense, of being inhuman for relishing in the killing of an innocent woman and her unborn child.

In a section of Salazar’s video diary an improvised explosive device (IED) kills Master Sergeant Sweet (Ty Jones), one of Alpha Company’s senior non-commissioned officers and a mentor to these men. His death is bookended by insurgent videos showing first the placement of the IED that kills him in night-vision, then the explosion itself. This sequence showing the perspectives of the insurgent video cameras and Salazar’s is important for several reasons. First, in the moments before his death, Sweet’s treatment of Rush symbolizes the constant deconstruction of the soldier’s individual identity by the military itself and its hierarchies even after basic training. This constant abuse of subordinates by those in positions like MSG Sweet contributes to the loss of a moral sense of responsibility in soldiers like Rush and Flake. Sweet’s examples of excellence and experience reinforce in their minds that abuse of power is acceptable. So, because they are in a position of power over the Iraqi people, they rationalize the abuse of that power. Given this we should then look at the bookends of Sweet’s death. Because Sweet has been established as a gruff superior who perpetuates an immoral attitude in the military one could argue that the insurgent’s success at killing him serves as De Palma’s message of reforming the military, which operates to foster these attitudes without regulation. This sequence is most important because it is the tipping point for Flake and Rush. From this point on

these two soldiers become more vile and insidious in their actions. Their lust for vengeful violence can go unsatisfied no longer. Security camera footage shows the beginning of this downward spiral as Flake calls for the U.S. to “nuke (Iraq) and pave it over,” and “vaporize every last (Iraqi),” and Rush proclaims, “that there ain’t gonna be nothing left, but scorched fuckin’ earth.”

The soldiers’ disillusionment comes to a head as Flake and Rush plan to return to a recently raided Iraqi home and rape a girl who travels through Alpha Company’s checkpoint regularly. McCoy, Blix and Salazar are present while Flake and Rush’s plan develops, but it is unclear who, in the end will participate. Blix threatens to expose their plan, but is dissuaded by McCoy, who cannot believe that Flake and Rush are capable of what they are planning. Furthermore Flake grabs Blix by the crotch almost seductively to imply that Blix will not interfere with his and Rush’s opportunity for a violent and sexual release. Each soldier becomes complicit in this scene as Blix threatens, but cannot follow through with exposing the plan, and McCoy allows Flake and Rush to move forward believing that their own fears will overtake them before they can complete their “mission.” Salazar is the most willing to go along, because he believes the event will make his video diary documentary more interesting. McCoy reiterates this as the four men (Blix elects not to participate, but agrees not to expose them) prepare to leave the base in the middle of the night, “It’s a juicy story isn’t it? Our band of brothers losing their moral compass and trying to reap vengeance on a 15 year-old girl. It’s unbelievable.”

Salazar’s willingness is most interesting, because of its reflexive nature. He desires to create a more interesting film to get into film school, but there is also an attention drawn to his audience. Even though his character’s implied audience is a college admissions board, we are his actual audience. And, he believes that we want to see what is about to transpire. This desire of

the spectator that has been identified by Salazar is what Lynne Kirby refers to as the “*pleasurable sensual assault* (Straw’s emphasis)” in which viewers masochistically desire to be shamed as spectators (Straw: 2010, p. 95). While all of these soldiers are guilty for one reason or another for what happens, Salazar’s position among the guilty also implicates us as the audience in witnessing the events and doing nothing similarly to McCoy and Blix. Paradoxically the audience takes pleasure in the privilege of witnessing the events that unfold and the horrors of war that they represent while simultaneously experiencing a distaste for the implication that, as witnesses, they are also guilty for them.

Salazar attaches a “hidden” camera to his helmet to record the film’s climax to continue the thread of witnessing and the first person point of view afforded to the audience. In night-vision mode the sequence is reminiscent of earlier embedded journalist coverage also shot in the green-hued perspective. The links between the two scenes go further than just their presentation. In the earlier scene the Americans raid a house (it is the same house in both sequences) to gather information on possible insurgent threats. The soldiers “blindly” follow orders, detain Farah’s father (Suhail Abdel Hussein) and trash the house. The embedded journalist with them draws attention to their seemingly purposeless mission. Rush gathers papers with Arabic writing that he cannot read and declares them “evidence.” This scene of the fruitless raid on an Iraqi home is echoed in *Battle for Haditha* prior to that film’s massacre, and in *In the Valley of Elah* in one of Mike’s recovered video files. Night vision has become a stylistic necessity of the modern war film following its heavy use in the broadcast of Desert Storm/Shield. Ultimately the American abuses of power that are shown in the earlier scene with the embedded journalist foreshadow the deranged abuses in the latter one. The audience position is reconciled here somewhat as Salazar’s hidden camera allows them to take the place of the separate and objective journalist in

the earlier scene. However, that reconciliation is not complete as Salazar still is the intermediary and he is resolute in witnessing/exhibiting Rush and Flake's actions.

The film's indictment of the spectator is made more explicit in Salazar's experience after these criminal events. From this point on in the film he becomes the composite for all the members of the audience, because the audience has shared his viewing experience thus far in the film. Together Salazar and the audience feel powerless, or indifferent, to do anything about the unnecessary atrocities of war. He says in his psychological evaluation later in the film, "Just watching doesn't mean you're not part of it." This is an explicit accusation of himself and the audience for participating in the continuation of war and these kinds of crimes. The audience's merging with Salazar is pointed to in some of his final remarks to a military psychologist, "That's what everyone does, they just watch and they do nothing. Or they make a video for people to watch and they do nothing." These retrospective remarks of Salazar are interlaced with his own guilt and intend to evoke similar thoughts and feelings in the audience who witnessed and "did nothing" as the film depicted sexual violence, and as the Iraq war continued providing a means for these kinds of atrocities to occur.

The whole sequence is quite disturbing as the drunken Flake and Rush behave without restraint unaware that Salazar is filming them. The final image of Farah's face even in night vision is filled with sadness, horror, and powerlessness. This image of her face illustrates the film's peak depiction of American soldier immorality. The visceral response elicited by Farah's face creates an intense need of the audience to be removed as witnesses. Salazar too feels this need and rushes from the scene. The audience's distance is slowly reduced until this final moment as McCoy asks, "What happened in there?" Totally implicated in the events that have just occurred onscreen the audience cannot be sure of the boundaries between being a witness

and committing a crime, and the acceptability of seeing those crimes played out on film is suddenly under scrutiny.

It is this scene's questioning of the tacit approval given to the conservative government for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that the conservatives object to about this and the other "bin Laden films." The implication that all Americans are guilty in some way for the crimes against the Iraqi people insinuates that these wars began under false pretenses and is an attack on the conservative agenda. For the conservatives this kind of filmic rhetoric not only challenges the administration, but also takes the side of the Iraqi insurgents and the Taliban.

De Palma attempts to return to the format of his previous film *Casualties of War* in the rest of this film as McCoy and Salazar attempt to redeem themselves for lack of action leading up to and during the rape. The similarities between *Redacted* and *Casualties of War* are most overt here as McCoy and Salazar experience intense internal conflicts regarding what has happened and their involvement. McCoy and Eriksson experience similar resistance when they decide to report their fellow soldiers. In *Redacted* the credibility of McCoy's testimony is questioned and McCoy's own father advises him to bury his memories to avoid coming under personal attack. Eriksson's commanding officer, Captain Hill (Dale Dye), in *Casualties* offers Eriksson a transfer to avoid death threats from his former squad before recommending that he not pursue an investigation that will ruin a young man's life. The similarities between these two films are significant, because they assert De Palma's message that the Iraq War is a reiteration of the Vietnam War in which all the same mistakes are being made. All of this is shown in contrast to Flake and Rush's lack of guilt and remorse. Immediately after the crime Flake sleeps soundly

without a second thought to raping Farah, killing her and her family, and then burning the bodies.¹⁴

Redacted succeeds at presenting an interesting depiction of the worst stereotypes of an American soldier. What it lacks, however, is any representation of military brass responsible for the actions of their men. Lawyer McCoy, a Corporal, is the highest ranked soldier that the viewer has continued exposure to. In a war that has been widely criticized for the policies of government officials, with several scandals coming to light, it seems an injustice not to give those responsible at a higher level some sort of representation. Nick Broomfield's *Battle for Haditha* provides those representations.

It is my contention that the absence of officers in this film allows for the redirection of blame after the massacre occurs. This film, along with *Redacted* and others that minimize the appearance of officers, undoes the work of World War II films that valorize the officer corps up to more recent films like *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) and *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001). *Battle for Haditha* presents the story of a platoon of Marines, led by Corporal Ramirez (Eliot Ruiz), which massacred 24 Iraqi civilians – mostly the elderly, women, and children – after insurgents detonated an IED killing one of the Marines. The audience understands Ramirez and others in his platoon to be well-seasoned soldiers with a lot of experience in this theater of war. However, the organization of the military typically places the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of officers, so this film suggests that because no officers are present – in this film or in the events that unfold in *Redacted* – the officers of the film are responsible for the brutal murders that take place.

¹⁴ In the film references are made to Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi's burnt body. This is never explicit in the film outside references from the participating soldiers. De Palma means to link the film to the actual events on which it is based, where the soldiers raped Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi, killed her and her family, and then burned the bottom half of Abeer's body.

The history of the actual battle for Haditha is important context for the film. Ramirez (Eliot Ruiz) tells his squad early on that the previous unit deployed to that area found 119 IEDs along the roads, and all the insurgents previously operating in Fallujah had moved to Haditha where the Marine threat was lower and likelihood of taking American lives was higher. In his article “Road to Haditha” Bing West details the Marine movements and military policy decisions that resulted in the battle conditions in Haditha at the time of the massacre. Kilo Company, the unit at the center of the controversy that inspired this film, was spread thin along the Euphrates river valley from Haditha in the North to Fallujah in the South. Disagreements over the most effective way to fight the war consolidated these forces and moved them repeatedly to where the threat was perceived the largest. As a result Iraqi police and army forces ultimately failed to maintain order when American forces were elsewhere and were often publicly executed by insurgents. Jaded by the inconsistent level of support from the Americans, Iraqis soon became indifferent in aiding them in dismantling the insurgency (West: 2006).

Kilo Company had participated in successful cooperation with Iraqi military and police in the beginning of the war, so this new combat landscape was much different to them (West: 2006). Accustomed to Iraqis willing to cooperate, they perceived this new reluctance on behalf of the Iraqi people to be a wholesale conversion to support of the insurgency. There is an example of a similar conclusion drawn by Flake and Rush in *Redacted* when they claim that Farah and her family must have known about the placement and location of the explosive that killed Master Sergeant Sweet. To make clear to the audience that the Marines were not exclusively in danger text appears on the screen stating, “60 Marines killed in IED bomb attacks,” and “29 Iraqi Police Officers publicly executed by Al Qaeda in the football stadium.” Haditha was arguably one of the most dangerous places in Iraq at the time.

The narrative of Broomfield's film is driven by three intertwining stories. The first is of Marine Corporal Ramirez, who is driven to killing innocent Iraqis after a soldier he has pledged to protect is killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast. The second is a former Iraqi Republican Guard soldier, Ahmad (Falah al-Flayeh), who turns to insurgency after the dissolution of Saddam's army to support his family. The third is an Iraqi woman, Hiba (Yasmine Hanani), and her extended family trying to live as close to ordinary lives as possible under the U.S. military occupation. Together these individual stories help to retell the story of an actual event where U.S. Marines killed 24 Iraqi civilians after an IED explosion.

Even with the addition of storylines that prioritize the Iraqi experience, *Battle for Haditha* provides a more interior look into what the modern soldier experience is like. The staged talking head interviews in documentary style that begin the film give the Marines an opportunity to directly address the audience in a way that the Iraqi characters are not privileged to. These opening four interviews with Marines, the last of which is Ramirez's, informs the audience of the boredom and monotony of a military deployment, and makes clear the fear and uncertainty soldiers have of the "unknown" enemy. One soldier tells a story of an elderly woman that had an AK-47 hidden underneath the folds of her burka, who began "spraying" thus making herself a combatant. As in the Vietnam War it is difficult to discern enemies from civilians. Women, children, and the elderly often joined, or at least aided, the Viet Cong in their operations. To make matters worse there is no promise that a civilian encountered one day won't decide to join in the insurgency the next. In a shot during the Iraqi massacre, a previously docile Iraqi becomes hostile when the first Iraqis are shot and killed. He picks up his household AK-47 and begins firing at the Marines giving them cause to raid the village and kill even more Iraqis.

These interviews also provide insight into how American soldiers think of the Iraqis, insurgents and civilians.¹⁵ Ramirez's comments exhibit an ultimate hatred and disrespect for everything Iraqi as he communicates a popular analogy among soldiers: if the human body is taken to be a representation of the Earth then Iraq is its "giant butthole" waiting for a "shitstorm." Another soldier debases the Iraqis when he compares them to animals in the hunt. And, war is the ultimate form of hunting. This also alludes to the empowerment of soldiers in war to kill without repercussion, which is sadly an attractive quality of joining the military currently. The interviews all have an added authenticity because of Broomfield's background as a documentary filmmaker, and that the actors cast to play the 3rd Platoon, Kilo Company Marines were ex-Marines with service experience in Iraq.¹⁶ As Michael Brooke says in his review of the film for *Sight & Sound*, Broomfield gives his film "verisimilitude by casting non-professionals with near identical backgrounds to the real-life protagonists and letting them improvise dialogue in their native languages" (Brooke: 2008, p. 56).

In the events leading up to the IED explosion and the subsequent killing of Iraqi civilians the monotony of deployment highlighted in the opening is reiterated along with the everyday life for which many Iraqis strive. The Marines conduct close-quarters combat (tactics designed for urban combat) drills and uneventful patrols through Haditha, and Hiba makes preparations for a circumcision celebration with a young boy and another woman. There is an effort to reduce the distance that exists as part of the American psychology that Iraqis are backwards and very different from Americans. Surely their customs are foreign to U.S. viewers, but the focus on domesticity here allows us to identify with this different culture and forces us to relinquish

¹⁵ All of these "interviews" were improvised for the camera by the actors.

¹⁶ 3rd Battalion, Kilo Company, 3rd Platoon was the unit designation of the group of soldiers that allegedly committed the murders in Haditha, Iraq on November 19th, 2005.

judgmental ideas about the Iraqi people and the Arabic community more generally. The film tells us that Iraqis are not the harbingers of death that the Marines believe them to be. They are human beings going through life much like anyone else in the world. This domesticity will continue to be juxtaposed alongside scenes of Ahmad's violent attitudes in order to intensify the affect achieved by the deaths of Hiba's family later in the film.

In contrast to these representations of American Marines and Iraqi civilians are Ahmad and his young companion, Jafar (Oliver Bytrus). They work with the "foreign fighters" of Al Qaeda to plant an IED undetected on the side of a road often traveled by the Marines. What Ahmad and Jafar symbolize most clearly in their first appearances is the indeterminate presence of insurgents among the otherwise innocent population of Iraqis. Because of this some degree of guilt for the later massacre must be laid upon the shoulders of Ahmad, Jafar, and insurgents like them, who sacrifice innocent lives for the sake of furthering an anti-American message.

Ahmad, however, does not appear without sympathy from the audience. Once the IED is planted and he, Jafar, and the audience anticipate its eventual detonation. And, Ahmad provides the explanation for his actions of the film. He was a career officer in Saddam's army for more than twenty years. In the wake of Saddam's fall early in the war men like Ahmad believed that they would remain in the military and would help the America rebuild the Iraqi government as a democracy. Those aspirations were destroyed when the U.S. dissolved the former Iraqi Republican Guard and forbade Ba'athists, like Ahmad, from serving in the government. (West: 2006). Feeling betrayed by the Americans, Ahmad is embittered and seeks a revenge that will indirectly cause the deaths of 24 innocent Iraqi men, women, and children. As such Ahmad does not represent the Islamist extremist support network or the Iraqi insurgency that have been fighting since the fall of Saddam's regime. He is a husband and a father intent on surviving after

being jilted by American policy. The audience can perhaps identify with him both as a family man, and as a man that has been wronged by American big government concerns.

The repeated reference to the Iraqi perspective of this story directs critical attention towards the Marines in the film. We see them watching DVDs of American vehicles being destroyed by IEDs and expressing a desire to “kill more people.” They are unspecific in this desire, so the audience is expected to believe that these Marines are more interested in killing itself than any kind of eradication of insurgency or terrorism. These men are mostly young, uneducated, naïve men. They have no sense of their place within a larger geopolitical picture. To them the only concern is to survive from day to day, and the information available to them suggests that every Iraqi, insurgent or otherwise, intends to kill them. The attitude of these soldiers indicates two primary failures of their chain of command, as demonstrated in the film. First the command structure has overlooked the necessity of adequately educating its troops about enemy troop strength, composition, technology, etc., and by not providing a more complete picture of the situation in Haditha the military brass has promoted in American soldiers that everyone not in U.S. military uniform is an enemy. The second failure of the chain of command is that officers in this film are largely absent. They are not present to correct these men’s attitudes about Iraqis, or about the situation in which they find themselves.

Battle for Haditha brings these three storylines together in a scene that exhibits a motif that has become typical of Iraq War films: the checkpoint interaction. Ramirez’s Marines operate a traffic checkpoint at the edge of the city and are responsible for checking every vehicle that comes through. Such a checkpoint was given repeated attention in *Redacted* and is significant in this film, because Hiba and her shopping companions wait to go through the checkpoint just before Ahmad, Jafar and their Al Qaeda escorts. The film suggests in this instance where each

storyline intersects that the Iraqi people have different attitudes towards the American occupying force – one of passive disengagement and one of active disdain as Hiba, Ahmad and Jafar appear in the frame together, but separated by their respective vehicles, and ideologies. What is also made apparent with this checkpoint sequence is the American indifference to the differing ideals of the Iraqis. Ramirez and his Marines treat every vehicle the same and are thus unable to discover the bomb hidden in Ahmed and Jafar's truck. Where are the officers to ensure that these men are more diligent in examining the vehicle with military-aged males?

Broomfield's film first indicts the officers of the U.S. military as it clearly delineates between officer and soldier duties. Ramirez and his squad are constantly in danger as they go outside of their forward operating base daily to operate checkpoints, to raid houses, to detain insurgents, or to gather intelligence. Their company and division commanders, Captain Sampson (Andrew McLaren) and Major General Richard Kipper (Jibril Hambel), respectively, remain in relative safety behind the defenses of the forward operating base (FOB) to direct the flow of combat. The heavy weaponry that Ramirez and his men are equipped with is contrasted with the high technology of the officers. Sampson and Kipper have monitors displaying video feeds of low resolution from Predator Drone UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) and complex communication equipment.¹⁷ Ramirez's men have crew-serve (vehicle mounted) machine guns as well as individual assault rifles and HMMWVs (High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle), or Humvees.

The differences in technology accent the most important difference between these men. Sampson and Kipper represent the emerging style of "fire-and-forget" warfare. They engage in

¹⁷ Predator drones were originally intended for surveillance and reconnaissance purposes, but have since their introduction in 1995 been outfitted with weapons – primarily Hellfire missiles – to conduct strikes on targets believed to be hostile. More information can be found on UAVs in Bradbury: 2002.

warfare from a distance with minimized risks to their own lives. This is significant because it places them far from battle while Ramirez and his platoon put their lives at risk with every mission they take without the luxury of removing themselves from dangerous situations. This commentary on an officer's distance from battle and the resulting coldness that results in making life and death decisions is punctuated as Kipper stares at a Predator video feeds and orders the death of a man walking along a road whose guilt or innocence is indeterminable. The audience cannot identify any reason for this man's death. Kipper's assumption that a man was carrying a shovel must be planning to plant an IED is very loosely tied to reality. What is also shocking and nonsensical is that Kipper received no type of confirmation about what the man's actions to order his death. Laurie Calhoun, a researcher at the Independent Institute, wrote in her article "The End of Military Virtue" about this phenomenon of what she calls "Desktop," or "Windows Warriors." According to Calhoun, " 'courageous leaders' have been rendered a matter of mythology" because of the elimination of face-to-face firefights and hand-to-hand combat (Calhoun: 2011, p. 381).

Ramirez makes the differences between the officers and the soldiers most palpable when he counsels Cuthbert (Jase Willette), a young soldier in his platoon on his first deployment. Ramirez wants to make sure that Cuthbert doesn't make the same mistakes Ramirez made on his first deployment. To show Cuthbert how little the government or military higher-ups care about them Ramirez shows Cuthbert a vicious scar that he received when he was an inexperienced Marine in Iraq.¹⁸ From this Cuthbert, and the audience, is supposed to understand that they have only each other for support and that Sampson and Kipper only see them as numbers, statistics for

¹⁸ Elliot Ruiz, who plays Corporal Ramirez in the film, was once the youngest Marine serving in Iraq. The scar he reveals to Cuthbert in the film is from an injury sustained while deployed in Iraq that resulted in his honorable discharge. (Armstrong: 2008, p. 39)

reports. As Ramirez shows his war wound to Cuthbert and the camera he decries those responsible for the war, and those officers in posts far from the dangers of Iraq that don't care about the soldiers being put in harms way. Ruiz said in interviews following the film's release, "(My injury) was because of an officer who didn't want to listen to more experienced men in the lower ranks, who had his own ideas, and they were wrong ideas" (Armstrong: 2008, p. 39).

In the juxtapositions of the Americans and Ahmad and Jafar, the Marines' flaw is revealed. On the one hand Jafar has an older man there to correct his behavior when he loses sight of the mission and his own safety. On the other, when the Marines go out on missions it is unclear who among them is ultimately in charge (Ramirez appears to be, but it would be unlikely for a Corporal to be in charge of such a mission) and there is no sign of any kind that any among them is a truly seasoned veteran of war. Ramirez – and others – have been to Iraq previously, but their collective experience pales in comparison to that of Ahmad's that has come, in part, from age. There is no representation of the soldier that is a holdover from Desert Storm, who would be a voice of reason in troubling times having seen the enemy on the battlefield once before akin to characters seen in the movies of Korea and even Vietnam, like *The Steel Helmet* (1951), or *Fixed Bayonets* (1951), both by Samuel Fuller. It would seem that the Marines are doomed from the start, because the officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, abandon them when they need guidance the most.

The failures of the American military officers come to a head in the scenes and sequences of the massacre carried out by 3rd Platoon, Kilo Company. That morning Ramirez is denied the opportunity to see someone about recurring nightmares of his experiences that are preventing him from sleeping. Sampson fails as Ramirez's leader, representative, and advocate by not

investigating or lobbying for some other options.¹⁹ So, the already tired and beleaguered Ramirez is sent on yet another mission while Sampson enjoys the safety and security of the FOB. As shown here post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is probably the biggest concern facing American soldiers and veterans of war returning and reintegrating into society. Additionally, because Sampson brushes off Ramirez's concerns the film suggests that PTSD is often the most overlooked problem resulting from the lengthy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Once the main violence of the film begins there are no officers present on the ground to control these men. Sampson and Kipper both are safely removed from danger and these events in different rooms. Being removed from battle, and from one another, they have lost their ability to effectively lead. They communicate with one another to direct the course of events, but have incomplete and inaccurate information to do so. Kipper in reply to Sampson's situation report says, "I don't want any more Marines killed. Am I Clear? Take whatever action is necessary." Sampson relays this order to Ramirez, and these lower-enlisted Marines at the scene are given license to act on emotions not training without any direct supervision.

Ramirez gets physically ill with the violence done to reflect Broomfield's intended audience response. That response is unsettling, and visceral, as these Marines meet no retribution for the killing of innocent people. These strong responses are directed very deliberately at the officer corps of the U.S. military, as Sampson, who has been absent in his duty throughout this sequence, arrives at the scene. His empty prayer for Cuthbert appears in great contrast to those officer representations given in World War II films. In those films officers always fought beside their men and attempted to ensure that American actions were on the side of the morally right.

¹⁹ Generally soldiers with symptoms like Ramirez would be granted a 72-hour pass to the Green Zone in order to remove them from the source of their stress. Army research showed that this is very effective short-term tool for alleviating symptoms of PTSD (based on information I received during a Combat Life Saver training course while I was on active duty).

Sampson does not participate alongside his men in reaction to the IED, and thus incorrectly assumes that they acted with the honor usually attributed to U.S. Marines. Sampson's – and Kipper's – ignorance of what really happened over the past several minutes is the greatest accusation in the film against those higher up in the American military's hierarchy.

It can be hard to hold anyone other than Ramirez accountable for the events we've just seen, because he gives the order to his men to go into the Iraqi neighborhood and clear the houses, and he is in many of the shots of civilians being killed at close range or is doing it himself. Seeming to know that the audience will find it difficult to place blame for these events on anyone but Ramirez, Broomfield offers a concluding scene reminiscent of a Catholic confessional. Ramirez delivers a tearful speech to another soldier that disappears off-screen as Broomfield's camera moves in closer and closer to remind the audience that while he committed the action there are other men who share the blame. He cries out angrily against the officers who have sent him and his men out to get killed. He also accuses those officers caring more for their medals than for their men. However, the tearful, melodramatic speech as it appears in *Redacted* and this film has fallen flat because of its proximity to the horrid, violent events that these films attempt to depict.

Like Brian De Palma's film *Battle for Haditha* denies its audience of any sort of redemption. Ramirez and his fellow Marines are implicated in the horror that they participated in, and their officers stand by and let them take the blame for their careless direction.²⁰ Presumably the last sequence of the film takes place inside of Ramirez's consciousness where he happens upon the dead bodies of women and children as if he wasn't the perpetrator of their deaths. In his voiceover he declares that after so much time exposed to that kind of reality a

²⁰ The investigation into military negligence regarding the actual soldiers and officers alleged to be responsible is ongoing.

soldier becomes numb to the pain and emotion associated with it. Ultimately the film is wanting for an ending that reminds its audience that its armed forces are not this evil or careless. It is missing the heroic leaders that are seen in virtually every World War II movie.

Both of the above films address problems that exist among U.S. military service members, officer or enlisted. Each film also subtly addresses the spectator in such a way that they become involved with the events being portrayed in some respects. In *Redacted* the audience is implicated by the prevalence of first person views of events unfolding around the characters. The boundaries between spectator and filmed participant are removed as much as possible, and uneasiness washes over the audience as they watch Flake and Rush rape and murder. Broomfield's film establishes more distance between the spectator and the film's subjects in order to more easily redirect some of the focus onto the responsibility of military command structure for these kinds of actions. This is especially true of the closing sequences as Broomfield abandons subtlety and risks weakening the strength of his argument thus far when he implies that Bush, Rumsfeld, and the Joint Chiefs were indirectly, or in some cases directly, responsible for the events portrayed in the film.

In the Valley of Elah is the last film that I wish to examine for its implications about the American conception of warrior archetypes. The segments of this film that show troops in Iraq are brief and mostly appear through scrambled, pixelated images and videos that Hank Deerfield's (Tommy Lee Jones) son, Mike (Jonathan Tucker), took on deployment. What this film is more concerned with is Hank's role in Mike's motivations for joining the Army and how he participated as a part of a larger society's indifference towards what the government puts soldiers through. Hank, as a veteran, occupies a liminal space between civilian and soldier. A veteran of the Vietnam War, Hank represents the long-standing soldier archetype that has been in

place since World War II. He is strong, disciplined, and decent. This role for Hank is important, because it will make his journey towards accepting a 21st century soldier archetype a difficult one. Once Hank begins to learn about his son's drug use and some questionable deeds while in Iraq Hank has difficulty in accepting the new standard for a soldier that includes frailty and damage, that his son exemplifies. In this way he symbolizes society's preference to view soldiers as above reproach, as examples of morality and decency. This provides the film's second major argument: the American people are complicit in the horrible actions committed by American soldiers, because of their support of government policies favoring war, whether that support is active or passive. These two points – Hank's acceptance of a new soldier standard, and American audience guilt in crimes of soldiers – are the most significant when thinking about why audiences are indifferent to these films, because the new soldier archetypes refute decades of American mythology concerning war, and audiences don't appreciate being made to feel guilty for the improprieties of soldiers regardless of the value or relevance of a film's content, thematic or otherwise.

Hank Deerfield is an American everyman who slowly uncovers the effects of his government's lengthy war in the Middle East with the help of Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron). Sanders represents the more liberal, modern, integrated society that has come to scrutinize the government's insistence on toppling Saddam's regime, and continuing to involve American soldiers in the religious disputes over control of the country in the aftermath. Sanders is also the key to Hank's discovery of the truth behind Mike's disappearance. Without her involvement in his case Hank wouldn't have the resources or the information he needs to continue searching for answers. This is interesting, because it promotes the merging of the old conservative and new progressive ways of thought. However, Sanders is not without responsibility, like Hank, in the

changed nature and actions of soldiers returning home from war. Ignoring a woman's pleas to get help for her husband, who has also just returned from Iraq, Sanders must accept some blame for that woman's murder later in the film when her soldier husband drowns her in the bathtub.

Sanders is not the only key female role in the film, as Hank's wife, Joan (Susan Sarandon), serves as another criticism of Hank's "old guard" mentality. Joan first appears as the submissive wife of the strict traditionalist, Hank. She complies with his desire to go to New Mexico, where their son was stationed, to investigate his disappearance, but does not accompany him. As information about their son surfaces her thoughts about the military and its indoctrinated masculinity come boiling to the surface. With the news that Mike was killed she decries Hank in tears over the phone, "Living in this house he never could've felt like a man if he hadn't gone (into the military)! Both my boys Hank, you could have left me one!" Joan blames Hank for her sons' deaths (their first son died in a training accident before the events of the film as part of the 82nd Airborne stationed in north Carolina), because it was Hank's personification of the myth of the American soldier as well as his insistence on the links between that myth and "being a real man" that encouraged them to join the army. The apparent search for validation in Joan's words, and Mike's documentation of his experiences force Hank to question if he is indeed to blame for what happened to Mike. Mike's videos appear as direct communications with his father. He says in one as he looks at the charred bodies of dead Iraqis, "That's really weird Dad." Together Joan and Det. Sanders function to impress upon the audience how backward the ideology is of men and boys associating manhood with military service.

Joan also exists in an opposing manner to Sanders. Being Hank's wife she represents the submissive feminine that traditionally existed alongside the military masculine. She is stripped of most of her agency in the film. She does not go along with Hank to New Mexico to investigate

her own son's disappearance. Once Mike's death is discovered Hank refuses to "allow" her to make the trip to see his body (she goes anyway). And, once Joan is given an opportunity to view Mike's remains her femininity and lack of agency are strongly codified when she is forced to do so from outside the room – Hank is allowed to see the remains up close and question the coroner who examined them. After this long scene of shock Joan as stereotype is complete when she breaks down, and needs to be consoled by Hank. Hank's hardened heart allowed him to accept his son's death with relatively little emotion, while Joan's traditional femininity, of course, will not allow her to exhibit a similar response.

Hank's revelations about the war in Iraq and its lasting traumatic effects on soldiers comes in waves as he discovers photos and videos taken with his son's camera. These images' fragmented and incomplete appearances communicate the chaotic environment that soldiers are subjected to overseas before in comparison to the relatively quaint and ordered lifestyle of home. The first such image is a still that fills the frame as the opening credits begin to play. There isn't much intelligible in the image, but an audio track plays in which one man can be heard shouting at another, "What are you doing? Get back in the fucking vehicle Mike! Let's go Mike, now!" The audience experiences these with Hank in addition to flashbacks of a telephone conversation between the two men. A little more of the conversation is played each time it is heard over black screens between scenes. One such short clip of this conversation plays before the action of the film begins and Hank learns that his son has gone AWOL.

Hank is revealed to be a man's man modeled after the World War II and Vietnam era warrior archetypes in the short scenes of the film's opening. He refuses to accept that Mike has gone AWOL, because he believes Mike is still in Iraq. As a military veteran himself, Hank has been conditioned to believe that he is a subject matter expert in all things, especially in

predicting or knowing his son's activities and whereabouts. At times in the film Hank is presented uncannily as all seeing and all-knowing, as in the apprehension of Ortiz (Roman Arabia, credited as Victor Wolf), a suspect in Mike's murder. The soldier that has called to inform him of his son's disappearance confirms this belief soldiers have that they are experts in all things, as he informs Hank that if Mike does not return soon he will be listed as "absent."²¹ This kind of obstinate back and forth is characteristic of military personnel in life and in films. Beyond this telephone interaction Hank fixes his own trucks, not trusting anyone else to do as good a job, and he instructs a school custodian in how to properly raise the American flag, which he has spied flying upside down (an international sign of distress). To Hank the flag flying upside down means, "We're in a whole lot of trouble, so come save our asses, because we don't have a prayer in hell of saving ourselves."

These scenes give the audience a sense of the kind of man that Hank is. His reliance on the heroisms of the past inspire the film's title taken from the biblical story of "David and Goliath," which he tells to Sanders's son, also named David, in the film. He strives to be the personification of what he believes an American veteran is supposed to be based on his Christian values and his sense of American nationalism. According to Brian D. Johnson, "Tommy Lee Jones (as Hank) stands like a weathered totem of America's vanishing honor" (Johnson: 2007). The flag-raising lesson at the end of this sequence symbolizes Hank, a model of American honor and masculinity, answering the call of his country in distress. What is unclear to Hank in these early moments in the film is that the distress is, in part, his own. Hank's belief in American Exceptionalism has blinded him to corruption and self-interest that has guided the country since Vietnam, and it will take finding out what happened to his son to regain his sight. In this way

²¹ This is strange in and of itself, because the call to Hank informing him of his son's AWOL status would seem to be an indication that Mike has already achieved that status.

Hank comes to symbolize each and every American from this point on in the film. He is a composite of every American that willfully or otherwise allowed their friends and family to join the service knowing that there was a war going on in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hank's view of his own son introduces the film's implication that we are all guilty for the crimes of Iraq. This first appears in a scene at a rest stop where Hank has parked to sleep on his way to Fort Rudd (a fictional base created for the purposes of this film's narrative). A young boy calling for his own father wakes up Hank. In an eyeline match cut that lingers on the boy the audience is granted access to Hank's interiority. To Hank, Mike is still fragile, immature, and naïve. Hank still thinks of Mike as his boy, not a man of the United States Army. For this reason Hank still feels a compulsion to guide and supervise his son. However, even though Hank knew Mike was young and inexperienced in life, hardly ready for the life-changing experience of a combat deployment, he allows Mike to enlist. Here the film points at the absurdity of America sending its youngest men and women, with the most potential left for life, to a situation that will most probably return them damaged physically, mentally, or both.

Despite this Hank's investigative efforts are representative of American curiosity and ingenuity. A question has arisen that needs to be answered: What happened to Mike? And, no one seems to be as concerned as Hank (a probable impossibility since Hank is Mike's father), so Hank must do everything in his power as a former military policeman, as a husband, and as Mike's father. Like a true detective, he hunts down every lead. He goes to the base to examine Mike's barracks room, pays a part-time hacker (Rick Gonzales) to retrieve the damaged files from Mike's camera-phone (which Hank took without permission from Mike's barracks room), visits a local strip club, where he is quite visibly uncomfortable there both as a faithfully married man and to see young men – soldiers like he once was – mistreating women, and even as a last

resort tries to file a missing person report at the local civilian police station. References to soldier improprieties in other war films, especially those of Vietnam, like *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987), *Casualties of War*, etc. suggest that Hank would not be entirely innocent of behavior similar to that of the soldiers in the strip club, but his depiction in this film, and the fact that he is formerly military police suggest that he has led a mostly chaste life. His discomfort in the club comes also from his realization that Mike might not have been the fine moral specimen Hank believed the Army would make him into.

Before Sanders gets involved with the case of Mike's disappearance the film provides a contrary example of the "old guard" that Hank represents. He meets an old friend from his army days, First Sergeant Arnold Bickman (Barry Corbin). Bickman cannot offer Hank any support either though, because he is also far removed from military service. There is no one that he knows that can help Hank get some information. Bickman's appearance is brief, but, unlike, Hank he has settled nicely into civilian life. He lives a life of pseudo-luxury as he spends his time now traveling with his wife in their RV to visit kids and grandkids. His move towards a more relaxed lifestyle suggests that he has forgotten his own experiences in the military and has adopted a willful ignorance to the plights of those men and women being put through similar traumas he undoubtedly faced in the army alongside Hank. Although they differ in this regard Hank and Bickman together exemplify a complicit society that this film seeks to indict. All of these failures and dead-ends lead the audience to believe that Hank, the penultimate man's man and veteran of the Vietnam War might not achieve his goal. In a cinema culture that favors the good guy getting his man, so to speak, this is quite unsettling.

Things do not get any better as Sanders unknowingly becomes involved in Hank's case. She and the other detectives of the local civilian police force have been tipped off about a body

found in a nearby field. As they mark the pieces that have been scattered about by animals they run out of evidence flags and must resort to sticking Dixie cups on the ends of wire hangers. When the MPs show up to take jurisdiction over the scene it becomes clear to the audience, if it wasn't before, that the body belongs to Mike, and that there is something suspicious about his death.

Sanders shares the audience's suspicion that something is being overlooked or covered up. Military or government interventions in police cases are a recognizable trope of any American genre that something is going, or is going to go, terribly awry. The presentation of this trope can be seen in a number of war and military films, like *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992), *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996), *The General's Daughter* (Simon West, 1999), *Rules of Engagement* (William Friedkin, 2000), and *Basic* (John McTiernan, 2003). All these films deal with some kind of government intervention that signals that a cover-up has happened or will happen. By referencing this popular theme in crime dramas and war films the audience is made aware of their own guilt in allowing those sorts of machinations to happen, because we, as a people, elect our leaders and choose not to question their methods when their results don't directly effect us as individuals – as they have effected Hank.

Another narrative trope of war films that I believe directly attempts to stir emotions of regret and responsibility in the deaths of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan is one that I call "The Chaplain." This type of film features a soldier or number of soldiers – usually two, one of them being an army Chaplain – that are assigned the difficult duty of delivering news of a soldier's death to their next of kin, or of escorting bodies home to be interred. Films that deal more specifically with these kinds of stories, and have in themselves sprouted a sub-genre of the war film, are *The Messenger* (Oren Moverman, 2009), and the TV movie *Taking Chance* (Ross

Katz, 2009). The significance of these films rises out of their narrative settings outside of war. Military men assigned this task in films are often deeply taken with the circumstances of American soldier deaths, and are especially affected by the widows, mothers and other family members that enter the grieving process. This trope is also given treatment in this film as a young man meets Hank in the early morning to tell him that Mike's body has been found. With no other explanation available at this time it must occur to the audience that the military is somehow responsible for Mike's death, especially because of the implications made by the arrival of the military police in the previous sequence.

With Mike's fate finally revealed there is no opportunity for these two men – Mike and Hank – to flesh out their differences. Mike joined the army and went off to Iraq to please his father, and when he came back he was brutally murdered. All the evidence points to his death coming as a result of his military service and deployment (there are some early allegations by the Military Police that Mike had gotten involved in drug trafficking during his service and that could have brought about his death). The film offers an interaction between Hank and Specialist Bonner (Jake McLaughlin), a comrade of Mike's, to address some of the issues that have been introduced concerning Hank's guilt over his sons' deaths and the traumas of soldiers coming home from war. PTSD is addressed directly as Bonner refuses Hank's invitation to talk at first, but when Hank offers Bonner a drink of Jim Beam rather than coffee Bonner cannot refuse. The suggestion here is that soldiers returning only find comfort in the bottle, and will never turn down an offer to numb their minds with alcohol.

The conversation between Hank and Bonner fulfills the audience's need to learn more about Mike, who has only appeared in pieced-together audio recordings and video footage. Bonner confirms everything that Hank and the audience hope for: Mike was a "first class

soldier” and “loved the Army.” What are more significant are the things that Bonner has to say about the military, the government and the people of the United States. He says, “They shouldn’t send heroes (like Mike) to places like Iraq. Everything there is fucked up. Before I went, I’d never say this, but you ask me now... They should just nuke it and watch it all turn back to dust.” Bonner’s – and the film’s – implication here is that Generals and politicians jockeying for better professional station have misguided American involvement in Iraq. This has led to Iraqi civilians becoming more and more anti-American by the day, and gives soldiers, like Mike who have the best intentions, no other option than to become corrupted, traumatized, and fatigued by war. Bonner’s confession here sheds light on something that most Americans ignored, or tacitly agreed to when they elected, and re-elected George W. Bush as President of the United States. Dutiful young men and women are constantly being sent with little practical training – physical, mental, tactical, or otherwise – to fight a war for unclear interests against an enemy that is not only unknown, but whose ranks grow by the day. And, they are expected to be all the better for that experience. The argument that soldiers are exempt from sympathy because they volunteered for the military is rendered inconsequential here as Bonner reveals that soldiers don’t join the Army to fight wars like this. They join the military to represent their families with pride and honor, not to abuse people whose country is weak from liberation and a decade of infighting, or to return as shells of themselves with no clear idea about why they had to do what they did.

Eventually Hank must relinquish some of his traditional views of the world, and, with Sanders’s help, get the information that he needs to answer his questions about Mike’s disappearance and death. With her involvement in the case Hank suddenly has access to important information regarding his son. He can make his own assessment of the crime scene, question witnesses, and participate in the apprehension of suspects – albeit without the

permission of Sanders or the military police in some cases. However, even as it becomes more apparent to the audience that one of Mike's comrades killed him, Hank is unable to believe that this is the case. Following a fresh lead Hank says to Sanders, who believes that another soldier must be responsible, "You have not been to war, so you're not going to understand this. You do not fight beside a man and then do that to him!" Hank has invoked masculinity to prove his point. In drawing attention to Sanders's gender and inability to serve in a combat role he invalidates her opinion by making it about her inability to "understand." As the investigation goes forward it is established that there is no "understanding" of this war or of these men. Hank's assumptions often based on combat experience, and who does and does not have it function more as blinders to the truth.

No scene in the film more directly indicts the American people for their role in sending troops to Iraq than Sanders's interview with Specialist Bonner as the threads of the truth surrounding Mike's death begin to come together. This exchange hints at something unseen in the first two films I've examined. That is the difficulty of the transition from being armed with authority on one day to being disarmed without authority the next. Being stripped of authority and power as a motif has become more prevalent in the films about Iraq and Afghanistan, because the films treating these wars depict the trials of returning home with more frequency than those of previous wars. After Vietnam some films treated the return home, but focused more on the rehabilitation of trauma than the difficulties of transitioning from warrior to civilian. Films like *Stop-Loss* (Kimberly Peirce, 2008), *Brothers* (Jim Sheridan, 2009) and *Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008) draw different degrees of attention to soldiers returning from Iraq or Afghanistan and experience difficulty with adapting to their new situations of little or no authority in life. And, much of the difficulty and frustration with this position comes from a

soldier's perception of how the civilian world is receiving them after their deployment. To a soldier, it is almost as if the civilian population for which they fought is responsible for soldiers' symbolic castration through failing to recognize the significance of the deployment experience. The American civilian population empowers its soldiers, who have significantly less experience than those that are empowered to do the same in the U.S., to enforce law and order in war zones, but remove that power when they return home. To lose that power, that trust, in such a way is emasculating to most soldiers to the point of frustration and anger.

The resentment towards the civilian population that is common to some extent in all soldiers boils over in Bonner as Sanders antagonizes him hoping to force him to reveal something to her about Mike's death. Bonner has a strong disdain for the authority that Sanders is exercising over him, because she has experienced nothing like a deployment to Iraq under the guise of freedom and the defense of freedom. Fighting off Sanders's military police counterpart Bonner says to her, "You have no idea what we did over there and we did it for you. If I were you I'd just say, 'Thanks,' leave it at that, and kiss my ass!" His hatred in this moment flows off of the screen out into the audience to further this film's indictment of society over the war in Iraq. The fact is we are privy only to a small part of the soldier experience through information we receive from various media outlets. No one can *really* know what a soldier has gone through but a soldier. Soldiers resent the lack of appreciation among Americans, but are more insulted that most Americans seem to have forgotten that there are even troops in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The conclusion of the film provides us with three important pieces of information that will complete Hank's quest that ultimately forces Hank to revise his views on military service and the American soldier. First, during the confession of Corporal Penning (Wes Chatham), Hank finds out that Mike got his nickname, "Doc," by torturing wounded Iraqi prisoners by

poking and prodding their open wounds. With this Hank must question the military itself, because it seems to have made a sadist out of his son, who, according to all who knew him, was not just a fine soldier, but also a fine man before the deployment to Iraq. The details concerning Mike's gruesome death come second also as a part of Penning's confession. A simple argument between Bonner and Mike escalates into a parking lot brawl where Penning found himself getting involved by stabbing Mike at least 42 times (the extent of Mike's stab wounds is revealed by the military coroner that examines Mike's remains earlier in the film). Not sure what to do, Penning, Bonner and another soldier decide to chop up Mike's body and burn it. Once the work is done they use Mike's credit card to treat themselves to a late, after-murder dinner. With this Hank realizes that the sadism adopted by his own son was not unique. Most of Mike's comrades appear to have come back from Iraq with a penchant for violence and a sadistic edge. Lastly, Ortiz tells Hank and the audience the story behind a recurring video and photograph in the film. Apologetic for treating Ortiz violently earlier Hank gets Ortiz to open up by offering him some whiskey to echo the moment earlier when Bonner can only be solicited for information with booze. Ortiz tells Hank the story of how Mike was driving a Humvee in a convoy with several soldiers riding in the back unable to see out of the vehicle's enclosure. Mike hit something, stopped and took a photograph of whatever it was on the side of the road. In Hank's reconstructed imagination of the event Mike hit a child and chose to document it to show how backwards military procedure is valuing soldier lives above even those of Iraqi children.²² Ortiz chooses to believe that Mike did *not* hit a child to preserve a positive memory of his comrade.

²² Standard operating procedure in a military convoy is to stop for nothing short of another disabled convoy vehicle. If something enters the roadway orders are generally to speed up to avoid making one's vehicle a target for enemy fire.

Hank, on the other hand, has no choice but to believe his own imagining of it, because it would serve to explain how his son became the man he was when he was killed.

After a sound dissolve of Hank sitting alone in his truck the audience is finally given a recording that has been playing in between scenes throughout the film. Presumably after Mike hits the child he calls Hank to “get me out of here.” Hank chastises his son embarrassed by his cowardice. Mike quickly realizes that it was foolish to reach out to his father’s help, steels himself and hangs up the phone. Having ignored Mike’s literal cries for help, Hank fully realizes his role in what happened to his son. True to his nature, though, Hank returns home to redirect his former love and respect for the military into a rallying cry for help and reform. The last shot of the film is the U.S. flag, shown in the film’s opening, again flying upside down, this time intentionally.

Three problems are dramatized concerning the warrior archetype in these three films. The first problem, exemplified most in *Redacted*, is that audiences poorly receive images of American soldiers committing horrible acts, such as rape and murder. The film’s critical thematic content met with a small audience, because of the distaste those audiences had for the “revised” American soldier that is not righteous, virtuous or moral. Next of these problems is that it appears that our military lacks leadership. From newly recruited Privates all the way up to the highest-ranking Generals the men and women of the military appear to act with complete self-interest. No officer appears in any of these films as a model of the soldier archetype left after World War II or the Vietnam War. The self-sacrificing image of the officer is undone by the appearances of officers mostly in *Battle for Haditha* as they sit in safety as their subordinates go out to face the danger. The third problem arises out of the first two. These films, *In the Valley of Elah* in particular, are critical of the nation for its role in constructing and maintaining these

antiquated models of soldiers and officers. What's more is that soldiers go into military service with these ideals in mind. And, it is because these ideals do not cohere with modern realities that soldiers experience trauma in such a way that they return as monsters or shells of their former selves.

In the end of all three of these films, while there is a glimmer of hope for the future, the soldiers represented fail to achieve any sort of redemption. Rehabilitation for the nation's military and its members appears to be a long way off as well. At the time of the films' releases those soldiers depicted in *Redacted* and *Battle for Haditha* were still under investigation, so no information regarding their punishments could be included in the credits. And, in *In the Valley of Elah* the hint at Hank's final actions call for reform of the military and revision of the warrior archetypes of old, but years after the film's release it would seem that neither has occurred. It appears that if the genre is to redeem itself it needs to reconcile its negative portrayals of soldiers while continuing to revise archetypes that have proven to be inadequate, and audiences need to accept these new images and incorporate them into the long standing traditions of genre and identity.

CHAPTER 3

MAKING A MAN:

A DISSECTION OF MILITARY MASCULINITY

The films I've examined thus far are not only useful in tracing the source for audience indifference to the subject matter, but also for examining the construction of a hegemonic military masculinity, as is the case with most if not all war films. Few films have women in central military roles who are not also subordinate to a role played by a man. Only a few films, like *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996) and *G.I. Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997) shift women from their more typical roles as love interests or embodiments of a stereotypical femininity and place them in lead roles that are typically played by men. Considering how few films there are like this alongside the very recent decision to open combat jobs to women in the military it would seem that war films and films about the military, more generally, are reluctant to reflect that change onscreen. This helps to reveal another reason why the war films of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars are typically poorly received by audiences, critics and scholars.

The films of World War II and Vietnam developed an identity for their American soldiers that relied heavily on the now archaic, traditional ideas of masculinity. Soldiers were often trained and then examined based on very patriarchal constructions of gender. Their ability to do their jobs as soldiers was heavily tied up with their ability to perform or exhibit a masculine ideal. Christine S. Jarvis points to the physical construction of the masculine ideal that took place during World War II in her book *The Male Body at War*. The foundational claim in her book is that the military sculpts the bodies of its soldiers to establish a military masculine ideal, and that that ideal was used in reforming and adapting the way other governmental institutions viewed the

body with specificity in most cases to the male body. For example, school physical education curriculums were adjusted based on the results of physical fitness programs developed for the training of soldiers going off to war in Europe and the Pacific. (Jarvis: 2004, pg. 5) The defeat in Vietnam caused this military masculine ideal to be questioned, so films made following the war in Vietnam worked to rehabilitate that ideal. In *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) Robert De Niro is the clearest example of the hegemonic American masculine ideal. His masculinity presents itself not only to subjugate women, but also those men around him that fail at meeting his standard. The traumas of Vietnam that cripple him psychologically infringe upon this masculine ideal that has been constructed both by civilian and military societies, so in the third act of the film he focuses on recreating the family unit that represented the masculine ideal that he once represented.

In the 1990s things began to happen in the American military that forced a reconsideration of the value and legitimacy of that decades old construction of military masculinity. The Tailhook scandal in 1991 is probably the most referred to instance of military impropriety that caused Americans to question the way the military had structured its ideal of masculinity. During an annual convention for officers of the U.S. Navy hosted by the Tailhook Association (a non-profit group supporting sea-based aviation) 83 women and 7 men alleged that their peers, of which more than 100 perpetrators were named, sexually assaulted them. Since then the military has been under heavy scrutiny concerning the treatment of its soldiers, women and men. More recently the film *The Invisible War* (Kirby Dick, 2012) criticizes the systems in place in the military for its indirect advocacy for the fostering of a rape culture rather than its prevention. From all the evidence, it would seem imperative that war films reconstruct their military masculine ideal, or at the very least critique it in such a way that advocacy for change

can begin. Two films of modern war made since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 exemplify the kind of change that I am writing of: *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005); and *Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008).

In *Jarhead* the experiences of Anthony Swofford in the Marine Corps articulates a critique of military masculinity through its performance. Swofford is understood to be an intelligent, somewhat philosophical man whose only sense of belonging in the military comes from his sense of familial duty and tradition. In order to succeed, and to be accepted, in the military he must perform the military's hegemonic masculine ideal. In *The Hurt Locker* the male characters presented exhibit the indoctrination of military hegemony by ascribing to its masculine ideals in various combat scenarios. Specifically Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner) adheres to the historical ideals linked to manhood described by Christina S. Jarvis in the introduction to her book *The Male Body at War*, like "public usefulness... personal achievement, and competitiveness," along with the appearance of "powerful, hypermasculinized male bodies to reflect the United States' rising status as a world power" (Jarvis: 2004, pgs. 4-5).

In the chapter "Making a Military Man: Iraq, Gender, and the Failure of the Masculine Collective" from her book *Welcome to the Suck* Stacey Peebles describes the performance of gender identity. Drawing specifically from Kayla Williams's memoir *Love My Gun More Than You* Peebles refers to the experience of a woman in the military, who did not ascribe to the stereotypes of the feminine and its distinctions of frailty, emotional outbursts, or domesticity. From Williams's descriptions of her military service as an Arabic linguist/interpreter she was "more of a man" – more masculine – than many of the men that she served with. Furthermore, Williams criticizes her sisters in arms for being too "feminine." In an anecdote Williams writes of a female soldier that she served with – also one of her superiors – that was chastised for an

error in judgment and cried openly in front of her subordinates claiming that her tears were brought on by PMS. Williams makes clear her disdain for women like this who undo the work Williams, and other women like her, have done to perform the masculine in order to succeed in the hegemonic, masculine military.

Kayla Williams is the embodiment of the argument that women and other marginalized classes like racial minorities and homosexuals are equally capable of performing the duties of an American soldier. This is interesting not so much because she is a woman and stereotypically one might expect her to be less able physically or mentally, but because she is adept at performing masculinity to assimilate, a skill that marginalized groups have been developing for the entire history of the United States military.²³ Her experience is important, because even though it is admittedly difficult she succeeds at blurring boundaries between genders, thus her story is a challenge to the military hierarchy in two ways. Firstly, as a woman who can occupy a place as both masculine and feminine she refutes the discourse that has impeded women's ability to serve in the U.S. military since its inception.²⁴ Secondly, by performing a masculine role, or by assimilating to the traditional masculine behavior of a soldier, she subverts the cultural and institutional norms of the military regarding hegemonic masculinity. *Jarhead* and *The Hurt Locker* further the discourse that Williams's story instigates by criticizing the creation, formation, and organization of masculinity within the United States military, and more generally in American society.

²³ As far back as the American Civil War women have either openly served or disguised themselves as men in order to serve in the nation's military. Susan A. Linville notes that the first female Medal of Honor winner was Mary Edward Walker, a surgeon for the Union Army during the Civil War and an active feminist. (Linville: 2000, pg. 117, note 4).

²⁴ While this is true Peebles claims that Williams's gender and sexuality prevent her from ever being seen as anything but female, as other. (Peebles: 2011)

In *Jarhead*, a film based on a memoir written by Anthony Swofford of his experiences in Iraq before, during, and after Desert Storm, Swofford's (Jake Gyllenhaal) unit of Marine Corps snipers flounders in the desert waiting for action with itchy trigger fingers. The antics and activities that ensue during the months long period that they wait are filled with the masculine posturing of immature boys and unseasoned warriors. Once the war is over their outlooks have changed and their questions of self begin and end with whether or not the masculine masquerade of war was really worth anything at all. *The Hurt Locker* follows the exploits of an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team at the end of their deployment. With a replacement supervisor, who has a reputation for following his instincts and being reckless with his own life and those of his subordinates, these men's behaviors criticize the composition of the military masculine. *Jarhead* intends to pose two questions. First, how efficient is our nation's military when its training program instills hyper-masculinity in its soldiers that caters to a type of combat that no longer exists? And second, is it necessary to adapt the training doctrines driven by masculinity towards a gender integrated ideology? I believe the answers the film means to provide are respectively: the military is not very efficient in training its soldiers, and yes such an adaptation is necessary for the sake of our soldiers' lives and sanity. And, Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* goes further to support these positions found in *Jarhead* by providing a pointed critique of masculinity.

Jarhead, directed by Sam Mendes, was released in 2005 more than two years after the United States invaded Iraq under the pretense that Saddam Hussein was storing weapons of mass destruction, and that he supported Usama bin Laden and the Taliban. Though the film's events take place around Desert Storm in 1991 it critiques the U.S. military from the late 20th century under George Bush Sr. into the present. In the film, as in Anthony Swofford's written memoir,

there is a primary focus on the experiences of those soldiers in the Gulf War relative to those in the wars of the past. Soldiers in the Gulf War, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, often look back to the Vietnam War or World War II to craft their perceptions of their upcoming war experiences. But, as Stacey Peebles writes, “Often, however, soldiers go into war and find that their own experiences are quite different, sometimes maddeningly so, from representations of previous wars that have informed their conception of and conscription into military service” (Peebles: 2011, p. 29). Furthermore, the difference in experience as it relates to combat action commonly leads to varied feelings of powerlessness, impotence, and/or a loss of masculinity (Peebles: 2011, pgs. 34-41). Richard Godfrey and others posit that this *demasculinization* (Godfrey et al.’s emphasis) or renegotiations of masculinity illustrate the inefficiency or over-efficiency of the military’s indoctrination and creation of soldiers (see Godfrey et al.: 2012, and Godfrey: 2009).

The effectiveness of the military to indoctrinate its soldiers in military masculinity is clear in the opening moments of the film. Swofford’s (Jake Gyllenhaal) voice plays over a black screen: “A story. A man fires a rifle for many years and he goes to war. And afterward he turns the rifle in at the armory and he believes he’s finished with the rifle, but no matter what else he might do with his hands – love a woman, build a house, change his son’s diaper – his hands remember the rifle.” These words along with the short sequence provided of Swofford’s basic training instill in the audience a sense of the intense program that soldiers undergo to become soldiers, effectually becoming small, interchangeable parts of a whole without individual identity. What’s more is that the soldier identity remains even after military service from the moment of discharge to the moment of death.

The opening of the film also reveals that Swofford is part of a family tradition of military service. His father served in the Marines during the Vietnam War, and the younger Swofford enlists over a sense of feeling “lost.” This is a common trope among war films wherein a young man joins the military out of a sense of tradition following in a father and/or grandfather’s footsteps with a romanticized ideal of what makes a man a man. *Jarhead* revises that narrative, and by extension the misconception that the military necessarily makes men out of boys, as Swofford quickly realizes that joining the Marines “might have been a bad decision.” This revision complicates the narrative as Swofford’s family dynamic before the military is revealed to be dysfunctional – his father is psychologically absent, his mother an emotional wreck, and his sister presumably insane – so this trope of familial military tradition is already corrupted. By joining the service Swofford participates in further identifying the military as dysfunctional. The voiceover here, and throughout the film for that matter, suggests that the military isn’t for everyone. This idea, which I believe is gaining ground among Americans, is a devastating one to military ideologies, because those ideologies have historically relied on the military being the best, and only, proving ground for America’s youth.

The distinction between military and civilian life becomes more important as the film moves forward, because the military thrives based on the insistence of the adoption and performance of a particular hegemonic masculinity. Military thought denigrates the civilian world’s notions of sensitivity and compassion so that the military then occupies a superior position represented by traits like rigidity and objectivity. From this, soldiers are trained to react through reflex and instinct rather than through rational analysis. The military viewpoint of this latter methodology is that if a soldier begins to assess his surroundings, or individual scenarios,

on a case-by-case basis he or she risks their own lives or the lives of their comrades, and that is unacceptable.²⁵

It is important to note here that Swofford's Marine Corps experience takes place in the late 1980s extending into the 1990s. This is important for my purpose because it separates the events of *Jarhead* from those in *The Hurt Locker* by more than a decade even though the films were released only three years apart. In the temporal setting of *Jarhead* the narrative of Vietnam still heavily influenced the attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of American soldiers. Young men entering the service were keen to win the next war to make up for the lack of closure in Vietnam while also expecting to enact and witness the carnage that has become iconic of Vietnam War reporting, and the films that followed the war's end. Conversely, in the Iraq war of 2003 and beyond, soldiers had those films of the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, and narratives of the first Gulf War, like *Courage Under Fire*, with less combat violence and more introspection that prepared them for a new, technological and untraditional style of war and warfare. In *Jarhead* there is an attempt to show influence that Vietnam had on soldiers going into Iraq in 1991. For example, one scene stages a room full of Marines who can barely contain themselves as the helicopter gunship scene from *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) plays before them. As the iconic scene continues the Marines hum along to "Ride of the Valkyries" as it plays onscreen and mimic the movements of the soldiers in that film achieving a kind of artificial release that cannot be surpassed during their own experience of war. These soldiers – Swofford among them – will come to find out that in the years since the Vietnam War represented in films

²⁵ Studies have shown that three quarters of soldiers serving in Vietnam and even World War II had difficulty in firing their weapons at people, soldiers or civilians, because of ethical or moral ideological decisions. Certain military training programs, like marksmanship, were modified after the Vietnam War to remove hesitation or analysis on the part of soldiers that might put lives at risk.

like *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987) and *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986), warfare has changed and their roles as foot soldiers have become largely obsolete with the production of fast-moving new technologies of war. Furthermore, the shared imagination of war established by the films of Vietnam intensifies the soldiers' vulnerability to the new, modern war.

After basic training the "soldierization" process is still not complete. Swofford's assignment to 2nd Platoon, Golf Company continues his education in military masculinity as he realizes that its enforcement is not only the responsibility of his superiors, but also of a soldier's peers.²⁶ His first experience among this new unit is as the victim of a ritual branding. Every Marine in the barracks swarms around him and pins him to the ground and Swofford passes out just as the brand is applied. Upon waking up later that evening Swofford examines his leg to discover that no branding took place. Troy (Peter Sarsgaard) finishes cleaning his rifle and informs Swofford that the hot brand was switched for a cold one to replicate the sensation just as Swofford passed out.²⁷ Troy leaves the room telling Swofford, "If you want a brand you're going to have to earn it." These words impart upon Swofford and the audience that the journey to becoming a soldier, and a man, is never truly complete. There is always another ritual to be performed, another trial to be undertaken to mark a soldier and separate him, or her, from society. This seemingly endless process is what creates the hyper-masculinity among soldiers. As a result of never receiving a true or ultimate validation for their efforts soldiers continue to strive for a "perfection" that doesn't exist. The most evident consequence of this as seen in *In the*

²⁶ Companies, often labeled by a letter of the alphabet, ex, "G," will take on the name that corresponds to the NATO phonetic alphabet, ex. "Golf." In other instances a unit will take on a unique name that begins with that letter. For example, I was assigned to "Killer," or "K," troop while serving with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (3rd ACR).

²⁷ The act of cleaning the rifle is essential to the representation of military masculinity in film, because it physically embodies ideal traits of the military masculine, such as order, routine, precision and efficiency.

Valley of Elah is that soldiers have difficulty “turning it off” and become prone to violence, aggression and blurred morality once separated from the military by discharge, or leave and liberty (military jargon for vacation).

Swofford appears as a poor candidate for the military in the beginning. He doesn't fall in line with consistency like his fellow Marines, or the soldiers represented in any of the hundreds of films made about war or the military. Swofford talks back to his superiors, avoids duty by chugging laxative and feigning illness, and resists indoctrination by the military masculine. Enter Staff Sergeant Sykes (Jamie Foxx), a career Marine who recruits Swofford to try out for surveillance and target acquisition (STA) to become a Marine Corps sniper. Sykes is the ideal Marine as imagined by Swofford. He is fast-talking, inspiring, and perceptive. With Sykes's motivation Swofford lives up to his potential as a Marine and undergoes the sniper training and survives the 87 percent attrition rate along with Troy. Sykes appears as a representation of the efficiency of the military system in achieving complete masculine hegemony. His role throughout the film will be one of a father to a son for Swofford. Whenever Swofford makes mistakes Sykes is there to shame him, and then reprimand him. And whenever Swofford wavers in his duty Sykes is there with a the inspiring words necessary to get Swofford to correct his thoughts and actions in order to more efficiently perform the military masculine.

Sykes is further established as the ideal Marine through the rest of the film particularly the training montage that precedes Swofford's unit's deployment to Saudi Arabia as a part of Operation Desert Shield. He is shown to be fit, intelligent, and without reservations when it comes to killing. He says to his trainees during this montage, “We've all been taught that ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ but hear this: Fuck that shit!” In a disturbingly somber tone he also refers to the headshot desired by a Marine Corps sniper as “the JFK shot,” and “the pink mist.” When

Swofford successfully hits the head zone of a target with his sniper rifle the connection between the two men is complete. Sykes has successfully instilled in Swofford the military masculine need for death and destruction.

Training sequences are an important part of this film's commentary on the hegemonic military masculine. The conditioning of soldiers allows for the military to measure its soldiers' competency at combat duties as part of a larger system designed to assess masculine performance by rewarding the demonstration of the attributes outlined by Christine S. Jarvis, like public usefulness, competitiveness, etc. Military training serves an important purpose for the performance of gender, because training grounds effectively allow the military to assess its soldiers in a more controlled environment than combat. *Jarhead* presents training in such a way to show that its measurement of results are inaccurate, its methods are useless and/or inefficient, and even with the level of control attainable lives are still put at risk. In one scene a fellow sniper candidate of Swofford and Troy's is killed in a live fire exercise when he panics under the strains of a simulated combat environment.

The repeated return to this training motif illustrates for the audience that there is often no practical application of said training. Basic training provides only the foundation for a construction of gender by the military's hegemony that continues without conclusion. And, Swofford's training in Saudi Arabia included tactics and procedures that would prove useless to him in the coming invasion of Iraq (defense against chemical weapons, and minesweeping in particular). The ultimate purpose of these training segments of the film is to further the idea that the military masculine ideal is unattainable. Swofford is a member of an elite unit – only eight Marines completed sniper training from a beginning group of 61 – but must still be rigorously trained and tested to prove themselves. Even with all of their training and preparation for a war

they knew was coming they are not prepared for the kind of warfare they will eventually see. This is made strikingly clear in the sequence after the invasion when one soldier, named Kruger (Lucas Black), panics under the raining oil of the wells sabotaged by Saddam's troops.

Military masculinity relies heavily on the shared excitement for combat. Lieutenant Colonel Kazinski reveals as much to the audience when he replies, "Ooh, I just felt my dick move," to a group of soldiers expressing thrilling impatience for war. Such excitement was exhibited in *Battle for Haditha*, when, prior to a mission, Ramirez's Marines engage in borderline violent behavior to prepare themselves for the excitement of war. Desert Shield/Storm included little combat, so soldiers like Swofford, who were relying on that experience to be "their Vietnam" had no outlet to prove their masculinity to their peers, themselves, or to the military. There is a contradiction in this aspect of the military masculine. The arousal at the prospect of violence is a key presentation of masculinity in the military, and that arousal itself is generated by the military-indoctrinated model of masculinity. This creates an interesting paradoxical dichotomy in which soldiers are expected to derive sexual pleasure and arousal from a trait of masculinity itself, but homosexuals, who derive sexual pleasure and arousal from the male gender, are relegated to a class of an "incorrect," or "lower degree" of masculinity.

Arousal *by* masculinity as a trait *of* masculinity is an interesting one that appears a lot in war films, but is not so prevalent as it is in the films of Desert Storm to the present. This is strongly tied to the Clinton administration's passing of the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy. Homophobia has always been a central tenet of hegemonic masculinity. The co-existence of homophobia and homoeroticism has been permitted since the policy's passing, because the policy made homosexuality "absent." That being the case homophobia was unnecessary and homoeroticism was unthreatening without homosexuals in the service. Simply put, it's okay for

straight men to act gay as long as they are not actually gay, and it is okay for gay men to act gay as long as they have succeeded in keeping their sexuality secret by performing a hegemonic military masculine. This permission of the presence of homoerotic behavior on the part of soldiers in the form of playacting is necessary for the acceptance of soldiers' arousal to masculinity itself.

Military ideology continues to purport that homosexuality necessarily precludes a soldier from being capable of performing their duties, because of rationale strongly tied to hegemonic masculinity. In that the heterosexual prowess of men is a key marker of hegemonic military masculinity. Swofford's peers pass around photos of his girlfriend back home and create masturbatory fantasies to perform their masculinity, prove their heterosexuality, and to replace the newly absent opportunity for sexual release. Without the ability to demonstrate a heterosexual male sexual prowess women and homosexuals are incapable of achieving the masculine ideal – even though it has already been established that such an ideal is unattainable.

Swofford, who begins to represent the ideally indoctrinated Marine once sniper training is over and the Marines have been deployed for Desert Storm exhibits his failings at adhering to the military masculine. Asked if he is scared he replies, "I'm twenty years old, and I was dumb enough to sign a contract. I can hear their fucking bombs already. I can hear their bombs, and I'm fucking scared, yeah. Don't tell my Staff Sergeant though, all right?" From these words Swofford makes it clear that he has some conception of his performance of the masculine, because he knows that he is afraid, but must keep that secret. He must perform as though he is unafraid to avoid chastisement by Sykes for failing at being masculine.

The most important scene of the film concerning how I have outlined and described military masculinity thus far is the desert football scene. Swofford and his comrades are ordered

to play football in their MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) suits.²⁸ Such a proposition as wearing a MOPP suit in the desert would be an uncomfortable one as they wear much like heavy winter clothes. With a journalist and her cameraman present Swofford and company are made to demonstrate both the effectiveness of their equipment and their ability to participate in a traditionally masculine sport made more difficult by wearing MOPP gear. Sykes and the journalists appear together as observers of the football game as demonstration to represent the role of the military *and* the media to censor and moderate what the public sees of the military at war. Incensed by the manipulation of their reality, and being treated like circus animals the game falls apart and becomes what Swofford refers to as a “field fuck.” Swofford describes this simulated gang rape – in which the Marines mimic rape but they don’t actually rape – in his memoir as “an act wherein Marines violate one member of the unit, typically someone who has recently been a jerk or abused rank or acted antisocial, ignoring the unspoken contracts of brotherhood and camaraderie and esprit de corps and the combat family. The victim is held in the doggie position and his fellow Marines take turns from behind” (quoted in Peebles: 2011, p. 32).

The purpose of this act in the film is a bit different than Swofford’s description in his memoir. Kruger, the soldier in the film on the receiving end of this “field-fuck” is not being punished or violated because of any wrongdoing. Rather, he is a participant in the act in so far as to act out against his superior. The scene also points again to the paradoxical dichotomy of homophobia and homoeroticism that exists in the military. Sykes reacts by hurrying the journalist away from the vulgar scene (in order to censor this behavior’s representation in the media). As representative of the military hierarchy, Sykes’s denial of homoeroticism

²⁸ MOPP suits are as heavy as most winter clothes. They are made from two layers of thick fabric that contain between them a carbon powder that is intended to absorb any harmful chemical the suit comes into contact with, thus keeping that chemical from coming into contact with the skin.

simultaneously admits its existence. Ultimately this kind of expression, which is one of collective rebellion against authority and masculinity, is punished in the military with hard labor that also reinforces the masculine ideals of strength and obedience.

A new recurring motif of modern war films is the appearance or mention of a “Jody” figure. The stagnation of Swofford’s deployment brings constant attention to this figure. “Jody” is generally a man, who takes advantage of a soldier’s deployment in order to befriend a soldier’s wife and eventually steal her away. In terms of the preservation of a hegemonic masculinity and the performance of the masculine trait of sexual prowess, this motif’s presentation in the film constantly calls into question the military’s concept of masculinity. In particular there are some striking shots of a makeshift bulletin board in one scene that has collected photographs of Marines’ wives and girlfriends that have left them. If the wives and girlfriends of so many soldiers’ wives are unfaithful and/or leaving their husbands, then the links between sexual prowess and masculinity become very tenuous at best, and the necessity of a hegemonic masculinity to military efficiency comes under question. On a weekend pass there is a complete breakdown of masculinity when one soldier’s wife sends him a home video of her own infidelity. Failure of sexual prowess has weakened this soldier’s masculinity and goes further to prove that military masculinity’s links to heterosexuality are imagined and enforced by American hegemony.

Swofford’s own experience of the Jody motif sends him on a downward spiral. He drinks alcohol, which is prohibited on deployments, and avoids guard duty. His failures in performing his military duties and adhering to the military masculine result in his demotion and a humiliating punishment. Sykes first force-hydrates him until his body has expelled the “unauthorized beverage,” and then made to burn the feces collected in the barrels of makeshift

outhouses. Swofford's fall is marked poignantly by words from Dante's *Divine Comedy* scrawled on one of the barrels: "Abandon hope, all you who enter here." Because of all this a psychosis develops in Swofford that is more characteristic of the kind shown in films of Vietnam. He forces Fergus O'Donnell (Brian Geraghty) to repeat the assembly and disassembly of an M16 again and again, because O'Donnell is indirectly responsible for the aforementioned punishments. After many repetitions Swofford loads a round and points it at O'Donnell. Chillingly Swofford describes how the M-16 is used to shoot at a target, "usually a human target," that could be enemy or friend. After a few intense and visceral moments Swofford turns it on himself giving the trigger to O'Donnell. Here, with Marine on Marine violence, the film exposes one of military masculinity's worst attributes. Swofford is driven to these actions, because he has no outlet for the desire to kill as a part of the hyper-aggression fostered by the military. At the brink of his sanity his desire to "know what it's like to kill a man" forces him to train his weapon on a fellow Marine. This desire to "know" killing predicates all of these Marines' notions of masculinity.

Sykes, true to the form of the inspiring leader archetype, will eventually attempt to reassure Swofford of his decision to join the Marines. Such a reassurance is necessary after Swofford's murder/suicide attempt, and especially after the ground invasion of Iraq where Swofford experiences his first brushes with death, the news that Troy – the closest example to ideal military masculinity the film provides – will not be permitted to reenlist, and Fowler's (Evan Jones) desecration of an Iraqi corpse. All of this is devastating to the morale of the unit, particularly Swofford, as the other half to Troy's sniper team, and the film's best representation of conscience. Sykes's pep talk does little but unrealistically romanticize military service. His logic falsely concludes that military service grants exclusive access to the world. He asks

Swofford, “Who else gets a chance to see shit like this?” referring to the burning oil wells all around them that the military has privileged them to witness. The film points at the absurdity of the question as it shows the audience just what Sykes thinks only he and his Marines get to see. Sykes sees the military as a place of exclusivity – another important component of military masculinity – and must reinforce that idea in him, and in his men, if his example of military masculinity is to survive and thrive.

Regardless of their inactivity Troy and Swofford get a chance to demonstrate their training in military masculinity. A last stronghold of Saddam’s army has fortified itself on an Iraqi airfield. Troy and Swofford are dispatched to kill the officer/s in charge in hopes of demoralizing their men and forcing surrender with minimal loss of life. The two men skillfully and stealthily make their way to their objective and are seconds away from completing their mission before another officer, Major Lincoln (Dennis Haysbert), storms into their sniper perch and aborts their mission. The promise of the “pink mist” so romanticized by Sykes earlier in the film was dangled in front of them, but yanked away at the last second. Troy quickly breaks down emotionally accusing Lincoln of training them for this moment, but not allowing them to follow through. He screams through his tears, “That is my kill! You don’t know what we go through!” Lincoln’s air strike flies over the airfield destroying whatever opportunity Swofford and Troy have/had at fulfilling their masculine desire for killing.

Their aborted mission sends them back to their unit having been completely stripped of their masculinity by Lincoln and the military. Swofford says to Troy, “I never shot my rifle.” Their opportunity for demonstrating their masculinity is lost as their codified impotence is complete, and Swofford’s reference to shooting his rifle connects the ability to perform in war to the phallic imagery of the gun. Like the lack of sexual release that soldiers experience, these

soldiers have also not been allowed to reenact their fantasy of war provided by the films of Vietnam. With close combat becoming a relic of the past, Marines like Swofford and Troy appear as holdovers of an older style of warfare. Godfrey's argument that soldiers are demasculinized, as their training proves unnecessary or inefficient emerges in the film as Desert Storm ends with Swofford's unit celebrating under the desert night. What use did all the "hardening" of these soldiers have in a war that relied mostly on air superiority and lasted just over four days?

In its conclusion *Jarhead* provides evidence that Godfrey's claim from above that the military trains its men and women to perform masculinity in such a way that that masculinity becomes unnecessary in the face of war. Swofford and his comrades have been trained for months and years as part of a masculine collective that lusts for the death and destruction of war. This goal of the military to create such an intense desire for war either completely eliminates individual moral sensibilities or relegates them to the furthest recesses of the mind. The film, in showing us the nature of a soldier's experience in the Gulf War, critiques the masculine nature of the military that creates soldiers who lust for war and who are forever damaged when that lust goes unfulfilled.

In actuality, Gulf War ground troops were inconsequential as American air superiority won the war in just four days. The skill of the soldiers meant little to that war effort and left many soldiers questioning their roles in a military that didn't seem to need them. However, after Desert Storm was over, the military continued to train its men and women in the tactics and techniques of a ground war fought in close combat. So, training practices continue to produce an insatiable desire to kill at point blank range. In *The Hurt Locker*, unlike *Jarhead*, we see how soldiers, with the same masculine ideals instilled in them, behave in a war with the ground

component that the Gulf War did not have. Because of this the soldiers as depicted in *The Hurt Locker* must rely on training as reflex and instinct in order to survive, so their masculine behavior is less a behavior of performance as it was in *Jarhead* and more a result of the repetition of training and indoctrination.

The opening titles quote by journalist Chris Hedges from *The Hurt Locker* posits, “war is a drug.” I would argue, however, that war itself is not a drug. What makes war seem addicting is the hegemonic construction of masculinity in the United States military that necessitates the violence and destruction of war. The United States pursues war in order to satisfy its addiction to the real drug, a dominant masculinity. Soldiers such as Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner) are not inherently addicted to war because war itself is addicting. They are addicted to war because they have been conditioned as a part of the military masculine collective to thrive in situations of chaos and trauma, such as those of war. What’s more is that soldiers become addicted to the chaos and trauma because they are rewarded heavily for their ability to enact their masculine training under those circumstances.

The opening scene that follows Hedges’ quote establishes the superior American military masculinity. An important aspect of this masculinity is the reliance on technology. Troops arrive in up-armored Humvees and a LAV-300 (a six-wheeled, 6x6 fighting vehicle whose manufacture can support a number of configurations).²⁹ Conversely, the Iraqi army and police aiding in an IED (improvised explosive device) quarantine ride in the beds of pickup trucks with no added

²⁹ Up-armored Humvees were a new technology for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Inch thick steel reinforced the doors and body of the Humvee to protect soldiers riding inside from gunfire and IEDs with blast trajectories coming from the side. Humvees during Desert Storm had no such fittings as seen in the earlier film *Jarhead*.

protection excepting their Kevlar helmets and vests.³⁰ Technology allows the U.S. forces to better perform their duties with better protection and firepower. The Iraqi forces and the insurgency's masculinity tied to technology are placed in a subordinate position to American masculinity from the very first moments of the film. The film knowingly problematizes this perception when the audience is forced to consider that the insurgency's refusal to adhere to traditional forms of combat. An unexploded artillery round, some crude wiring, and a cheap cellular telephone are all it takes to render the U.S. Army, for all of its technological and technical superiority, insignificant, and Thompson's (Guy Pearce) death provides the first blow to the dismantling of America's military masculinity.

After replacing Thompson on this EOD team James quickly shows himself to be reckless with his own life on their next mission to disable a reported IED. Refusing to allow Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) to investigate the IED with the robot shown in the opening, James dons the bomb suit to check on it himself. The danger that James willingly seeks out is impressed upon the audience in what I believe to be the most terrifying moment in the history of film.³¹ James diffuses an initial IED and discovers six more explosives that surround him. Showing great composure James disarms each and acknowledges the trigger man as he flees the scene and discards a seemingly innocuous nine-volt battery.³²

³⁰ American soldiers are issued Kevlar vests and helmets as well, but American vests also have a ceramic plate in the front and back that can stop a pistol round fired from point blank range.

³¹ During my own deployment experience in Iraq I was present for the discovery or detonation of several IEDs – one time being in the target vehicle that was disabled by a bomb buried under the road. My response to this scene during my initial screening was intense enough to halt my viewing.

³² A common detonation technique used by insurgents is to touch a wire to the positive and negative connections of a 9V battery, completing the circuit and providing the charge needed to detonate the blasting cap.

James's conduct in the scene above produces some immediate tensions between him and Sanborn. The EOD team had developed a rhythm and cohesion under Thompson's leadership that made Sanborn feel safe. James's method is tremendously different, and even though in these early moments of the film he risks only his own life Sanborn begins to fear for his own life. This fundamental dispute over leadership styles and standard operating procedure creates and drives the tension between Sanborn and James throughout the film as each attempts to prove his superior masculinity to the other, to Eldridge (Brian Geraghty), the soldier under their command, and to themselves.

James is a daring yet technically proficient soldier. He is competent and practical, albeit reckless. Sanborn, on the other hand, is careful and methodical to a fault. His strict adherence to standard operating procedure will in most cases protect his life, but because they are intended to protect the careers of his superiors more than his life their practicality is questionable at best. Despite each soldier's positive qualities they both have tragic flaws. James's obsessive need to solve puzzles in the form of IEDs reinforces his already reckless nature and will place his life as well as the lives of his subordinates in danger. The character of his obsession is eventually shown to be overtaking as James has little, or no perspective of his life and responsibilities away from war and disabling IEDs. His relationship with his wife is an unsure one, as he cannot even remember whether or not they are divorced. Sanborn is incapable of operating outside of the military's established protocols and that inability to improvise will hinder his ability to demonstrate the masculinity in his training.

By contrast, Eldridge appears in this film to examine the flaws and benefits of the leadership styles and attitudes about war of James and Sanborn. Eldridge is a Specialist. This is significant, because it suggests naiveté and inexperience. On missions Eldridge is often unsure of

what to do, so he looks to Sanborn for instructions. The mentor/protégé relationship between Eldridge and Sanborn is complicated, however, by the introduction of James. James has dismantled hundreds of IEDs without fatal consequence, so Eldridge begins to question if erring on the side of caution is the best way to do his job effectively. This internal crisis for Eldridge ultimately signals a deeper issue of fatalism. Eldridge has become convinced that his presence in Iraq will inevitably lead to his own death. Before the new team's first mission Eldridge laments, "Pretty much the bottom line is if you're in Iraq, you're dead."

James's representation in the film deliberately points at the inconsistencies and inefficiencies of the military's established chains of command. His radically different approach to warfare as this EOD team experiences it compared to Thompson and Sanborn illustrates discontinuity in the military. The military standards of organization and uniformity are important to its conception of masculinity. Capability and efficiency are central to the operation of the military masculine and the surest way to achieve both is to create a uniform fighting force. That James demonstrates variation instead of uniformity suggests that if soldiers are not strictly uniform and interchangeable then incompetence must exist in the ranks. This threatens military masculinity, because military policies, procedures, and practices are generally above scrutiny. The absence of an insisted upon uniformity necessitates a reconsideration of the effectiveness and/or necessity of the military's standard operating procedures.

The possibility of rampant incompetence in military leadership is not its only problem. Two officers appear in the film, Colonel Reed (David Morse) and Lieutenant Colonel Cambridge (Christian Camargo). Each man exhibits a degree of obliviousness in combat without showing any particular skill in leading soldiers. In fact, these two characters in the film serve to prove the incompetence in military leadership more than anything else. Reed seems positively aroused by

James's dedication to facing danger without fear and completing his job with remarkable efficiency (James claims that he has disarmed more than 800 IEDs). This sort of reception by his superiors might explain why James has achieved the rank of Sergeant First Class.³³ To an outside observer, like one in the audience, it would seem that James's complete disregard for his own safety should merit reprimand not accolades, but that is what is shown. Reed can only respond to James's actions with awe and praise. To him James demonstrated bravery, not careless stupidity. Cambridge, a military doctor, is shown to be decidedly more sensitive and concerned with the welfare of soldiers, particularly Eldridge. In a few interactions between the two Eldridge encourages Cambridge to come on one of the EOD team's missions. Cambridge decides to do so, and on that mission he demonstrates his narrow understanding of conditions of warfare in Iraq by getting killed by an IED. We might further conclude that his sensitivity and understanding – not markers of military masculinity – also led to his death. By not performing the military masculine “full-time” he was bound to die.

In a movie that, I argue, provides a pointed critique of masculinity, the sequence surrounding the team's encounter with a group of civilian contractors is strangely placed. To this point in the film James and Sanborn have participated in masculine posturing to achieve dominance and Eldridge's failure to find his own place in the military hierarchy work toward an argument against the established military order. Showing incredible discipline and skill – traits of military masculinity – James and Sanborn take control of the situation that has seen most of the civilian contractors killed or injured by sniper fire. Eldridge similarly showcases elite skill as he kills the last of the insurgents who was taking cover behind a herd of goats.

³³ It takes some men and women an entire career to achieve the rank of Sergeant First Class – a rank that one can only be demoted from by an act of Congress

In this sequence these men show their ability to forget their differences. James and Sanborn's conflict over leadership and safety practices is forgotten for the moment and they work together well in order to ensure that they survive along with the living mercenaries. Eldridge also overcomes his preoccupation with death and destiny with the help of James's encouragement to take his life into his own hands by dispatching a would be sniper intent on killing Eldridge and all else who remain alive. For the moment these men's masculinities that have been fostered by training and an already lengthy military deployment serve them well providing some evidence that the military's rigorous process of creating soldiers is effective. This is not entirely accurate, however, as the film continues to progress and the mentalities of these soldiers continues to degrade, and the effects of their training and indoctrination proves to be ultimately unnecessary and inefficient. So, while this sequence might serve to refute the argument posited thus far in the film, it really serves as a reference point for how detrimental a strong sense of military masculinity can be. This is reasserted in the following scenes of James, Sanborn, and Eldridge drunkenly wrestling to celebrate their kills and to prove, yet again, their masculinity to one another. In the absence of an enemy to exercise domination over they must dominate each other.

Tension and uncertainty characterizes these men's masculinities individually and in relation to one another. Some moments in the film thus far reveal the back and forth battle that exists internally and externally for these men to assert their masculinities. The biggest blow to each of their masculinities comes in the group's fourth mission in the film. Cambridge decides to come along on Eldridge's request. James, Sanborn and Eldridge clear a building that has been reported as an insurgent bomb factory. Cambridge remains outside and attempts to encourage some local Iraqis to clear the area, because of the danger inherent. James's psyche takes the first

blow. During the clearance of the building James discovers a body of a young boy. He believes it to be the body of “Beckham” (Christopher Sayegh), a young boy that sells pirated DVDs on the American military base that James has befriended. It is quite obvious that the insurgents have operated on the body’s chest and abdomen.³⁴ The audience is made to watch as James investigates the body for explosives, because the camera shows a very deliberate attention to the cutting of the stitches and James’s hands disappearing inside the body cavity. Noticeably shaken by the experience James is unable to destroy the body and the IED factory, so he wraps the body in a shroud and carries it out of the building. This event dismantles James’s conception of the lengths that the enemy is willing to do to kill him, so James will continue to doubt his own position as a soldier in Iraq. In the scenes following his decisions indicate that he is scrambling to regain a sense of his surroundings as well as reassert his masculinity over the Iraqi enemy.

Eldridge’s newly acquired masculine mentality suffers a similar blow when Cambridge is killed in a manner similar to Master Sergeant Sweet in *Redacted*. Cambridge unknowingly causes his own death as he encourages a group of Iraqis to move from the area. With the risk of killing innocent Iraqis removed the trigger man can freely detonate an IED obscured by a sandbag similar to the one seen in the film’s opening. Eldridge, who invited Cambridge to join them on a mission, is devastated by Cambridge’s death. In shock he attempts to “find Cambridge” to see if he’s all right. James and Sanborn must restrain him and attempt to explain to him that Cambridge is gone. After this Eldridge will exhibit the “death-seeking” behavior linked to military masculinity. His drive to survive all but disappears as he aligns himself with

³⁴ It was common for insurgents to disguise explosives in the corpses of animals and people to lure American troops in for detonation. *Rules of Engagement*, discussed later, mentions similarly a “donkey bomb.”

James's search for someone to blame. It takes James shooting him, and his would-be kidnappers, to make Eldridge realize the error in a reckless attitude towards war.

Cambridge's death, while significant for its effects on Eldridge, is more important because of what Cambridge represents. As a military doctor – probably a psychologist – he spends his time far from danger on base tasked with monitoring soldiers like Eldridge, who exhibit symptoms of PTSD. He is a composite of military officers that have an inaccurate perception of combat in Iraq, and an unrealistic expectation of soldiers. Still deluded by the military's policies to "win hearts and minds" he treats Iraqis ignorant to their abuse by soldiers before him. His relative safety has prevented him from seeing the reality of the Iraq war and the rapid reversal of attitudes of the Iraqi people against American forces. Cambridge pays the ultimate price for the policies of his peers, and the abuses perpetrated on the Iraqi people by American ground forces.

With his whole team shaken, himself included, by deaths of soldiers and civilians, James takes it upon himself to bring justice to those responsible. His masculinity reaches truly arrogant levels first as he ventures out of Camp Victory to confront "Beckham's" family. Finding his way to a house that may or may not be the young boy's James quickly realizes his mistake in searching for "Beckham's" killers with no real idea of where to begin looking. The gravity of his unwise decision is likewise made apparent to the audience, as James must return to base on his own. The scrutiny of the Iraqi people that take notice of him weighs heavy with the frustrations caused by the American occupation. Like much of the film to this point it is made clear that Iraq is full of potential enemies – certainly not any friends.

Perhaps because there is no respite from this experience before the team's next mission James's need for retribution still fuels his actions "outside the wire." Sent out to investigate the

source of an oil-tanker truck explosion. This scene is the film's most revealing one of the carnage that follows an IED detonation. Burning cars and palm trees, bloody and dazed survivors, amputated limbs, and shots of women wailing and children calling out for their families are intercut with long shots of the scene that display a huge crater with pockets of fire that was created in the blast. James makes the necessary connections to feed his obsession and makes it his team's duty to go out "Hadji hunting." Eldridge has completely been drawn into James's style of warfare. He has been convinced that bravery and caution are not the traits of a soldier, and that brazenness and recklessness are most valued.

James's obsession becomes absurd once again as he orders his team to split up and search three alleyways for the phantom insurgency near the blast site. Like these soldiers, the audience has no idea what to look for in the enemy. In the films of older wars the enemy was always easily identifiable. Germans wore gray uniforms emblazoned with the symbols of Nazism, like seen in Darryl F. Zanuck's *The Longest Day* (1962) or Ken Annakin's *The Battle of the Bulge* (1965). The Japanese and the Vietnamese were characterized by their Southeast Asian features, as well as dark brown uniforms in contrast to the American tans and greens, as seen in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957) or in the more recent *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006). The enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan war films hide among the civilian population, whom they are indistinguishable from, for an advantage. Children pop out of doorways in each alleyway to draw attention to this inability to identify the enemy and renew the anxiety generated by the recurrent theme of Vietnam films that had women and children often participating as combatants. Soon the least experienced soldier of the three, Eldridge, is abducted, and James and Sanborn rush to rescue him. In the attempt James inadvertently shoots Eldridge, but kills his two abductors.

Eldridge's shooting leads to a complicated moment of the film that calls attention to Eldridge's injury as the fruitless result of an overexertion of military masculinity. In the sequence prior Eldridge is a most-willing participant in James's half-cocked mission to get some bad guys. In reply to James's suggestion he says, "I'd like to get in a little trouble." Eldridge only partly accepts the blame for his plight laying off most of it on James, who encouraged Eldridge's vehemence for close combat. James is condemned for his "adrenaline fix" and the risk that it exposes his subordinates to. In this scene James becomes a representation of the military brass that send other men and women in their place to face danger, injury, and death. Eldridge decries this aspect of the military hierarchy as it has been embodied in James, and cries out on behalf of Americans against the war and soldiers in Iraq, "Let's get out of this fucking desert!"

The final moments of the film offer up evidence that military masculinity conditions soldiers in such a way that they become incapable of functioning in American civilian society. Back home, James, doing some grocery shopping with his wife, is sent to get some cereal before meeting up at the checkout counter. James appears small in the frame next to a shelf of dozens of different kinds of cereals. A close-up of James shows his frustration with the inability to make a choice, and an eye-line match gives us some interior perspective about what is making this decision so difficult. In Iraq James was responsible for life and death decisions, but to be at home and make a decision concerning the minutiae of everyday life was beyond his capability. Having a choice is something that many soldiers have difficulty coming to terms with. The military tells its soldiers what to do, how to do it, where to do it, and at what time it needs to be done. By removing the soldier as a part of the decision making process efficiency is maximized, but soldiers often have trouble taking that control of their lives back upon separation.

Jarhead and *The Hurt Locker* have each seen a considerable amount of critical and/or commercial success. The question arises, then, why these films did not fare in a similar fashion as those examined in the first chapter of my analysis, all of which all failed at the box office and were almost universally panned by critics – *In the Valley of Elah* being the one exception. I propose that the answer lies in how these films place masculinity under scrutiny as it operates as a foundation of the American military. These films, unlike the ones examined earlier, do not place the blame on soldiers for the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but on the governmentally established system that trains and indoctrinates them in the ways of a military masculinity. From the Gulf War to Operation Iraqi Freedom these films show us how the situation of the military's particular brand of masculinity in soldiers both male and female is unnecessary given the evolution of warfare from World War II to Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan, and makes soldiers unfit for life outside the military.

I propose that these arguments against military masculinity and the themes that support them suggest that the films being made about the current wars are unsuccessful when they do not address the issues associated with masculinity, patriarchy, and misogynistic hegemony as it presents itself in today's military. In recent years with more and more gender integration and the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, these traits of the American military have been brought more and more into the light of public scrutiny. Fiction films like *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane* draw attention to the uniquely difficult place that women occupy in the military, never able to truly integrate in a system that was designed at every level to be a homosocial one for men. Even documentaries like Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) and Kirby Dick's *The Invisible War* (2012) expose the military's nefarious nature in covering up crimes against women who serve alongside men. Growing social awareness has made the

conventions of war films of the past obsolete when telling the stories of wars of the present.

Some commentary on issues of gender, gender relations, the accepted binary of

masculinity/femininity, and their effects on soldiers must be provided in films of modern war.

Audiences are aware of these issues going into the theater, and they expect more sophisticated commentary on them in not only the military, but in modern society.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNKNOWN ENEMY:

GENRE RESILIENCE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF ARABS

Like gender integration the road to racial integration was a long and difficult one for the United States military. If it weren't for Harry Truman's executive order to desegregate the nation's armed forces it may have been an even longer struggle towards being able to serve akin to what women experienced in policies preventing them from serving in combat roles "on the front lines." With the roles and numbers of racial and ethnic minorities increasing in the military over time, so too do we see a change in their portrayal in the war film. In World War II African Americans, Japanese Americans, and/or Hispanic Americans were often included as a part of the "unit" in war films. With support and pressure coming from the United States government the anachronistic placement of these characters ensured that all Americans rallied behind the war effort even if some groups' service capabilities were restricted. In Vietnam the military had been somewhat newly desegregated, but on the heels of the civil rights movement African Americans in particular were still in subordinate positions to whites in much of the country and their poor socioeconomic stations resulted in their being drafted in disproportionate numbers to whites for the war. Blacks in war films are often depicted as fast-talking, street-smart realists with no intention other than to survive the war and make it home, as seen in *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986) and *Casualties of War* (Brian De Palma, 1989). This contrasts strongly with the white officer stereotype from these films that is convinced of the moral imperative of winning the war in Vietnam, an idea that when most of these films were made was shown to be erroneous. In the films of modern war from the Gulf War and beyond minorities often appear in roles to illustrate

the diversity that has become commonplace in the military, but people of color are rarely in the role of the protagonist. In the five films addressed in the previous chapters there are only three prominent characters of color (*Redacted* – Salazar, *Battle for Haditha* – Ramirez, and *The Hurt Locker* – Sanborn). There are at least three times that many white characters in principal roles.

There is still much to be done to ensure that people of color are given fair and accurate representation in war films, but in the aftermath of the first Gulf War and the events of 9/11 ten years later a new dynamic creation of the ethnic “other” appeared in war films. This was not a creation of war films or by any means even unique to them in any sense. I’m speaking of the depiction of Arabs and the people of Islam.³⁵ Jack G. Shaheen’s *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* summarily reviews more than 900 films from 1896 until today claiming that, “filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy #1 – brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural ‘others’ bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews” (Shaheen: 2001, pg. 2). Shaheen’s readings point to an emerging trend in the reception of war films. Orientalism is poorly received and heavily criticized.

I have identified three groups of representations that emerge when we examine how Arabs have been represented in war films. First, like any minority group in war films, Arabs are often depicted in subservient roles to whites. Tony Shalhoub’s character, Frank Haddad, in *The Siege* (Edward Zwick, 1998) opposite Denzel Washington and Annette Bening is a good example. He serves a government agency in the apprehension of known terrorists. Even though he is not white, Denzel Washington has become such an icon of American cinema that one could

³⁵ While I understand that the terms “Arab” and “Muslim” are not the same thing I employ the term Arab here and throughout this chapter to refer to both groups interchangeably in a similar fashion to Jack G. Shaheen, as the two often appear together in their representations on film, especially in the genre of war film.

argue that his “blackness” has been pacified and he represents for this film at least a white hierarchy. If that reading is not satisfactory, enter Bruce Willis’s character, a white male General who is tasked with exercising martial law over New York City after a series of terrorist attacks. Haddad distances himself from his Arab ancestry by assimilating to the regulations of one of America’s most strict law enforcement agencies. In this way Haddad is codified as a “compliant” Arab. He is constantly working to prove to his country that he subscribes to American values rather than the values of his home nation or the Islam religious traditions – even though none of these values are necessarily mutually exclusive from the others.

The second subset of Arabic representation on film is the “religious fanatics” that Shaheen refers to in the introduction of his book. Everything about them is foreign and exotic, thus the step towards anti-American codification is a small one. They wear foreign clothes, they have strange customs – religious and otherwise – and they constantly refer to Americans as “infidels” that have tainted their right to practice their religion, or govern their homelands, freely. As seen in the Al-Qaeda “foreign fighters,” who decry the consumption of alcohol, in *Battle for Haditha* they also have extremely traditional values. In any modern war film these characters are not hard to spot. They are often the enemy and meet death on terms that are good for “them” and for “us.”³⁶ The soldiers responsible for the scandal at Abu Ghraib and for the atrocities like the ones depicted in *Redacted* and *Battle for Haditha* carry out those acts because of an adherence to the belief that these representations are true – that they are real.

The third, and last, subset that has arisen since the Gulf War and the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 is a more complex representation. I will refer to this

³⁶ I refer here to the common understanding among American audiences that people of Islam believe that dying in the act of killing an American “infidel” grants them Martyr status and instant access to Heaven.

subset later as the complex/nuanced Arab. This representation of the Arab is also the most infrequent, because this representation doesn't exemplify any polar set of values. Because they are not strongly aligned with the West and America's forceful implementation of a worldwide democracy, or the radical fundamental conservatism under the Kingdom of Islam finding a narrative space for them is difficult. They cannot be used in opposition to American forces, because they do not oppose, nor support American initiatives. They just wish to be left alone, to live as they wish without any government pushing them towards an ideology. They also cannot be used to oppose Islamic governments, radical fundamentalists, or dictatorial/terrorist regimes, because while they do in fact oppose those groups, by opposing them outright they immediately become members of "compliant" subset whereby they are subservient to America's wishes for them, which have already been established as positions they cannot occupy.

The most recent glaring example of the second grouping of Arab representation defined above is William Friedkin's *Rules of Engagement* (2000). The film sets out to establish Arabs, specifically the Yemeni people, as backwards and fanatical. Furthermore, the film promotes the idea that American lives are more valuable than any other, most of all Arabs. Samuel L. Jackson's character, Marine Colonel Terry Childers, is dispatched from a Navy ship to "babysit" a hostile situation in case things turn chaotic. Upon arrival, Childers immediately orders his men to take defensive positions while he finds the ambassador, played by Ben Kingsley, and his family in order to evacuate them. The crowd of Yemenis outside the embassy turns violent at the arrival of Childers and his men and quickly escalates from stones to bullets peppering the walls and coming through the windows. Three Marines are shot before the ambassador is flown to

safety and more are wounded or killed, including Childers, as he tries to “hold the fort.”³⁷

Without a provocation clear to the audience Childers gives the order to one of his subordinate officers, Captain Lee (Blair Underwood) to open fire into the crowd below. Lee hesitates for fear Childers’s order might lead to the deaths of innocent civilians among the crowd some of them women and children. Childers reiterates his order shouting, “Waste the motherfuckers!” into his radio handset and a dozen Marines rise up from behind what little cover they have to open fire into the crowd. In the aftermath it is made clear that 83 Yemenis were killed with more than 100 more critically wounded. Childers is eventually accused of disregarding the rules of engagement – procedures for the various combat scenarios (land, sea, and air) that are intended to minimize casualties of innocents – and the rest of the film showcases his court martial and the investigation and intrigue that surrounds it.

The sequence above occupies roughly fifteen minutes of the overall film (128 minutes) from the first shots of chaos in the embassy’s courtyard filled with Yemeni demonstrators to the somber and quiet close as Childers stands atop the Embassy roof looking down at the bloody mess below claiming, “Mission complete.” These scenes serve as the film’s most significant representation of the Yemeni people, and more generally of Arabs. No time is wasted to emphasize that the people of the Middle East hate the West, particularly Americans, and are quick to attack with whatever means necessary.

In order to ensure that the audience identifies with Childers and shares his hatred of the crowd the film carefully constructs Childers as a soldier, though violent and temperamental at times. So, what is most important about the beginning moments of Friedkin’s film is that there

³⁷ The architecture of the embassy resembles that of a medieval castle with parapets and towers. In this instance however these features that were intended as added cover for defending soldiers on the walls provide very little protection for the Marines that have taken position on the roof.

are no clear images of the crowd firing on Childers and his Marines on the roof. All that is offered here are repeated images of “snipers” firing from ideal vantage points on the rooftops of buildings behind the crowd. Without clear justification for Childers’s actions the ambiguity about his intentions makes his history shown in the film’s prologue all the more important. In the prologue Childers and his friend Hayes Hodges (Tommy Lee Jones) are young officers on patrol in the jungles of Vietnam. Together they are “green” officers trying to survive acting in the interests of saving American lives.

At surface value this film appears as another in a long history of films that vilify Arabs through a harmful stereotype. The depictions are familiar to the audience even if they are not accurate to any kind of reality. Shaheen exhaustively outlines the establishment of the kind of stereotypes seen in this film and criticizes the studios and governmental bodies that continue to allow even now these caricatures of Arabs. While *Rules of Engagement* probably deserves its place in Shaheen’s “Worst Films” appendix there is another interesting reading of this film provided by Tim Jon Semmerling that points to a conservative reactionary concept called “the myth of political correctness (PC)” that drives the film’s narrative and makes the representation of the “evil,” violent, or fanatical Arab necessary.

The “Conservative Myth of the Politically Correct” was created in reaction to the election of Bill Clinton to the office of President of the United States of America. Clinton’s campaign platform was one of multiculturalism, relativism, deconstructionism, and postmodernism. Conservatives took to calling these ideologies “politically correct” as a way to denigrate them as a part of the liberal agenda. These ideas opposed the myth that conservatives had cultivated of the United States as wholesome and traditional. In that myth, that emerged and gained strength post World War II, America appears as a benevolent nation that “challenged... the barbarism” of

Native Americans, “the tyranny of European colonialism, the horrors of slavery, the bloody threat of secession, the devastation of economic depressions, and the brutality of fascism,” along with “the menace of Communism” in the latter half of the 20th century (Semmerling: 2006, p. 165).³⁸ It was these inherently essentialist ideas that were disputed by "Clintonian" thinkers leading them to adopt the “isms” of a new generation of leaders that would usher the nation into the new millennium. As a reactionary measure the conservatives went to work at creating another myth – a myth that didn’t promote conservative values as older myths did, but rather attacked the foundational principles of Clinton’s administration. Together the Conservative Myth and the Conservative Myth of the PC worked together to attack liberal thinking associated with the “isms” of a postmodern world. Of these the most important target was/is multiculturalism and this film serves to critique that ideology first and foremost.

In the film’s beginning an attempt is made at gaining ground for the conservative myth of America as benevolent power. A younger Hodges and Childers are young officers in the lush, dense jungle of Vietnam. They separate their respective squads in order to advance on the enemy from two directions in hopes of overwhelming enemy defenses and limiting American casualties. The enemy is well prepared for one advance and Hodges is the only survivor of his squad after a deadly ambush by well-camouflaged and skilled NVA troops. Childers, however, has the advantage along his route. Unlike Hodges, Childers and his men are able to preemptively identify the enemy along their path and their scenario takes an opposite track. Childers and his men are able to kill or injure several NVA men before Childers takes their commander, Colonel Binh Le Cao (Baoan Coleman), prisoner. Under the threat of murder that commander withdraws

³⁸ To avoid confusion between the two “myths” cultivated by conservatives I will refer to the newer myth that criticizes the ideologies of the late 20th century liberal ideology as the “Conservative Myth of the PC” and the older, more situated, one that promotes the U.S.’s benevolent nature simply as the “Conservative Myth.”

his men that had just massacred Hodges's men. Hodges, seriously wounded, is rescued by Childers's actions and this "life debt" will motivate his actions to help Childers later in the film.

This prologue establishes a few foundational aspects of the Conservative Myth that are integral to the present establishment of the Conservative Myth of the PC. The context of the war in Vietnam is most important here. By referencing a conflict that was 25 years old the film benefits from a historical hindsight that privileges the viewer with knowledge about that war that the camera's subjects did not have. The audience can watch these men's actions, particularly Childers's, and comfortably and confidently pass judgment based on the rehabilitation that has taken place since the end of that war.

The most important aspect of the Vietnam context for both this film and my argument is the establishment of enemy identity. The film first presents Childers's ambush on the element of the NVA with gratuitous explosions of human bodies in slow motion showing every drop of blood that exits the bodies. This ambush is over quickly and Childers takes the NVA soldiers left alive prisoner. During questioning of their commander about troop strength and other important strategic information the attack begins on Hodges and his squad. In order to justify the gruesome deadly force that was used by Childers's men – and the perverted attention shown to it by Friedkin – Hodges's men are ambushed soon after in several similar shots. First Hodges's knee explodes from enemy fire immediately incapacitating him, then a number of the Marines under his command die on-screen in a similar fashion to those Vietnamese that have already died by Childers and his men's hands. Childers's actions – of executing the NVA commander's radio operator – to save Hodges's life become justified, because the violence against American soldiers in this scene is shown in a greater magnitude the killing of the Vietnamese that occurred prior. The justification of the Vietnamese dead and the execution of Cao's radio operator are

reiterated during Childers's trial. Even Cao, under oath, believes Childers actions were "calculated... to save American Marines."

By beginning with the sequence in Vietnam the film redirects its spectators' strong emotions associated with the Vietnam War towards and Arab "enemy." These opening scenes are echoed by the events that take place at the American Embassy years later, because Childers similarly decides to "execute" a crowd of Yemeni protestors, some of them innocents, giving primacy to the value of American lives. Childers's execution of Colonel Cao's radio operator is directly referenced in the later "combat" action as Childers appears, in both scenes, to be bent on the exacting revenge in a brutal, psychopathic way on an enemy whose specific guilt is difficult to assign.

The visits to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. by both Hodges and Childers reiterate this connection between the "present day" events of the film and those of the "past" presented in the prologue. Both men lament at the loss of American lives in a war that has since been understood more and more as an unnecessary one that took more than 58,000 American lives. In a flashback the film juxtaposes Hodges memories of Vietnam with imagery of the consequence of American involvement – specifically Childers's actions – in Yemen. Both the vilification of the Vietnamese and the Arabs as enemies, and the premium placed on the value of American lives above all else gives the arguments of the Conservative and PC myths their strength.

Angry Yemeni people are shown sparingly in the film. By minimizing the Arab presence the film attempts to avoid seeming reactionary, but the film does not succeed in providing an enemy that is faceless or nameless so that that focus on domestic ideology is complete. The primary focus of the film, however, is not to generate hate for the Yemeni people. Yemen was

chosen as the location for the film “because it is sufficiently remote” (Shaheen: 2001, pg. 406). In focusing on the events following the killings the film foregrounds its critique of the democratic administration and its “politically correct” ideologies. By setting the film’s controversy in Yemen, which the U.S. has maintained peaceful relations with for decades, the film becomes not just a tool to dismantle multiculturalism, but also a piece of propaganda to promote and justify Orientalism.

The two appearances of the Yemeni – Childers’s defense of the embassy and Hodges investigative visit to Yemen – show the Yemeni as impoverished anti-Americans prone to violence and mob mentality. They wear clothes stereotypically Arab – the men in keffiyahs, and the women in their hiqabs, obscuring their faces from Westerners. They perform exotic, foreign customs and ceremonies – *Rules of Engagement*’s most egregious example occurs once Hodges lands in Yemen and a group of men are appear in the foreground of the frame dancing with miniature scimitars with exaggerated blades – for the Western spectator/tourist. These depictions are integral in the film to maintain the primacy of Americans and their lives. The Yemeni cannot appear to be “normal” in our American sense of the word lest they garner sympathy with the audience. The film relies heavily on the audience identifying with Childers and Hodges, so any such sympathizing for, or identification with, the Yemeni subjects would jeopardize that goal.

The Arabs’ representation as an enemy of the U.S. is tautological. They are angry and violent because of American presence in the Middle East. The U.S. believes that it must remain for peacekeeping purposes, so the Arabs there continue to be violent. The Conservative Myth of the PC suggests with this circular logic concerning the Arabs’ motivations that “political correctness” – specifically multiculturalism – has endangered American soldiers and citizens serving the state department overseas by situating them in a place where the “battle” can never

be won, where the people will always hate Americans. The limited representations – both in screen time and the reductive nature of their motivations – of Arabs in the film allow Friedkin to focus more on the “real” villain of the film, a composite representative of the Clinton administration, Bill Sokal.

Sokal’s self-preservation takes on a sinister and nefarious quality to further the film’s conservative agenda. Sokal sits alone in his office on the eve of Childers’s court martial watching the security camera footage from the embassy. The tape that has been hidden away until this moment shows the crowd firing up at the Marines on the roof of the embassy, as Childers has repeatedly claimed. Sokal needs Childers as a scapegoat, so he destroys the tape, because of how damaging the tape might be to Biggs’s case. A subtle reference to the improprieties of President Clinton during his term in office this willingness, of Sokal, to subvert the justice system in order to get the most beneficial result for himself illustrates the villain of liberalism by the Conservative Myth of the PC. That villainy shows no bounds as he pressures ambassador Mourain to testify, falsely, that Childers was crazed and intent on killing the Yemenis outside the embassy, and as he attempts to shift the blame from himself to Major Biggs when the location of the destroyed tape comes under question. Sokal wants to be at the center of the investigation and trial of Childers to ensure his own desired result. When that position becomes precarious, as he is cross-examined by Hodges, he exercises his skill in deflecting blame, and it is apparent that justice is Sokal’s last concern. He is most concerned with maintaining his position of relative power in the U.S. government.

The film continually suggests that Childers and Hodges, who have spent their lives serving their country and cultivating a lifestyle of heroism and valor, are being done a disservice. These men, their training, and their behavior has become outdated. Both men have experienced

different aspects of the military. Childers emerged from Vietnam unscathed and has gone on to great command and combat success. Hodges's injury shown in the prologue has precluded him from a similar career, as he is only capable of sitting behind a desk as a Marine Corps officer. In a private dialogue Childers tells Hodges, "It's a whole new ballgame – no friends, no enemies, no front, no rear, no victories, no defeats, no mama, no papa. We're orphans out there."

Childers's words here are common rhetoric of the modern war film, because the global landscape has markedly changed since the fall of the Soviet Union. However this film suggests through the articulation of the Conservative Myth of the PC that enemies exist in opposition to the United States both foreign and domestic. Childers must dispatch a crowd of violent protestors that explicitly represents the Arab "threat," and defy members of the administration that are willing to sacrifice a dedicated soldier for the sake of a multiculturalist global image. Bill Sokal, the National Security Advisor, conversely argues, "Why should the United States be held responsible for the actions of one man?" The film will argue over its course that the United States is responsible, because it trained Childers to value American lives above all else, and sent him into a violent scenario where he had to exercise his training by killing 83 Yemeni. The implication here is that Childers's training and his actions in Yemen were justified under the construction of the Conservative Myth.

The binary oppositions of the representations of Childers's Marines and the Yemeni crowd outside the embassy are necessary for the promotion of the Conservative Myth of the PC. What is also necessary is the brevity of the Yemenis' depiction in this film. The film avoids making its focus the villainy of Arabs, because there is only the short opening sequence set in Yemen, and appearances of Yemeni characters when Hodges returns to the "scene of the crime."

Friedkin strategically does this so that his film may focus on the supposed inadequacies of liberal “political correctness.”

The Yemeni shown during the embassy assault are unreasonably and uncharacteristically violent.³⁹ Additionally, that violence also escalates quickly from throwing stones to shooting from rooftops, throwing Molotov cocktails, and taking a battering ram to the embassy’s front door. The appearance of the battering ram conjures a memory of the students storming the embassy in Iran and the ensuing hostage crisis between 1979 and 1981. By referencing these traumatic events the film becomes reliant on attitudes of hate and animosity in order to establish its opposition against “political correctness.” The conservative argument takes its form as a question here in this opening salvo: How do America’s developing ideas of multiculturalism contend with, or incorporate, a people that seem so intent on hating Americans? Even when the American flag has been lowered and given to the retreating ambassador to symbolize the removal of American presence the snipers and the crowd do not relent in their attack. The removal of the flag, and the ambassador, is a symbolic one, and the Yemeni, as they are depicted and described throughout, desire more. Their intent is to kill as many Americans as possible.

By contrast, the American Marines who have arrived to evacuate the embassy do not reciprocate the violence of the Yemeni crowd. Methodically they take up overwatch positions on the embassy rooftop and do not return the snipers’ fire even though several Marines are injured or killed in the process. America takes the position of the victim with these injuries and deaths. Such codification is rare in film, because the strength and continued prevalence of the Conservative Myth relies so heavily on America existing as a benevolent super-power that rescues such victims from oppression, and is steadfast in overcoming evil. However, once the

³⁹ According to Shaheen’s review of *Rules of Engagement* no such violence has ever occurred against a U.S. embassy in Yemen (Shaheen: 2001, pg. 405).

Yemeni have been established as utterly bent on violence and the killing of American Marines Childers orders his men to fire into the crowd (to this point in the film the crowd has not been shown to possess weapons or firing upon the Marines on the roof of the embassy). In a moment of ambiguous American valor, the Marines come from behind their overwatch positions, and with far superior weaponry wreak havoc on the crowd below. That none of the Marines appears to engage the threat most apparent to the *audience* – the snipers on the opposing rooftops – is the most curious part of this scene. The images of bloody, gruesome bodies of the elderly, of women and of children implies that the crowd was, in fact, the most dangerous to Americans, so Childers was compelled to have his men neutralize the more significant threat. Of course, the videotape destroyed by Sokal, and Childers's own flashbacks to these events will confirm to us that the crowd was indeed the more significant threat to Childers and his men.

Lee cannot find the reason for Childers's order to fire into the crowd and in a harsh look in Childers's direction questions what he believes to be an unnecessary loss of life. Childers returns Lee's critical gaze with his own look of resolution. Later in the film, Childers confirms his resolution to Major Biggs (Guy Pearce) during cross-examination, "They were killing my Marines! I was not going to stand by and watch another Marine die, just to live by those fucking rules!" Here Childers is referring to the rules of engagement that govern ground combat in an urban environment. In this outburst of emotion Childers confirms that he gave his order to save American lives, thus valuing them as more important than the lives of any others. In this case those lives were the lives of Arabs – Yemeni men, women and children of varying levels of guilt concerning the injured and dead Marines.

Hodges's occupies a unique and unsteady position between two generations and their schools of thought. His father (Philip Baker Hall), a former general, is revered among Sokal's

inner circle and is an exemplar representation of the Conservative Myth. Hodges's own son (Nicky Katt) elected not to serve in the military and conversely represents the new liberal idealism of Sokal and the "Clintonian" era. The Hodges of the first and third generation, while representing different eras in American thought, both agree that Hayes is making a mistake in agreeing to represent Childers. Guilt has been removed from any thought process here as they criticize his adherence to a sense of honor. General Hodges recognizes that the government, with the new ideologies, is seeking to torpedo Childers's career, and to make an example of his kind of absolute thinking no longer to be tolerated in the military. More importantly he doesn't want to see the Hodges' "good" family name, dragged down with Childers. The youngest Hodges similarly disapproves, but not for motives of self-preservation, but because he has come to believe that Childers is guilty. The media, no doubt fed with information from Sokal, has given Hodges's son all the information he needs to hang Childers for the murder of innocents. These two men, taken together, symbolize and articulate the nation's sentiment towards the military. The previously assumed attributes of honor, duty, leadership, commitment, selfless service, etc. are no longer valuable. Moral relativism is the only real currency that soldiers have and will be judged on a case-by-case basis on whether or not they've acted morally.

In an intimate moment between Hodges and his father, where the younger tells the elder that if Childers can be hung out to dry in such a fashion then all of their collective medals and citations meant nothing. Childers also articulates this explicitly during his own cross-examination later in the film as part of his outburst: "You think there's a script for fighting a war without pissing somebody off!? Follow the rules and nobody gets hurt!? Yes, Innocent people probably died! Innocent people always die! I was not going to stand by and see another Marine die just to live by those fucking rules!" Whether or not Childers acted within the scope of duty

relies on whether or not the jury, or the film's audience, believes that American lives are more valuable than any other. The entire film stands a promotion of the idea that they indeed are and that the lives of innocent Yemenis, Arabs, are, in any number, worth "wasting" for the sake of saving Americans. In Hodges and Biggs's first meeting Biggs even draws this comparison. He says, "What do you think would happen is a Yemeni killed 83 Americans? They'd have a trial that would last for one day and they'd take off his head."

Biggs begins this film as a military lawyer who is only seeking to exact justice based on the merits of the case, but as the film goes on we can see him begin to be seduced by the power of "political correctness." He claims, at first, to not want to "stack the deck" against Childers, but as the film goes on it appears that his intention is to get a conviction by any means necessary. He even brings Colonel Cao from the Vietnam prologue to testify that Childers is prone to wild, psychotic acts of violence when in combat situations. Losing his case against Childers his role in the film closes with a promise to bring up new charges against Childers based on Cao's testimony. As a converted believer Biggs represents the unscrupulous follower of "political correctness" perpetuated by the Conservative Myth of the PC that can withstand no losses and will stop at nothing until the old guard is dismantled. The moral ambiguity is seemingly swept away as the film's jury pronounces Childers not guilty for the Yemeni murders. But, the question remains of whether or not Childers actions were morally just, honorable, or becoming of a United States Marine. The essentialist rhetoric employed by this film doesn't go far enough to explain why the dead deserved to die.

Both conservative myths are rounded out in the film's epilogue. Childers is found not guilty of the charges of murder and conduct unbecoming of a United States Marine Corps officer. Ambassador Mourain is removed from the Foreign Service after being charged with

perjury for lying during his testimony. And the conservatives' chief enemy, Bill Sokal, is convicted of destroying evidence and leaves his position as the National Security Advisor. The inscrutable position of the United States military is maintained and "politically correct" ideologies are shown to be a threat to the foundations of the country. The Conservative Myth of the PC suggests that liberal ideologies sacrifice ideals tied to the Conservative Myth, like divine providence. Under "political correctness" the government becomes willing to sacrifice the benevolent image of nation for more individual and personal success. This focus on the domestic debate over the ideals of the nation's government forces issues of race and identity raised by the depiction of the Yemeni people into the background. The film's achieved box office success premiering at number one, but has been widely panned by critics and scholars, like Semmerling and Shaheen, for its depictions of Arabs.⁴⁰ Through its success it helped to popularize the image of a crazed, fanatical, one-dimensional Arab character in film, especially in those films dealing with modern war. *Rules of Engagement* is an aberration of the industry, however, because it stands alone among films of modern war in its wholly negative depiction of the global Arab community. More and more films are striving to represent Arabs in a more accurate, realistic way as they attempt to question, and even subvert the kinds of representations that *Rules of Engagement* and countless films before utilized.

American war films have always relied on the creation of enemy as "other," and the war films of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are no exception. But there is a growing sense of responsibility to those being represented to do so accurately. Films like *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999) exist in opposition to *Rules of Engagement* and its predecessors that vilify Arab communities. Films set in modern war differ, because previous enemies of America appeared in

⁴⁰ Box office numbers found at: <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=weekend&id=rulesofengagement.htm>

direct opposition to American mythological ideals of the soldier that fights for freedom and democracy. That is no longer the case for American war films, because the enemy in Iraq is not necessarily opposed to Americans ideologically. *Three Kings* demonstrates how war films can successfully complicate the representation of Arabs in films about modern war in order to provide a more positive, accurate image of Arabs.

In Russell's film there are Arab characters from the second and third categories of representation described above. There are the borderline fanatical Arabs that are bent on revenge against an America that bombed their homes and ruined their lives under the guise of liberation. There are also representations of Arabs who have values very similar to most Americans wanting nothing more than to survive and perhaps thrive on their own hard work and ambition. The Arabs of this third category might be confused for the Arabs of the first category – compliant Arabs – but the film contrasts its Arab characters with both the soldiers of the United States and the surviving soldiers of Saddam's Republican Guard simultaneously in order to establish them as part of the third category of complex/nuanced Arabs.

There are varying opinions about whether or not *Three Kings* presents positive images of Arabs. Shaheen applauds the film, because it "erases damaging stereotypes, humanizing a people who for too long have been projected as caricatures" (Shaheen: 2001, p. 485). He even goes on to include this film among his extremely selective "Best Films" list in the appendices of his book (only twelve of the 900+ titles he reviewed made it to this list). Tim Jon Semmerling disputes Shaheen's claim that this film could be interpreted as a positive turn for the representation of Arabs in Hollywood. Semmerling interprets the film as a metaphor for forced anal sex over the Iraqis beginning with the "ass map" that Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg), Chief Elgin (Ice Cube), Conrad Vig (Spike Jonze), and Walter Wogaman (Jamie Kennedy) find on a surrendering

member Saddam's Republican Guard. His analysis continues, as he reads images of tunnels underground to represent the anus, and seeing the pacification of Iraqi soldiers guarding Saddam's stolen treasures as the submission of the dominated party in the act of anal sex. He even goes on to relate the "ass map," and the location of the hidden gold it represents, to ideas that Freud had on children's toilet training. The struggle over the map, according to Semmerling represents human beings' infantile narcissistic need to hold onto their own feces – to possess it. All that being said, I am inclined to agree with Shaheen not because as he claims it eliminates stereotypes, but because it complicates Arab identity in such a way to encourage understanding that the term Arab represents a broad demographic set of people that are impossible to represent as a composite character. To insinuate that this is at all possible would be like positing that a man from the Deep South, a woman from New England, or a Bay Area Californian could singularly represent all the peoples of the United States.

Unfortunately, because war films rely on the construction of an enemy identity seen or unseen, *Three Kings* must present its audience with characters that represent the common, negative stereotypes of Arabs for the realistic, positive representations to be contrasted against. No significant Arab characters appear in the film until after Major Archie Gates (George Clooney), Barlow, Elgin, Vig and Wogaman have been introduced and their plan to find and steal the Kuwaiti gold is set in motion excepting perhaps the surrendering Iraqi with the "ass map." His unwillingness to strip and give up the map to Barlow and Vig is what initiates Semmerling's connections between the film and Freudian theory and furthers his argument of the film as metaphor for anal sex perpetrated on Saddam, his army, and the Iraqi people.

The rest of the deserting Iraqi army arrives appearing similarly ragged, dirty and beleaguered. American soldiers like Barlow and Vig strip them of their uniforms and their

dignity. This does not appear as a good beginning to any sort of positive representation of Iraqis or, more largely, of Arabs in general. However the more significant work done to characterize Arabs in a more “realistic” fashion begins after Gates and his team of “battle immature” (Semmerling’s term) soldiers arrives in the village outside of Karbala where the stolen Kuwaiti gold is kept hidden.

The team’s first real encounter with Arabs comes as they roll into the small village that surrounds one of Saddam’s bunkers. Every Arab demographic is represented in these first few shots of their plan finally put into action. Men wear the keffiyeh with its ends wrapped around their faces to protect them from the wind and the sand. Children run to the speeding Humvee from all directions out from under their parents’ watchful protection to bid welcome to the soldiers that have helped “liberate” them. And, civilian men and women dart out of the Humvee’s path unsure about where it is going or where it might stop. Like the deserting Iraqis earlier in the film the members of the Iraqi army here are passive and easily submit to the Americans’ wishes readily giving up their weapons and going to the ground caring more about their own safety than senseless violence. Some of the men inside of the bunker even physically embrace these soldiers claiming to love freedom and the United States. These are rugged men who have probably been guarding this particular bunker since before the invasion. This imagery gives the Iraqi army an honorable character. They are not malicious, vengeful, or hating of the Americans. They are rather just soldiers following orders, unlike the invading Americans who have come out of greed to take what isn’t theirs.

In the midst of Gates’s raid on the bunker to find the gold an Iraqi man with a megaphone calls for the Iraqis to come out of their homes. In this village, still under Saddam’s control, a resistance has been hiding. They take the coming of these Americans as the fulfillment of the

promise that Bush made to the Iraqi people to aid in their goal to topple Saddam and take back their country. Bush eventually balked on this promise as Iraq withdrew from Kuwait and a cease-fire was reached. This left the Iraqis to fight against Saddam's superior force alone without Bush's promised support. Left outside to control the soldiers and people Vig is unsure how to react to this mixed display of behavior from the Iraqi people. As the most uneducated and ignorant of the group Vig has always had the conception of Arabs as villains. He constantly refers to them as "dune coons," and "sand niggers," and never associates them with any positive attributes. He is taken aback at their lack of violence as they gather around him in celebration of the American arrival.

This imagery is subverted quickly as another group of Iraqi soldiers comes running in firing their weapons into the air to get the crowd to disperse. They destroy a tanker truck carrying milk with orders to prevent anything from entering the village. Gates and his men have no interest in helping these people, because, like Vig, they have a distorted perception of the Iraqi people. They have come to believe that being Iraqi is synonymous with supporting Saddam, but their perception of reality changes when soldiers begin stealing MREs and water from the Iraqi civilians given to them by Gates and his men. Gates, Barlow, Elgin, Vig, and the audience realize that the Kuwaitis were not the only ones being oppressed by Saddam. They are suddenly made aware that Saddam also actively abused his own people.

Contradictory to these images Gates and his men find the soldiers more and more willing to comply with them. They are unaware that the enemy soldiers plan to continue operations as normal after the Americans have taken what they want and leave. The film's tactic of showing these Iraqi soldiers taking advantage of the language gap between them and Gates's team codifies them as being sneaky and nefarious. Similar strategies are used when the Americans

search one bunker and an Iraqi soldier attempts to direct them to another village where the gold is hidden. While Gates, Barlow, and Elgin arrange to carry the gold out of the bunker more Iraqi soldiers arrive and begin violently abusing the villagers and some rebel prisoners being held in the same bunker as the Kuwaiti gold. The abuse of the villagers is well underway again when the three Americans emerge from the bunker to see Iraqi soldiers beating men, women and children. The unit's commander appears courteous as he offers Gates the help of his men to get the gold out of the bunker so that they may leave him to his duty of quelling the uprising and regaining control of Iraq for Saddam. Shots of his soldiers' bloody knuckles from beating the villagers, AK-47s locked and loaded, a rebel prisoner bound, bloodied, and gagged assure the audience that this man is not what he seems. In a final confirmation of his villainy he orders one of his soldiers to silence a woman begging for the Americans' help. She is shot in the head, blood spraying from the opposite side and her body falling to the ground in slow motion as her daughter, restrained by another soldier, calls out for her.

A marvelous sequence follows that illustrates that every bullet has a consequence. The Iraqi commander in a battle with Gates "accidentally" shoots himself in the leg. An Iraqi shoots Gates in the arm only to be shot dead by Barlow. Barlow escapes death when his Kevlar vest stops a bullet meant for his chest. Elgin responds by killing Barlow's shooter, and Vig fires a burst of rounds from his vehicle-mounted machine gun killing another soldier drawing his gun. In the meantime Gates has drawn his own pistol and shoots the Iraqi commander in the head. It is this sequence that separates those Iraqis that are supposed to be understood as villains and those that are not. Gates cuts loose the prisoners and orders for them to be put in the bed of the Humvee leaving and leaves the Iraqi army disarmed and subdued for the moment. That is, before an Iraqi tank arrives.

Here the principal “evil” Arab, Captain Said (Said Taghmaoui) is introduced. Said is one of the best bad representations of an Arab in film. What I mean by this is that his treatment as a villain is done with care and sympathy. Later scenes in the film will reveal him to be much like Barlow and his compatriots, and this complicates the stereotypical representations of “evil Arabs.” Still, as a villain he is methodical, vengeful, and insidious. We see him at the center of a most of the scenes of violence against either the civilians of this village, the members of the resistance, or the Americans. He fires mortars containing a concentrated form of CS gas, or tear gas, at the Americans and fleeing Iraqi rebels successfully stalling their escape and making it possible to take Barlow prisoner. Once Barlow is taken prisoner Said tortures Barlow for seemingly no reason. He doesn’t procure any information from Barlow. The goal of the torture takes a vengeful and sadistic form, and it seems that Said only wants to “break” Barlow and make him denounce America. As evidence of Said’s villainy, one of his own men, who aids in Barlow’s torture, cannot bear to watch as Barlow tenses in pain with electricity surging through his body.

Special attention is paid to the implements of Barlow’s torture. Crude wiring and electrical equipment is connected to Barlow’s head to shock him into submission, but because Said does not desire information the submission desired is one of American to Iraqi, of white Westerner to Arab Middle Easterner. Said continually refers to the United States as a “sick fucking country” and uses Michael Jackson as an example of America’s hate for racial and ethnic “others.” To Said it is clear that Jackson turned his skin white and straightened his hair because he has been made to hate his black-ness by his country. Furthermore, Said sees that hate as analogous to the hatred America must have for the Arabs and children that have been bombed in the war.

However, Said's representation here is not so one-dimensional as this. Said is an officer in Saddam's Republican Guard and he serves his country with duty and honor akin to the way that American soldiers serve theirs. He is also a family man whose home was bombed by the Americans amputating his wife's legs and killing his one-year-old son in the process. Said exemplifies the savage, vengeful Arab in all the stereotypically negative ways, but is still a sympathetic character. Through an imagined flashback the audience sees the images of Said's home being bombed and his son's crib being crashed down upon by the falling ceiling. Two separate flashbacks also show Barlow's wife walking, baby in arms, safely in the U.S., and his wife standing inside their home as the windows explode in Barlow's imagined bombing of his own home in the way that Said describes. In this moment Barlow is connected strongly with the audience, because he provides the conduit with which we can understand Said's anguish "worse than death" at the destruction of his family. This sympathetic linking of the audience to Barlow, and Barlow to Said, adds more complexity to the "evil Arab" stereotype than its usual representations allow.

In the second torture scene Said expresses his motivations for joining the Republican Guard that are echoed in Ahmad's monologues from *Battle for Haditha*. He informs Barlow that he only joined the Iraqi army to support his family. More evidence is offered up here to prove that Iraqis and Americans are more similar than film representations might lead us to believe. Said joined Saddam's army only to support his family just as Barlow did when he discovered that he had a baby on the way. Both men were trained and armed by the American government, Barlow for the Gulf War and Said for the Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s. Barlow is reluctant to believe that his own country supported the army that is now torturing him, but as the scene progresses Barlow comes to realize the truth of American presence in Iraq. Saving Kuwait from

Saddam may have been an honorable goal on the surface, but what has happened to Said's family, and what Barlow witnessed happening to Amir's wife and the people of the village outside of Karbala is beginning to jade his view of American foreign policy. All this information suggests that the American government was the real villain in all this and to drive this home Said pours a pail full of motor oil down Barlow's throat. This scene doesn't redeem Said's actions but complicates the relationship between "good" and "evil" as the audience begins to understand that the conception of a "right" or "wrong" side depends on the observer's position. Said only means to serve his country regardless of its ruler in much the same way that many Americans served under Bush whether or not they agreed with or even understood his policies. Said is made the villain in relation to Barlow and his comrades only by necessity. Based on our knowledge of Saddam, Said's survival depends on how successful he is in helping defeat the Iraqi uprising. Barlow, Gates and their men pose a detriment to that success, and survival.

Ultimately Said, his commanders, and the troops that serve them are established as the enemy in an action that is not their own. Gates finds Said along with two other men with Barlow. Gates kills the first two as they attempt to draw their weapons on him. The third, Said, Gates shoots in the leg and leaves his fate to be decided by Barlow. In this moment the benevolent Barlow chooses not to kill Said, the man who ordered his electrocution and force-fed him motor oil. The two have developed a strange kinship through the interrogation and Barlow sympathizes with the man who, in the course of doing his duty, lost parts of his family. Even in a moment where only Gates and Barlow would know the truth of what happened Barlow spares Said's life. This is an act that we know that Said would not have reciprocated since he claimed early on during Barlow's interrogation that he intended to send him off to Baghdad, where no one would ever find him. It is mercy in this scene that characterizes who is "good" and who is not.

Said and the Iraqi soldiers that have taken Barlow prisoner are countered in this film by Amir, one of the prisoners discovered indirectly by Gates and his men in raid of the bunker with the gold. Amir at first is abrasive seems to be yet another in the long line of hateful Arab villains that appear in American films. He is critical of America for liberating Kuwait, and leaving him and his rebels “twisting in the wind” in their fight to get rid of Saddam. Gates continues to lie about their mission, even here, keeping his eye on the prize. Having lost some of the gold during Said’s successful CS gas attack Gates deceitfully defends his actions in the rebel’s underground hideout informing the audience that even though he is bartering for aid in saving Barlow’s life his first priority is the gold. Amir’s shrewd negotiation with Gates to get some of the gold and to guarantee that Gates and his men will escort him and his people to Iran and a refugee camp characterizes him as a man without scruples. He barterers with the lives of Barlow, and his own people boldly, but successfully.

His ability to deduce that Gates’s mission is not to retrieve the gold on behalf of the United States and Kuwait but to steal it informs us quickly that this is a rare type of Arab, especially in American war films. He is American educated – studying business at Bowling Green State University – and an ambitious entrepreneur (he meant to return to Iraq, use his American education, open a few cafes, and use the money he would make from those to open hotels in Karbala). Sadly his plans were obliterated when the war and the American bombings began. The audience immediately identifies with Amir, because his plan for success could belong to any American. His dream is very “American” in nature, because he desires to be self-made, to provide for his family, and works very hard through obstacles and setbacks to ensure that he gets what he wants. He is the embodiment of what Americans believe themselves to be yet he is an Iraqi.

The representation of Amir and other prisoners is subtle, but very important to the pro-Arab message of this film. First there is the scene among the opening of the film that presents images of surrendering soldiers being taken prisoner by the U.S. forces indicating their defeat and the reluctance of even Saddam's army to fight for him. Then there is the raid on the second bunker when Gates stumbles upon an interrogation and inadvertently frees Amir and a number of other prisoners. Then, as Gates, Amir and their men raid the "Oasis bunker" where Barlow is being held Elgin and Amir open a door with dozens of men, women and children hiding in fear. Lastly Barlow is positioned as a prisoner himself for much of the film in order to communicate some of the values of the Iraqis more effectively to American audiences. The presence of prisoners throughout helps to situate the enemy in the film. For some, like Amir and his people or Barlow, the enemy is clearly the Iraqi army under Saddam, who torture and interrogate them. For others, like the surrendering soldiers that appear in the beginning, the enemy is the Americans and they are shamed into giving up their weapons and stripping off their clothes. Some though, like those found in the bunker just before Barlow, seem to be confused about who the enemy is. They gaze at Amir and Elgin – faces of the two nations previously at war – and don't know whether to feel fear or relief. These people hurriedly escape in fear for their lives in part because the bunker is coming down around them, and partly because they are unsure whom to see as most dangerous, Americans or Iraqis.

Amir is especially interesting, because he criticizes American policies in Iraq. His comments about America's intentions, or lack thereof, in Iraq are given the privilege of an outsider looking in, because he represents an "other." His comments are scathing, but incredibly perceptive, coming only days after the war is over and America's victory is still fresh in the minds of the global community. Amir's comments carry particular weight, because as an Iraqi

citizen, and rebel, he is already feeling the effects of America's ability to win a quick victory over Saddam. Amir seethes now that he and his people are alone in a fight that they could only win with the support of a superpower like the United States. Bush's false promise to help the freedom fighters after the liberation of Kuwait convinces Gates not only to give up some of the gold, but also to subvert the usual role of "friendly" Arabs as compliant ones. Gates and Amir must compromise in order to achieve the best ends and both are in a position of power relative to the other. Without Gates the Iraqis cannot cross the border into Iran, and without Amir Gates cannot rescue his captured man Barlow.

After Barlow's first torture scene with Said, the similarities between Americans and Arabs are made explicit to Vig, Elgin, and to the audience. Twin Iraqis (Jabir and Ghanem Algarawi) voice a desire to the two Americans that they would like to open a salon. Two Arabs wanting to "cut hair" puzzles Elgin. Putting it bluntly for the two Americans Amir says, "Look, they don't care if they cut American hair, Shiite hair, Sunni hair. They just want to get rid of Saddam, and live life, make business." This sequence also illustrates the skewed views that Iraqis have of Americans as crazed killers who lust for Arab blood. One of the twins wants to know if the American soldiers expect to kill every Arab. Vig, again as the most uneducated man in the group, replies, "That's what I was trained for." Here Vig comes to represent the portion of the U.S. that have been conditioned to believe that Arabs are evil. The suggestion here is that two nations have come to believe the other is made up of people who are bent on killing them, but we learn through this short exchange that those ideas are incredibly twisted and mostly incorrect.

How commonplace Amir's "American" ideals are is evidenced in the leader of the Iraqi deserters in that Amir and Gates meet on their way to save Barlow played by Fadil Al-Badri. Gates's attempts at convincing this man to give him cars stolen by Saddam from Kuwait fail.

This man, like Amir, is interested more in survival after the withdrawal of American troops, and the needs of these Americans is secondary to his preparations for what will inevitably be a hard fight to come. The cars are important to him, because he intends to use them in exchange for food and water for his people. Gates's malarkey about George Bush wanting them to fight for a free Iraq and patriotic duty is lost on this man. Interestingly enough this man has a similar appearance to Saddam suggesting that no matter what similarities are found in the appearance of one Arab to the next they are not all the same – they are not all villains or enemies of America. In fact, when the American/Iraqi force storms the bunker where Barlow is being held many of the Republican Guardsmen there to defend it flee believing that Saddam is coming to kill them. This indicates that they have as much fear of Saddam as much of the world does and they only serve him in order to survive, because Saddam was known to execute any captured deserters.

Americans are actually portrayed more negatively than the Iraqi rebels that they end up helping escape Iraq. They appear to have no respect for one another as they bicker and fight amongst themselves. And, even though their mission to save the Iraqis takes priority over stealing the gold, Gates and his men hold onto the notion that they might actually pull off their “heist” until the last possible moment when it looks like Gates's superior, Colonel Horn (Mykelti Williamson), is going to prevent them from helping the rebels across the border. The changes brought about in Gates and his men are characteristics that the warrior/soldier archetype in war films is supposed to exemplify inherently. That a transformation even needs to occur at all in this film paints American soldiers in a negative light. These men are greedy, self-serving, and isolationist in their views about world events. Even Horn, who is coming to reprimand and probably court martial Gates and his men, has a closed-off view in which these men are in violation of policy. It does not matter that they are doing what is morally and ethically right. It

could also be argued that the popularity of this film indirectly affected the way soldiers would be depicted in later films, such as those examined in Chapter One. The evolution of this change is recognizable especially as George W. Bush's war in Iraq became more and more unpopular among the American people.

Rules of Engagement and *Three Kings* have very different commentaries of modern war. One film uses conservative rhetoric to position an Arab enemy in opposition to the military as a symbol for American values. The other deconstructs the stereotype of Arabs in war films and introduces a new, more complicated archetype. *Rules of Engagement* follows the formula for war films and establishes no other position for its Arab characters other than as villains. *Three Kings* revises the formula by complicating not only its Arab characters, but also the American soldier archetypes, and the relationship between the two. What emerges in the analysis of these two films is a taxonomy I have identified of Arab characters in war films: compliant; radical/fundamental; or the complex/nuanced. Furthermore, what these two films demonstrate is the emergent necessity for war films to present accurate depictions of all of their subjects, especially those of Arabs and other people of color, and a greater prevalence of complex characters of all kinds.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I have set forth in the above pages to provide evidence for the link between reception histories and character representation in modern war films. Specifically I have attempted to address representations of a new warrior archetype that exists in opposition to the archetype established by decades of filmmaking between World War II and the Vietnam War. Additionally I examine the complication of military masculinity as it is critiqued in these films of the global war on terror, and the introduction of enemy representation that problematizes both the stereotypes of Arabs, and the presentation of an “us v. them” argument.

The warrior archetype was first introduced in the films of the interwar years between World War I and World War II, but the major developments that established the myth of the American soldier occur in the films that depicted World War II. From 1939 to the present the films of World War II clearly establish soldiers of the American military as the righteous arm of the American government.⁴¹ They act in the interests of justice and freedom from oppression, and they often are characterized by their morality, selfless service, integrity, and willingness to sacrifice themselves for a greater good. This archetype has reappeared throughout the history of war films ever since through the Korean War and the Vietnam War up to the Gulf War in 1991. Since then the warrior archetype, as it appears in films of modern war, has seen considerable revision as soldiers are presented with moral ambiguity, self-interested ambition, corruption, deceit, and cowardice in the face of danger. These traits appeared in films about the Vietnam

⁴¹ With the production of such films as *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) and *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001) the heroic American soldier myth remains intact in the films about World War II.

War, but the characters treated in those films frequently experienced redemption by death or homecoming rehabilitation. A new warrior archetype appears in the war films of Desert Storm and beyond to directly oppose those of past wars, and most directly contribute to indifference among the audience. This effect is accentuated by the underlying implication with this modified archetype that the audience is complicit in the creation of these distasteful representations through their passive, or active, support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Similarly an exhibition of military masculinity has always been important to the war film genre. Several of the attributes described in the above paragraph are linked to masculinity as it presents itself in the military. Hegemonic masculinity in the military and the films that are made about war place primary importance in attributes like physical fitness, ability and efficiency, and competitiveness. These attributes are demonstrated repetitively in war films through training sequences, in combat action, and through the camaraderie that exists between soldiers. However gender integration in the actual existing military, and the repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in 2012 suggests that the construction of masculinity in the military is in need of revision. The military masculine ideal as it has been constructed naturally relegates those masculinities that it deems insufficient, or subordinate to the traditional military masculinity to a lower status. For example, women and homosexuals are thought to be incapable of demonstrating a male, heterosexual sexual prowess, which the military has come to value as a part of its hegemony, so those groups are viewed as subordinate, or “lower,” masculinities. The same could be said for people of color in the military, who, because of racial stereotypes that exist among the military’s collective consciousness, also experience subjugation because of their “deficient” masculinities. The films I examined in my second chapter exemplify those films of modern war that intend to complicate views of military masculinity in order to draw attention to the flaws of the military’s

systems of training and indoctrination that punish subordinate masculinities as they are identified by the hegemony, and reward death-seeking behavior that becomes idealized. Ultimately these critiques present an interesting argument that the construction of masculinity in the military is impractical and/or inefficient.

People of color have always filled subordinate roles in war films, or they have been vilified in roles of the enemy. The Germans and the Japanese appeared as villainous enemies with aspirations of world domination in the films of World War II. The depiction of the Japanese as primitive savages carried over and affected the representation of the enemy in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The “nefarious” nature of Communism fueled the sadistic representation of those enemies, so it is not surprising that the archetype of the Japanese soldier used for many World War II films was adapted to these later enemies from the Far East. The wars that have occurred in the Middle East since 1991 made the Arab enemy, that arguably has existed in film since the invention of motion pictures, much more prominent in the cultural imagination of war. Arabs appear in some films as promotions of Orientalism in direct contradiction of the liberal ideologies of “political correctness.” This presentation further implies that there is a danger from an enemy on the home front who wishes to sacrifice traditional American values for the sake of adopting self-interested policies of moral relativism. While these films have been attacked critically for their unconscionable representations of Arabs they are also important to compare against those films that represent Arabs more accurately.

The films that I’ve examined all contribute to my argument that there is a link between character representations, their demonstrations of masculinity, and the elimination of Arab stereotypes. The archetype of the warrior, the masculine, and of race – the Arab in particular – are all represented in new, critically interesting ways in modern war films. In each case we see a

correlation of representation with reception history. With warrior archetype there is a clear negative correlation: as the new soldier realities appear onscreen, audience interest and critical praise both diminish. With the films concerning masculinity or the racial “other” as enemy there is a positive correlation: as increased sensitivity in more accurate representations proliferate, the films achieve some deal of critical or commercial success, or both. Certainly we will continue to see these representations evolve in the coming years as the withdrawal of troops from Iraq might provide some hindsight into the soldier experience of war. Only time will reveal the trajectory of the genre from here.

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