

‘Television’s “True Stories”: How Memory became Documentary in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*.

By

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Abstract:

World War II's long and enduring history on television is illustrated by the continued circulation of documentaries such as *The World at War* (Thames Television, 1973). While documentaries such as these can be considered as a collection of memories, my purpose in this article is to explore what happens when a collection of memories is positioned as documentary. How do televisual promotional strategies shape and define the status of series that blur the lines of fact and fiction? What purposes do such strategies serve? To answer these questions, I examine two 'docudramas' - *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010), co-productions of HBO, Playtone and DreamWorks SKG. I explore how the preliminary marketing for both series insists on their status as 'true stories'. I expose the industrial purposes underlying HBO's marketing strategies and move beyond the moment of broadcast to examine how the paratextual network generated via DVD and Blu-Ray identifies the series unequivocally as historical documentaries. Ultimately my goal is to demonstrate that the category of 'docudrama' is inadequate for a full understanding of how the series' paratextual network situates them within historical representations of World War II and recalibrates the relationship between visual history, memory and documentary.

Keywords:

World War II; HBO; Docudrama; Band of Brothers; The Pacific

Introduction

‘The true story of Easy Company.’

Intertitle from *Band of Brothers* Trailer

‘We had all given up that the story would ever be told. The real, true story.’¹

Richard Greer, 1st Marine Division

In 1998, in the wake of the success of *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg approached cable network HBO with a proposed adaptation of Stephen Ambrose’s book *Band of Brothers* (Ambrose, 1992). Constructed primarily from interviews with surviving veterans and published with their endorsement, Ambrose’s book charts the history of the members of an American paratrooper company in World War II (Company E, known as ‘Easy’) from training, through the war in Europe, to the resumption of their lives as civilians. Despite the extraordinary budget demanded by Spielberg and Hanks’ vision for the series, HBO had no hesitation in agreeing to back the project at a cost of \$125m, making it the most expensive television series of its time. *Band of Brothers* was broadcast by HBO in 2001, with the first episode airing just before 11th September. Perhaps because of the events of that day in America, viewing figures tapered off as the series progressed. However, *Band of Brothers* has since become not only HBO’s best-selling DVD, but also the highest grossing TV-to-DVD release to date.²

Just under a decade later, HBO once again agreed, in Spielberg’s words, to make ‘room on their schedule’ and in their budgets, this time at a cost of \$250m, for *The Pacific*.³ Like *Band of Brothers*, *The Pacific* is a ten-part miniseries. In contrast to its predecessor, however, *The Pacific* concentrates on the experiences of just three individuals – Eugene Sledge, Robert

Leckie and John Basilone – rather than an entire company, and shifts attention away from the war in Europe. The series is based on memoirs written by Sledge and Leckie, and on public and historical accounts of Basilone's life. Both *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are thus predominantly drawn from the memories of the American soldiers who fought in World War II, and interviews with surviving veterans feature at the beginning of each episode in both series, creating a documentary setting for the footage that follows. Complex, hypermediated battle sequences in the two series expand on the distinctive vision of World War II combat established within *Saving Private Ryan* to generate what Geoff King refers to as a 'spectacular-authentic' aesthetic of warfare; a combination of the look of period battlefield footage with contemporary techniques of filmmaking such as computer generated imagery.⁴

As a result of the amalgamation of documentary conventions, the high-profile involvement of Hanks and Spielberg and the extravagant budgets demanded by the production of visual spectacle on a scale unusual in television, the two series conform to a definition of docudrama as 'informative yet entertaining in a way impossible for the traditional documentary.'⁵ Spielberg refers to *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* repeatedly as 'semi-documentaries', using this term to differentiate them from what he refers to as 'mainstream TV'.⁶ Within academia, the integration of interviews with the veterans and the dramatic re-enactment of their memories has been described as a 'creative symbiosis' between past and present with a cumulative effect not possible in any other medium except television.⁷ However, my interest in this article is not in how the series negotiate the interstices between documentary and drama, but in how *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are positioned by the paratextual material that surrounds them as 'true stories'. At the time of their original broadcast and following their subsequent release as DVD and Blu-Ray box sets, the network of promotional texts in which the two series are embedded does not so much blur the boundaries between documentary and drama as eradicate

them completely. I want to suggest, therefore, that the category of ‘docudrama’ is consequently inadequate for a full understanding of the position HBO has carved out for the two series within the framework of historical representations of World War II. In examining the industrial purposes both series serve, I aim to answer the following questions: how do televisual strategies of representation and promotion shape and define the status of series that cross the lines of fact and fiction? What purposes do such strategies serve?

In order to answer these questions, I turn first to an examination of the preliminary marketing that precedes the initial broadcast dates of both series, concentrating on the premiers in particular, to establish how *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are imbricated within moments of commemoration. Next, I move on to explore how the ‘extra’ material available on the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of the two series not only extends HBO’s initial marketing strategies, but also situates the series within an intricate network of texts that augments the status of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as historical artefacts in their own right. My goal is to demonstrate not only how their paratextual network identifies *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as television’s ‘true stories’, but also to consider the consequences of obscuring the complexities involved in the transformation of a set of memories into historical ‘truths’.

‘Big, Important, Powerful’ television

From the outset, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* were marketed as event-status programmes and highlighted as special even within HBO’s usual discourses of distinction.⁸ According to John Caldwell, the value of event-status programmes lies not only in their ability to attract viewers, but also in their ability to function as ‘high-profile banner carriers’ of a channel’s brand identity.⁹ For a cablecaster reliant on subscription fees rather than advertising for

revenue, HBO's considerable investment into two miniseries with limited potential for attracting new subscribers should be understood through the specific opportunities generated by the subject matter of the two series to enhance and extend the HBO brand. The potential inherent in the two miniseries' ability to promote HBO's identity is acknowledged by Chris Albrecht, Chief Executive of HBO at the time the *Band of Brothers* deal was brokered. According to Albrecht, *Band of Brothers* presented the opportunity to 'have the audience see the kinds of projects that HBO stands for.'¹⁰ Intended to function as 'honour roll[s] of valour and sacrifice' for those who fought in World War II, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* enable HBO to reach beyond its subscriber pool and to align its distinctive brand with the values inherent in social acts of commemoration.¹¹ As an indication of the significance of the two miniseries to HBO, the promotional budget of between \$10 and \$15 million allocated to *Band of Brothers* and later to *The Pacific* amounts to more than that devoted to promoting prestige long-running series such as *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) and *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004).¹² Eric Kessler, Chief of Marketing for HBO when *Band of Brothers* was broadcast, sums up the preliminary marketing strategy for the series thus: 'We want people to say, "That looks big, important, powerful, and I need to see that."' ¹³

Carefully crafted links between both series and commemorative events establish them as 'important' television. In the case of *Band of Brothers*, HBO spent over a year arranging for the premiere of the series to be held as part of the celebrations for the fifty-seventh Anniversary of D-Day in Normandy at Utah Beach in 2001. Forty-seven of the surviving members of Easy Company and their families were flown out for a special screening of one of the first episodes of the series. In addition to the veterans, invitations were extended to various heads of state as well as to the descendants of Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower.¹⁴ Similarly, for the premiere of *The Pacific*, HBO flew 250 veterans to

Washington DC for a special wreath-laying ceremony held at the World War II Veteran's memorial. The wreath-laying was followed by a screening of an episode of *The Pacific* at the White House, attended not only by President Obama, but also by National Security Adviser General Jim Jones and members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The two premiers were widely covered in news media (CNN featured live coverage of the wreath-laying ceremony, for example), allowing HBO to align itself with notions of public service and to develop its brand identity on both a national and international stage.

While the premieres of both series imbricate them within official acts of commemoration, the marketing surround preceding their initial broadcast weaves them into history and memory. The *Band of Brothers* website invited users to 'experience the war', and that of *The Pacific* goes further by allowing viewers to 'interact with history' and, in a link to episodes from the series, to 'witness the conflict'.¹⁵ Social media was not quite as prevalent in 2001 when *Band of Brothers* was released but *The Pacific's* subsequent online marketing drive incorporates Facebook and Twitter and asks users to 'pay tribute' to veterans and active soldiers by 'sharing' their stories.¹⁶ The pre-broadcast promotional surround thus constitutes an intricate web in which national and individual histories and memories are thoroughly intertwined with the series themselves, augmenting the perception of the two as 'important' television. More importantly, the nature of both series as dramatic re-enactments of events is subtly overwritten, particularly on the websites, by the suggestion that they offer direct, unmediated access to the war itself.

In order to fulfil the remainder of Kessler's criteria and to establish *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as not only 'important', but also as 'big' and 'powerful', the scale of the productions is

emphasised throughout both pre-broadcast promotional drives. The high production values required to create the spectacular, hypermediated effects that have become the touchstone of 'authentic' reproductions of the industrial battlefield since *Saving Private Ryan* are compatible with HBO's insistence that its original programming is 'not TV', as its slogan suggests. Much of the publicity for *Band of Brothers* emphasizes the fact that the series surpasses *Saving Private Ryan* in its depiction of the spectacle of war, with the production unit using more pyrotechnics in only one episode than used in the entire shoot of the film.¹⁷ If *Band of Brothers*, described by its trailer as an 'epic miniseries event', outdid *Saving Private Ryan* in scale and scope, *The Pacific* in turn is described as 'beyond epic', demanding a budget 'usually reserved for Jerry Bruckheimer blockbusters.'¹⁸ Mary Ann Doane identifies the 'activation of special effects and spectacle in the documentary format' as a way for television to counter 'its own tendency toward the levelling of signification.'¹⁹ In the case of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, the special effects required for the spectacular recreation of industrialised warfare are utilised within the promotional material of the series to set the series apart not only from 'ordinary' televisual documentaries and dramas, but also from cinematic dramatizations of World War II.

To a certain extent, the promotion of these two series can be considered as nothing unusual for a cablecaster whose entire marketing strategy revolves around identifying all of its original programming as special or distinct in order to maintain its edge in a crowded and fiercely competitive industry. However, it is important to look beyond the marketing hyperbole to consider how the two series are identified within the textual milieu generated through the premieres, websites and promotions. The links between the two series and commemorative events function as official endorsements for the version of World War II memory put forward by *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. The presence of the veterans at each memorial ceremony,

and also in the previews of each episode, is mobilized as a 'site of truth', to adopt a phrase from Marita Sturken, adding cultural weight to the two series.²⁰ The veterans' identification of the series as 'not Hollywood' but 'real', carries an inviolable authority by virtue of their status as survivors and further enhances the perception created by the websites that the two series represent an unmediated 'reality'.²¹ In addition to inextricably entangling the two series within officially endorsed moments of memorialisation and historical accounts, the promotional surround allocates them a specific place in the mediated history of World War II as sanctioned, culturally significant 'true' stories distinguished from any previous televisual documentary by virtue of their filmic production values and yet exceeding any dramatic recreation of the war in film through the expanded scope of televisual narratives.

The value of the series as a cultural commodity for HBO is illustrated by a multi-year deal with The History Channel for the rights to *Band of Brothers*, where it first aired in November 2004, timed to coincide with Memorial Day in the U.S.²² The sale of the series to a channel whose programming consists predominantly of documentaries further enhances the status of *Band of Brothers* as a form of history in its own right. Dan Davids, executive VP and general manager of History at the time, describes the series as the 'perfect match for The History Channel brand' whilst Scott Carlin, president of domestic programming for HBO, both justifies the sale and underscores the status of *Band of Brothers* by stating that the History Channel 'has the same values of historical accuracy' that are present in the series.²³ A similar rationale is evident in the original broadcast of *The Pacific* in the U.K. by BSkyB, also a subscription channel, which aired the series on a channel normally reserved exclusively for films. According to Ian Lewis, director of Sky Movies, the film channel was a 'natural' fit for *The Pacific* because the series is filmed in High Definition (HD) and with cutting-edge technology that enables it to 'sit alongside the big theatrical movie releases in terms of quality'.²⁴ *The Pacific*, in other words,

is singled out from mainstream television because of its high production values, yet it is also marked as distinctive from film by virtue of an expanded episodic structure that far exceeds the running-time of any feature-length movie. The pre-broadcast promotion and subsequent careful release of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* into syndication thus establishes the two series as officially sanctioned 'true stories' - bigger, more important and more powerful than both film and 'mainstream' television. The DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of the two are in turn subsequently marketed as mementos of commemorative events and of World War II itself.

DVD and Blu-Ray: Telling the Story 'The Way it Was'

As a consequence of digital technology and the proliferation of DVD (Digital Versatile Disc) and Blu-Ray box sets, the moment of broadcast can no longer be considered as the 'primary site of importance' for television.²⁵ Elsewhere, I explore how the proliferation of so-called 'ancillary' material in the form of 'making of' documentaries, archive films, interviews and trailers facilitated by DVD and Blu-Ray technologies has recalibrated the relationship between history and film.²⁶ Now a standard feature of most DVD or Blu-Ray releases of both film and television, such 'extras' are usually considered in terms of industrial synergy as extensions of promotional strategies that expound on the 'artistry, quality and cultural significance' of the product.²⁷ However, close textual analysis of bonus material reveals that such approaches are limited in terms of understanding how these texts involve the audience in the 'construction, evaluation, and preservation' of a film or television programmes 'historical worth'.²⁸ There is no denying that the extra features available in the box sets of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* perform a promotional function, but like the pre-broadcast material, they locate the two series within a network of texts through which viewers are invited to interpret their content and assess their status. They provide information on the production history of the two series, but they also

promise to promote a 'deeper historical understanding' of the events around which the series are structured, as the menu for *The Pacific* Blu-Ray set asserts. As such, they contribute to a reformulation of the relationship between television, visual history, memory and documentary. The process of establishing the two series as part of the commemoration and history of World War II begins even before the box sets have been opened or the discs viewed.

The release dates of the *Band of Brothers* and *Pacific* box sets continue the association between the two series and official commemorative events established within HBO's preliminary marketing strategies. First released early in November 2002 in both the U.S. and U.K. markets, the box set of *Band of Brothers* was packaged as a 'Commemorative Gift Set' to coincide with Remembrance Day (U.K.) or Veteran's Day (as it is known in the U.S.) on November 11. All subsequent releases of *Band of Brothers* and also of *The Pacific* in the sell-through market have also been released around the same time. The DVD and Blu-Ray sets of the series are thus positioned as mementos of larger processes of memorialisation after having been inscribed within these events through their premieres. Hanks attributes the continued success of *Band of Brothers* in the sell-through market precisely to the links between the series and annual commemorative anniversaries. Its subject matter allows sales of the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets to continue 'churning right along because people keep buying it every Veterans Day, every Christmas, every D-Day.'²⁹ The release of the box sets in November not only allows HBO to take advantage of the free publicity generated by the groundswell of remembrance that occurs on days of remembrance, but also reinforces the status of the series as officially endorsed versions of the past.

The packaging of the box sets works as a paratext that informs the consumer of their cultural value as mnemonic objects. Caldwell's concept of 'exhibitionist history' – the conspicuous reconfiguration of historical imagery to generate the impression of a world '*more ontologically real*' than that of fictional genres – is useful in understanding how the packaging of the *Band of Brothers* and *Pacific* box sets carves out a specific place for the two series within the mediated history of World War II.³⁰ Special limited editions of the sets in both DVD and Blu-Ray (the *Band of Brothers* version was released in November 2007, *The Pacific*'s in November 2010) take the form of burnished tin boxes, replicating the look and feel of objects that might be manufactured for military purposes. But whether available in the limited edition or in the more regular cardboard packaging, the box sets reconfigure scenes from the series to resemble faded photographs from World War II, recalling and repurposing the monochromatic, grainy images of war photographers such as Frank Capra, and locating the series within the same iconic lexicon. As Jonathan Gray notes, it is standard practice for DVD and Blu-Ray sets of television series (which are usually more expensive than those of films) to be aestheticized in ways to make them attractive as collectibles, but the packaging of the *Band of Brothers* and *Pacific* box sets additionally encodes them as historical artefacts, lending them a cultural weight that distinguishes them from box sets of series that might be purely fictional, while their connection to memorialisation in turn infuses them with an emotional gravitas that distinguishes them from other documentaries.³¹

The extra features available on the box sets themselves continue to weave *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* into the history and commemoration of World War II, constituting a network of texts that surrounds and penetrates the two series. 'Making of' documentaries are so ubiquitous they have become a standard inclusion in any set of extra features. In the case of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, the 'Making of' documentaries (both produced by HBO,

2002 and 2010 respectively) extend HBO's pre-broadcast marketing strategies - there are repeated references to the size of the productions, for example, reasserting the series as event-status programming for non-subscribers who may have missed the moment of broadcast. However, they also continue the emphasis on memorialisation. The concentration camp set for episode 9:10 of *Band of Brothers*, for example, is described in the 'Making of' as a 'monument to people who died in camps rather than a movie set' by director David Frankel, and actor Richard Speight (who plays Sgt. Warren 'Skip' Muck) urges those who watch the series to commit to memory the actions of the men of Easy Company. Similarly, in 'Making *The Pacific*', actor John Seda (who plays Basilone) remarks that the process of shooting the series was more significant than 'just making a movie' because it was about honouring the veterans 'the way they should be honoured.' Through these kinds of observations, the series are identified as not just 'epic' productions, but as 'monumental' in the true sense of the word as a structure that serves as a reminder of the past. The act of watching them is consequently infused with the same sense of veneration that accompanies public rituals of commemoration such as the annual D-Day Memorial Service in Normandy.³² Evidence of how the box sets have allowed the series to become adopted within individual practices of memorialisation can be found online, where viewers attest to watching them annually as part of personal observances on Veterans Day and other days of remembrance.³³

However, the 'Making of' features do more than simply invite consumers to consider the two series as memorials to World War II. They go one step further by endorsing the representation of the memories of the veterans in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as historical documentary. In order to fulfil what *The Pacific* writer/producer Bruce McKenna refers to in 'Making *The Pacific*' as the 'moral responsibility' required to translate the memories of the veterans into televisual narratives, the 'Making of' documentaries imbue the filmmakers and actors with the

authority of historical ‘experts’. In addition to repeated references in ‘Making *The Pacific*’ to what producer Tony To calls the ‘massive amount of research’ undertaken by the production crews, the ‘Making of’ inserts legitimize the production process itself as a means of generating historical knowledge. In a trope familiar from the promotional surround of many war films, the ‘Making of’ documentaries equate the production process of the two series with waging war.³⁴ ‘We became soldiers’, asserts actor Ross McCall (Joe Liebgott in *Band of Brothers*), while Dale Dye, military advisor for both series, notes in ‘Making *The Pacific*’, ‘we never say the word movie, we never say the word “actor”’. We refer to the “mission.”’ The experience of ‘boot camp’, in which the actors experience a modicum of the training that soldiers of the time would have gone through, and of emotionally inhabiting their characters, serves as justification for their right to speak on behalf of the veterans. As Donnie Wahlburg (Carwood Lipton in *Band of Brothers*) puts it in ‘The Making of *Band of Brothers*’ – ‘now that we have the uniforms on and we’re getting to play them and people are calling us Easy Company, we can say it for them. They are heroes.’ Research combines with the production process to enable the cast and crew of both series to ‘get at the truth’ and tell the story ‘the way it was’, in the words of Tony To and Gary Goetzman, two of *The Pacific*’s producers (‘Making *The Pacific*’). As a result, the ‘Making of’ segments invite the viewer to consider *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* not as dramatic reconstructions of historical events, but as if the cast and crew ‘were actually back in the 1940s [. . .] actually shooting stuff for real,’ as Ken Daly, Visual Effects Supervisor suggests in ‘The Making of *Band of Brothers*’. These kinds of exaggerated statements are not unusual in the promotional material of war films and the degree to which they are accepted by viewers is of course open to debate. What is at stake here, however, is how they re-negotiate the always uncertain boundaries between fictional and factual representations of the past and in the case of these two series, shift them into the realm of ‘stuff’ shot ‘for real’ – into the realm, in other words, of war documentary.

The idea that *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* do not so much recreate moments from World War II as offer direct access to the past is further enhanced by features available only in the Blu-Ray format for both series. These are the 'Timeline' in *Band of Brothers* and the 'Enhanced Viewing' feature in *The Pacific*. Both are interactive features that allow the viewer to 'click' on icons supplying maps, information on various battles, details on the capabilities and uses of various weapons and vehicles, and information regarding the soldiers in the series. A 'picture-in-picture' feature in the form of a pop-out window allows for ongoing commentary from veterans and historians as well as the occasional inclusion of archive footage of events in the series as they unfold onscreen. The Timeline and Enhanced Viewing features are intended to provide 'the ultimate viewing companion', as the menu for *The Pacific* describes it, and they facilitate a deeper relationship between the viewer and the series (in addition to providing an extra selling point distinguishing the Blu-Ray format from DVD). Documentary filmmaker Leslie Woodhead once expressed the wish for a 'kind of "television footnotes"' to signpost the differences between imaginative reconstructions of material and concrete historical sources.³⁵ To a degree, it could be suggested that these features function as footnotes, as they allow for the insertion of concrete historical information into the series themselves. However, the penetration of the series by historical material does not so much signpost the differences between the series and history as much as smooth over them. The very structure of the 'picture-in-picture' feature, which foregrounds the commentary while scenes from the series run in the background, creates the sense that the historians and veterans are referencing the events in the series, as if they were unmediated moments from the past, *and not the other way around*. As a result, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* begin to operate as metanarratives of World War II, rather than the reverse, in the sense that the particular beliefs and perspectives inherent in their narratives form the bedrock upon which other narratives about the past are constructed.

The extra features of the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* thus not only extend the pre-broadcast promotional marketing of the series, they also combine with this material to form an intricate array of texts that surrounds and infuses the two series with ‘greater aura and authenticity’, emphasizing their ‘moral and civic value.’³⁶ Central to the discourse evident throughout this paratextual network is the idea of the series not as ‘semi-documentaries’ or ‘docudramas’, but as ‘true stories’, capable of offering direct access to an unmediated past. The connections with officially endorsed commemorative ceremonies, interviews with the veterans, inclusion of historical footage, observations by historians and commentary by production staff and actors generate an authoritative and persuasive framework for the particular version of the past contained within the series, but exactly what, or indeed whose, ‘truth’ is represented within *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* is never fully declared or defined within the paratextual surround. For that, we need to turn to the series themselves.

Band of Brothers and *The Pacific* are elegiac paeans to the American soldiers who fought in World War II and their emotional affect is powerful and compelling, both created by and feeding into exhortations to ‘never forget’ the sacrifices made by these men. But in the intensity of their focus on the memories of veterans, the series adopt a perspective of World War II that is based primarily on the American soldier’s experience of combat. Viewed from ‘under the helmet’ of the American soldier, as Hanks refers to the vision of World War II in the two series, the war is rendered as a series of battles, fought in spaces made extraordinary through the awe-inspiring spectacle of industrial warfare and inhabited primarily by men.³⁷ As the tagline for *Band of Brothers* suggests, these are ‘ordinary men asked to do extraordinary things’. Part of what makes them extraordinary, as the title of *Band of Brothers* indicates, is their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their brothers-in-arms. While this is not as evident in *The Pacific*, the theme of sacrifice remains strong, but in this case soldiers sacrifice if not

their lives, then their innocence in a cause that while never clearly defined, is nevertheless unquestioned throughout the series. The emphasis on sacrifice in both series transforms the soldier into the primary victim of war, and masks the fact that, as Joanna Bourke points out, the fundamental act of men in war 'is not dying, it is killing.'³⁸ The reduction of war to an exclusive, liminal space of masculine relationships and endeavour in both series not only inadvertently perpetuates its appeal, but also obviates the necessity of questioning the morality or suitability of a military response to a given situation. As a result of the reverential tone that pervades both series, neither adopts a critical stance to the causes of war and the actions of soldiers during warfare are never questioned. The 'under the helmet' perspective of warfare, while undoubtedly valid, encourages its own kind of forgetfulness by obscuring more than it reveals of the 'true story' of World War II.

The emphasis on combat in the two series makes fighting between soldiers the defining experiences of World War II. However, the experience of actual combat was relatively rare, with only 25% of the U.S. Army (which in turn comprised less than 10% of the total U.S. armed forces) coming under enemy fire throughout World War II.³⁹ Perhaps even more critically, the focus on soldiers as the primary victims of war obscures the fact that civilian casualties outweigh military casualties on all sides in World War II.⁴⁰ War in general, and particularly a war waged on the scale of World War II, represents a myriad set of experiences and memories that cannot be reduced to a single, or even a few, 'true stories'. By situating *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as definitive, officially endorsed versions of the past, the paratextual network that surrounds them effectively fills in the spaces between dramatic recreation and documentary, creating a closed version of the past that shuts out the possibility of that sense of 'partial knowledge and suspended closure, the sense of incompleteness and the need for retrospection' that Bill Nichols identifies as essential to an understanding of history.⁴¹

Conclusion

The identification of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as ‘true stories’ created with the intention of honouring the veterans and their memories not only endorses the uncritical distillation of World War II into the American soldier’s perspective of the battleground, it also obscures the commercial goals of the producers. The financial risks involved in producing *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are mitigated by their identification in the paratextual network as historically significant cultural commodities, allowing HBO not only to confirm itself as a producer of original programming with exceptional production values, but also to align its brand identity with the social and cultural values associated with memorialisation. Writing on an earlier World War II documentary, *Victory at Sea*, Peter Rollins identifies a ‘dangerous beauty’ inherent in the ‘drama of commemoration.’⁴² The paratextual network that surrounds and pervades *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* integrates the ‘drama’ of commemoration with notions of unequivocal ‘truths’, creating a powerful affirmation of the version of the past in the two series as history. The confirmation of the ‘dangerous beauty’ inherent in the two series’ depiction of sacrifice and spectacle on the battlefields of World War II as the ‘true’ story of war diverts attention from the complex causes of warfare and, perhaps more importantly in the context of current conflicts, from the terrible costs to all those involved, not only to the soldiers involved in the fighting.

Endnotes

¹ Greer in 'Making *The Pacific*' (HBO, 2010)

² Bill Keveney, 'Hanks and Spielberg return to WWII together for *The Pacific*,' *USA Today*, December 3, 2010. http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2010-03-12-Pacific12_CV_N.htm <accessed January 22, 2011>

³ Spielberg in 'Steven Spielberg Interview HBO's *The Pacific*,' Sara Wayland, *Collider*, 4 February, 2010 <http://collider.com/steven-spielberg-interview-hbo-the-pacific/15813/> <accessed October 13, 2011>

⁴ Geoff King, 'Seriously Spectacular,' in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. David Slocum, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 292.

⁵ Tom Hoffer and Richard Nelson, 'Docudrama on American Television' in *Why Docudrama? Fact-fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 64.

⁶ Spielberg uses HBO's flagship series *The Sopranos* as an example of 'mainstream TV', suggesting that *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are distinctive even within HBO's production of 'quality' television. Spielberg in 'In Good Company,' David Gritten, *Radio Times*, September 29 – October 5, 2001, 46.

⁷ Thomas Schatz, '*Band of Brothers*' in *The Essential HBO Reader*, eds. Gary R. Edgerton, and Jeffrey P. Jones, (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 133.

⁸ A great deal has been written on the creation of HBO's brand identity as a purveyor of programmes that are different from mainstream television. For comprehensive collections, see Edgerton and Jones, *Essential HBO Reader*, 2008, and Marc Leverett, Brian Ott and Cara Louise Buckley, eds. *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008)

⁹ John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 162.

¹⁰ Chris Albrecht in 'Television Notebook Fox Exec Tout Fiction,' David Kronke and Valerie Kuklenski, 'Television Notebook Fox Exec Tout Fiction, Succumb To Reality,' *Daily News (LA California)*, July 18, 2001.

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¹¹ Spielberg in 'Interview with Steven Spielberg', *TV NZ*, no posting date, <http://tvnz.co.nz/the-pacific/interview-steven-spielberg-3403539> <accessed October 8, 2011>

¹² Allison Romano, 'On HBO, war is hype,' *Broadcasting and Cable*, 131, No. 34 (August 13, 2001) 18. http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/91190-On_HBO_war_is_hype.php <accessed May 7, 2013>

¹³ Kessler in *ibid*.

¹⁴ TimeWarner, 'HBO to Hold World Premiere,' Press release, March 28, 2001 http://www.timewarner.com/newsroom/press-releases/2001/03/HBO_to_Hold_World_Premiere_BBAND_BROTHERSB_June_6_at_03-28-2001.php <accessed November 9, 2010>

¹⁵ The original Band of Brothers website, constructed by AOL, is no longer available, but the website for *The Pacific*, established by hbo.com, can still be accessed on <http://www.hbo.com/the-pacific/index.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/thepacific>; <http://www.hbo.com/the-pacific/inside/extras/social/twitter.html>

¹⁷ That episode being *Carentan* (3:10). See 'D-Day Unveiling for War Epic', BBC news, Entertainment, TV and Radio, Thursday June 7, 2001 for one representative article that

mentions this particular production detail,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1373148.stm> <accessed May7, 2013>

¹⁸ Respectively, Stephen Armstrong, 'The Mother of all Wars,' *The Sunday Times: Culture*, March 14, 2010, 4 and TVNZ 'Interview with Steven Spielberg.'

¹⁹ Mary Ann Doane, 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe' in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in the Media*, ed. Marcia Landy, (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 272.

²⁰ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 120.

²¹ Veteran Herbert Suerth in 'Premiere in Normandy' (Entertainment News, 2001)

²² The connections between the two series and commemorative events additionally facilitates their sale into syndication by guaranteeing the opportunity for annual repeats.

²³ Davids and Carlin in History Channel, '2003 *Band of Brothers* Marches over to the History Channel,' Press Release, November 17, 2003. [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/BAND OF BROTHERS Marches Over to the History Channel\(R\) In a Basic...-a0110231477](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/BAND OF BROTHERS Marches Over to the History Channel(R) In a Basic...-a0110231477) <accessed February 7, 2010>

²⁴ Ian Lewis in 'Sky buys rights to HBO's *Band of Brothers* follow-up *The Pacific*,' Caitlin Fitzsimmons, *The Guardian*, May 21, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/may/21/the-pacific-hbo-sky-band-of-brothers> <accessed May 2, 2013>

²⁵ James Bennett and Tom Brown, 'Introduction,' in *Film and Television after DVD*, Bennett and Brown, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 6.

²⁶ Debra Ramsay, 'Flagging up History: The Past as a DVD Bonus Feature' in *A Companion to the Historical Film*, eds. Robert Rosenstone & Constantin Parvulescu. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 53-70

²⁷ Caldwell, 'Prefiguring DVD Bonus Tracks,' in *Film and Television after DVD*, Bennett and Brown, 2008, 161.

²⁸ Ramsay, 2013, 69.

²⁹ Tom Hanks in 'Tom Hanks Returns to *The Pacific*, ' Dave Itzkoff, *New York Times: Arts Beat*, June 3, 2010, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/03/tom-hanks-returns-to-the-pacific/> <accessed 8 October, 2011>

³⁰ Original emphasis, Caldwell, 1995, 188.

³¹ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and other Media Paratexts* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010) 107.

³² The box sets of *Band of Brothers* includes a segment on the series premier in Normandy, which includes interviews not only with the veterans and the filmmakers, but also with Susan Eisenhower, who refers to *Band of Brothers* as 'powerful' television, Winston S. Churchill and Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, who all endorse the series and by extension, HBO.

³³ For example, a long-running thread on IMDb's message boards structured specifically around the subject of repeat viewings of *Band of Brothers* provides evidence of the incorporation of the series into private moments of memorialisation. One poster writes, 'we watch it once a year, sometimes on D-Day, or sometimes Veteran's day' (posted November 16, 2008). Another starts viewing the series 'ten days before Memorial Day, it makes the day even more meaningful' (posted May 14, 2009). *Band of Brothers*: Message Boards: 'Sign here if you watch BOB at least once a year.'

<http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0185906/board/thread/114317081?d=114317081&p=1#114317081> <accessed May 31, 2010>

This thread has since been archived, but others concerning repeat viewings persist.

³⁴ Ramsay, 2013, 66

³⁵ Leslie Woodhead, 'The Guardian Lecture: Dramatized Documentary' in *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) 109.

³⁶ Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 83.

³⁷ Tom Hanks in 'The Mother of all Wars,' Armstrong, 2010, 4-5.

³⁸ Joanna, Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*. (New York: Basic Books, 1999) xiii.

³⁹ James F. Dunnegan, *How to Make War: A Comprehensive Guide to Modern Warfare* (New York: Quill, 1983) 215, quoted in *Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War*, eds. Frank J. Wetta, and Stephen J. Curley (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992) 44.

⁴⁰ While exact figures are difficult to obtain, civilians are believed to account for over half the mortality rates of World War II. Marianna Torgovnick, *The War Complex: World War II in our Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 41.

⁴¹ It is important to note that paratextual networks may also open up film or television to alternative interpretations and historical perspectives, as I argue in Ramsay, 2013.

Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 147

⁴² Rollins, 'Victory at Sea,' in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* eds Gary R. Edgerton and Peter Rollins (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001) 117.

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