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The Hero Soldier: Portrayals of Soldiers in War Films

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The Hero Soldier: Portrayals of Soldiers in War Films

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all those who have fought and died in the defense of this country.

They are the real hero soldiers. I would like to thank Dr. Scott Liu for his tireless dedication, insight, and encouragement to stay the course and think outside the box.

Also a special thanks to Kevin C. and Justin P. and the rest who put up with me through this process and encouraged me to persevere.

This thesis is available online at: <http://thesisgdavie.wordpress.com/>

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Abstract

The mythos of the hero has existed within the stories of humanity for as long as we can remember. Within the last hundred years film has become one of the dominant storytelling media of our culture and numerous films, especially war films, about heroes and their inspirational actions have been made. This study focuses on war films and the hero soldiers and their actions portrayed in those films. It uses a narrative analysis of five war films to accomplish this. The findings suggest that the hero soldier has become more human and fallible over time and that heroes are a constantly changing entity. These changes do not reach down to the fundamental levels of hero makeup. At the core and archetypal level the hero remains the same. However, the hero soldier has become more flawed over time descending from invincible demi-god to a fallible human. This change is due to the merger between the hero and non-hero characters, and the incorporation of their traits into one another.

Chapter One:

Introduction

We have not so much lost our faith in human greatness as altered our cultural notion of what greatness is. (Popora, 1996, p. 214).

Since the advent of human communication and narrative, the idea of the hero has existed within the stories of humanity (Campbell, 2008). In the last hundred years, film has become one of the dominant storytelling media of our culture and numerous films, especially war films, about heroes and their inspirational actions have been made. This study focuses on war films and the heroic actions of the soldiers portrayed in those films. The continuing, repeated themes lead one to believe that an observable portrayal of the heroic soldier exists within films over the decades.

As culture has evolved one can suspect that the portrayals of heroes have evolved and changed as much as the art of film has over the past century. This supposition creates a number of questions: How is the hero soldier depicted in film? Is there a change over time in the depiction of the hero in war movies? If so, how and why? Does film reflect dominant ideologies of the hero in our culture?

Film is in many ways an art form and also a form of mass communication that has the power to motivate and move the audience emotionally. Billions of dollars are paid each year by audiences to go to the movies and experience stories they haven't lived

themselves. Film plays a role in our society that some consider just as important as the evening news or a television show. Everyone can name at least one film that affected him/her on a deep level. How many of us can say that about news stories? The point is that film is one of the most important forms of mass communication and the themes, archetypes and characters it portrays are interpreted by millions of people each and every weekend. Film is such an important form of mass communication because it reaches the millions of movie-goers every weekend who interpret the themes, archetypes, and characters portrayed. The depictions in film have a connection to our society and culture. A deeper understanding of this form of media could enrich our insight into the portrayals of hero soldiers, decipher their connection to our society, and explore the meanings they hold.

This study aims to understand the portrayal of the hero soldier within film. Its purpose is to understand how heroes are portrayed in war films as well as document any changes in the portrayal of the hero over time. It must be stressed that this study is exploratory in nature and will seek to understand the portrayals of heroes and understand whether that conception has evolved over time.

When analyzing any form of art, film in this case, we must always keep the historical context in mind. All forms of representation such as films, music, etc. are in a constant struggle to create their own version of meaning. For example, a film about World War II made in 1995 depicts how the director in the context of 1995 sees World War II. Hence, to fully grasp the gravity of the way a hero is portrayed in film we need to understand the full context in which the film was made. This context is crucial because “representations that lay claim to historical accuracy can mask facts, policy and values”

(Dittmar & Michaud, 1990, p. 298). Therefore, an understanding of the historical period in which a film was made can help us shed light on the intricacies of the portrayals of soldiers in that film.

In order to effectively analyze film while keeping in mind the historical context, one must limit the scope of analysis. The wealth of information about a particular period in time is massive. In keeping with that thought we will limit our context to a finite number of areas that will give us an idea of the time a film was made, i.e., U.S. history and global events. These will be taken into consideration as a first step in developing a broader milieu for the analysis.

In order to explore and understand the portrayal of hero soldiers in war films the following steps will be taken. First, we will review pertinent literature to build a conceptual and analytical framework for the analysis. This framework will be comprised of a discussion of the concept of the hero, followed by an overview of the ideas of the soldier hero. An overview of the change in heroes over time will then be covered to round out the conceptual base. Second, the method in which this study was conducted will be discussed, followed by an analysis of five films. This analysis will explore how the heroes in each film relate to the concept of the hero soldier. Lastly, the conclusions will be drawn from the analysis of the portrayal of the hero soldier within the films which was tempered by the lens of the conceptual knowledge garnered from scholarly research.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

To study the hero soldier in film, we must understand what exactly the concept of hero means, how it applies to soldiers, and how those concepts are interwoven in film. This literature review will cover studies which explicate the meaning of the hero concept as well as to show how the hero concept, and by extension, the hero soldier concept, changes over time.

The Hero Concept

According to Henderson (1968), a student of Carl G. Jung, the "myth of the hero is the most common and well known myth in the world" (p. 101). Myth in this sense refers to the story of the hero – from his humble beginnings to his journey and finally his ascension to hero. Henderson acknowledges that the hero archetype or schema has existed in cultures spanning the globe since history began. He contends, "these hero myths vary enormously in detail, but the more one closely examines them the more one sees they are structurally very similar. They have... a universal pattern, even though they were developed by groups or individuals without a direct cultural contact with each other..." (p. 101). What has been referenced here by Henderson (1968) as an archetype is the common pattern within the hero's makeup.

Jung (1968) indicates, "the universal hero myth, for example, always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents,

monsters, demons, and so on, who liberates his people from destruction and death. The narration or ritual repetition of sacred texts and ceremonies, and the worship of such a figure... exalt the individual to an identification with the hero" (p. 68). This idea creates the basis for our understanding of the hero. The hero archetype is, at its most rudimentary level, the framework of an individual who combats the forces of evil. Jung goes on to note the unavoidable emotional connection and reaction this archetype can evoke in a person.

These ideas or myths of heroes have been ingrained in the human psyche. Heroic images and schemas are hard-wired into the human psyche and "are in fact symbolic representations of the whole psyche, the larger and more comprehensive identity that supplies the strength that the personal ego lacks" (Henderson, 1968, p. 101). This cursory understanding of the origins of the heroic myth provides the context for our understanding of what comprises a hero. Which in turn provides the lens through which soldier-heroes are examined throughout this study.

Sullivan and Venter (2005) suggest that heroes are those "who perform extraordinary acts, such as saving a child" (p. 101). In this case a hero goes above and beyond anything a normal human would encounter on a daily basis. One aspect of a hero could be defined as a person whose actions directly result in saving the life of another person at great personal risk. Sullivan and Venter (2005) go on to suggest that heroes are born when their acts are viewed as "unattainable by most others" (p. 102). In this sense we understand that while life-saving is a heroic act, a hero is defined by his/her unique actions in a given situation, or by a heroic act which no one else is willing to undertake, usually due to the risk factor.

In their 2009 study, Harvey, Erdos and Turnbull suggest, “acts may be thought heroic... [when] relating to courage, bravery and altruism” (p. 313). They posit that courage manifests itself through heroic action by way of means to attain a desired outcome. They reconfirm the risk aspect by stressing that heroic acts are often hazardous to the hero. Harvey et al. (2009), summarize their conceptualization of heroism in this way: “Heroism can be viewed as a highly moral behavior that has been explained as a form of sensation seeking, altruism, citizenship and bravery and a desirable but sometimes non-adaptive response in Darwinian terms” (p. 313). These traits will be elaborated upon later in this manuscript.

By this conception Harvey et al. (2009) put forth the idea that heroism is defined by a combination of bravery or courage, altruism, a sense of duty or citizenship and a disregard for personal well-being. These characteristics come together in action to form a heroic act, although not all need to be present for an act to be deemed heroic. For example, saving a child from a collapsing building is certainly a heroic act, but this act may not have anything to do with a sense of citizenship or duty but instead be driven simply the desire to do the right thing. Also it is suggested that heroism takes on the form as “being clearly emotional, unplanned, risky...” (Harvey et al., 2009, p. 317). This idea extends the previously mentioned criteria of the hero. It adds to the ideas of Sullivan and Venter (2005) by including the dimension of morality in the hero’s characteristics. Not only are heroes brave risk-takers but they are concerned with the moral good as well.

Sullivan and Venter (2005) are not the only scholars who have attempted to extend the idea of morality into the definition of a hero. According to Schlenker, Weigold and Schlenker (2008), heroes are “principled, honest, spiritual, and benevolently oriented

toward others” (p. 323). They point out that “doing the right thing is a basis for acts of heroism” and, like other researchers, underscore the prevalent risk theme because heroism “often involves personal sacrifice” (Schlenker et al. 2008, p. 323). Furthermore, they indicate that the moral aspect of heroism often involves making not only the right decision but also a tough decision. An easy choice, such as running away from a perilous situation, is often an immoral choice. While making the moral choice, the hero effectively creates a harder path for him/herself. Morality thus adds another important dimension to the growing definition of heroism explicated in this study.

Schlenker et al. (2008) also address the cultural connection to the hero concept. “Heroes provide reference points for goals, standards, and ways to behave” (p. 326). Consequently, we can understand that heroes in many ways are ideals for society. A hero is someone whose purpose is inspirational and who serves the function of setting an example for society. Heroes are therefore created to better society. No one can disagree with this idea; everyone has been influenced by a hero in life at some point, whether in person, in the news, or perhaps even on television or film. Schlenker et al. (2008) pose a very salient idea through their study: the idea that the hero and society are connected and through that connection share common values.

The hero is connected to society and society is connected to the hero. Societal “ideologies and heroes go hand in hand and probably reciprocally influence each other,” notes Schlenker et al. (2008, p. 348). This connection is tied to the traits common in heroes and can be used as a lens through which to study them.

The Hero Soldier

Now that we have established the foundation for our understanding of the hero concept, the next step is to apply these characteristics to the hero soldier. This serves the purpose of facilitating understanding of the enactment of hero characteristics by soldiers in war films. War films are the chosen vehicles for this study as wars are more often than not the context in which heroes are made. Wars provide the opportunities for soldiers to prove themselves heroes through deed. By applying the hero archetype and previously discussed characteristics to soldiers we take the next logical step in understanding the background of the hero soldier.

The Jungian hero archetype is morphed and molded for the modern age by S. R. Hankins (1983). Hankins suggests that heroes adhere to a five-fold archetype. As we walk through these criteria for a hero, we will compare them to the soldier hero. The first criterion is that the hero is from “outside the society in which he operates” (Hankins, 1983, p. 269). When applied to the hero soldier we find that this piece of the archetype stands up. All the soldiers in the war films analyzed are operating in a distant land, not their own. Whether the jungles of Vietnam in Southeast Asia or the arid forests of northern France, all of the soldiers are outsiders to the land in which they fight.

Secondly, Hankins’s criteria call for an ascetic quality in the hero. This criterion ties to the idea of the moral fiber of the hero. The hero doesn’t value material possessions or wealth. In many ways a hero and the hero soldier can be viewed as the warrior monk. While the soldiers need the tools of their trade (e.g., a weapon and armor), they are devoid of other wants. No hero is collecting riches on his way through Europe, Vietnam, or Iraq. They are there for a different purpose. For some it is the discovery and

reclamation of their souls; for others it is as simple as winning the war. Either way the hero soldier stands up under this criterion for the archetype as laid out by Hankins (1983).

The third characteristic is aversion to women, not in a homosexual sense, but in the sense that the hero stands alone. He has no woman standing by his side. This is the only piece of the criteria that is not applicable to hero soldiers. Not because they do not fulfill the criterion but by their very natures soldiers (certainly in WWII or Vietnam) are not in the presence of women. In the time of these wars women were not on the front lines in any capacity. For this reason this element of the archetype was excluded from analysis but not discounted as a possible criterion for the hero who operates in other contexts.

Fourth is that “the hero exhibits compassion for the society of which he is not really a part” (Hankins, 1983, p. 269). While Hankins cites Superman and Jesus as examples, we can apply this to the hero soldier to the same ends. The soldier in each one of these films is away from home. He is deployed to a foreign land where home is a memory in which he delights or laments.

The fifth and perhaps the most universally recognized characteristic of the hero archetype is the battle with evil. Whether it is the evil within himself or outward evil, the hero uses his powers or the tools at his disposal for good. While a hero could make an excellent villain, he does not become that villain. His commitment to doing the right thing is always a motivating factor behind his actions. The hero soldier is always driven by this inherent desire to do good and while he sometimes struggles with the decisions, goodness always prevails in the end. He will go above and beyond duty in the pursuit of justice and doing the right thing.

In addition to the applicable criteria of the hero archetype as laid out by Hankins (1983) we must understand the traits of a hero soldier in the specific context of war and combat. These traits were the central focus of Wansink, Payne, and von Ittersum (2008) who analyzed the heroic qualities of combat-decorated war veterans. These veterans are those whose heroic qualities had been recognized in perhaps the most formal ways possible through the award of silver stars and other military awards. To determine the traits that are most commonly associated with heroes, Wansink et al. (2008) analyzed myriad accounts of heroes from newspapers, biographies, literature, and history. Through this analysis they developed a list of the most universally recognized heroic qualities and grouped them under three main areas: leadership, loyalty, and risk-taking. Leadership in terms of the hero soldier encompasses the ability to effectively guide others, a showing of self-discipline, resourcefulness and a sense of high self-worth. Loyalty, an internal quality that might be easy to appreciate but hard to recognize in films, is defined as working with team/squad members in a positive fashion. Risk-taking is a spontaneous action displaying an adventurous spirit and adaptation to change; taking a personal risk is the central trait common to all heroes.

The defining traits of a hero soldier are best illustrated through life saving actions, actions that often manifest themselves as risky and with some level of disregard for personal well-being. These actions almost always require bravery or courage, the wherewithal to act with or without fear and altruism, and a sense of contributing to something greater than oneself. Also included in these actions are a sense of duty or citizenship, much akin to the idea of a soldier and his/her duty to country. The actions may jeopardize a personal goal in the future, but the hero will not compromise his

character for a future gain. For example, a hero soldier risking his own life to save a wounded comrade, is the right, but not required thing to do. However, the central trait of the hero soldier that emerges is one of risk-taking behavior tempered with motivation and character.

The Changing Hero

Thus far our review has focused on the conceptual definitions of heroes that have been generally shared among researchers. Nevertheless, there has been much debate over the changing roles of heroes in human society. The debate has been between researchers who believe that the hero has simply changed on the surface and those who claim that the underlying hero myth has changed (Campbell, 2008). Both sides, however, agree that in one way or another the conception of a hero has changed. In this section we will examine the changes posted by in the literature and outline the explanations for the changes.

One cannot study the hero without exploring the work of Joseph Campbell whose name is synonymous with the study of heroes. In his seminal work, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Campbell (2008) details the pantheon of heroes from the dawn of time until the modern age. His insight into the heroes of today is most relevant to the present study. In his explication of modern heroes, Campbell notes that “The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes... and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance...” (2008, p. 334). He goes on to explain how the hero of ancient days and mythic times has ceased to exist in current society. The society that was required to support the demi-god hero was one based in a group identity and as culture has shifted from group-based meaning to a focus on the individual, our heroes have changed as well.

Campbell suggests that in the modern age, the emphasis on the individual and de-emphasis on religion has shifted our cultural values and expectations in regard to what makes a hero. He traces the changes in hero makeup to the idea that all “mysteries have lost their force; their symbols no longer interest our psyche. The notion of cosmic law, which all existence serves and to which man himself must bend, has long since passed...” (Campbell, 2008, p. 336). In essence, the hero has become more human because society has lost the mystery and magic that led us to believe in the invincible hero of the past. Our reliance on science has taken the so-called “magic” away from life and left us with a more human hero. In this way Campbell makes a case for the idea that heroes do reflect society and the nature of the hero is wrapped up in our cultural values and ideas.

This idea that modern societies have lost their heroes because they no longer need them was central to Campbell’s work on the modern hero. He states that our focus on science and the demystification of life rendered heroes of the past useless to modern society. Instead, our heroes must be devoid of magic and mystical properties. They must start on a level ground with the rest of us. The hero of today is an ordinary person doing extraordinary things such that even an ordinary soldier could become a hero by fighting against seemingly insurmountable odds and emerging victorious. The hero soldier does not possess any powers that others do not have. The differentiator is the motivation to act that drives the hero to greater heights than the sea of normal people can attain.

This cultural pedagogy has shaped the heroes from the god-like super humans of the past to the heroes of today who are simply “ordinary men in an extraordinary situation[s] who behaved extraordinarily,” as noted by Matt Damon in supplemental material to *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998). Campbell (2008) notes, “it is

not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse” (p. 337). This admonishment, per Campbell’s explanations, suggests two things: First, that currently society is the guide in shaping the hero, and therefore as society changes so do our heroes. Secondly, it suggests that to save the changing and more human hero from the depths of fallibility, the hero needs to rise and influence society as opposed to the current *modus operandi*.

When discussing the changing hero, or transforming hero as termed by Campbell, we cannot escape the inextricable connection between culture or society and the hero. In many ways the hero “traces the course of the legendary history of the human race through its typical stages, the hero appearing on the scene in various forms according to the changing needs of the race” (Campbell, 2008, p. 30). This idea that the hero is a reflection of society is interwoven through all of Campbell’s work and is reflected in the work of his contemporaries as well. For example, Jung (1968) noted that “when we attempt to understand symbols, we are not only confronted with the symbol itself, but we are brought against the wholeness of the symbol-producing individual. This includes a study of his cultural background” (p. 81). If we apply this to film, we see that the context in which the filmmaker (the symbol-producing individual) created the film is important to any analysis of the film itself.

In his study of the hero in the western movie, titled *The Heroes Are Tired*, Whitehall (1966-67) points out that “this sense of noble destiny, the inviolate nature of his own code of honor which the westerner will be called upon to defend, is slowly begin replaced by a sense of tragic destiny” (p. 14). Although Whitehall’s study addresses the downward spiral of the hero portrayal in western movies, we can see how even in the

mid-60s the idea of what composed a hero on the silver screen was beginning to change, thereby supporting Campbell's assertions regarding hero change.

Throughout his analysis of the films, produced from the beginning of filmmaking until the time his article was written, Whitehall (1966-67) traces the slow fall of hero, the gentle transition from heroic Adonis to world-weary mortal. He notes, "the movie heroes are an aging aggregate of men with lines like the contours on a relief map etched on their faces: faces weathered and lived in, faces with memories rather than hopes" (p. 17). He details how in many ways heroes in westerns have become more human. No longer are they the god-like super humans who approach immortality and carry lesser men to great destiny. Instead, they have become more human, more to the tune of a regular person stepping up for a moment at a time; they are flawed and no longer hopeful, and many times come dangerously close to becoming hopeless.

"The western hero, unaided by the supernatural, must now know for what he is prepared to die and his struggle has become, not as it used to be, against exterior forces of lawlessness, but more and more against some deficiency or blemish in himself" (p. 18) posits Whitehall (1966-67). He suggests that this idea applies not only to the western hero, but also to heroes in films in general.

Whitehall (1966-67) concludes with a stark observation that speaks to the genre as a whole and holds wider implications for the portrayal of heroes in film: "So the heroes, not only of *Showdown at Boot Hill* but also of many westerns, nurse their wounds, fragmented man. The shining, unconvincing goodness of Shane, the Spirit of the West, so wraith-like as to be almost meta-physical, has given way increasingly to men who feed off their hatreds" (p. 18). Whitehall observed these changes in heroes from the early film

eras to the mid-60s, other researchers observed that the change had continued to take place and affected the way in which heroes were portrayed.

In 1996, Porpora noted that our modern culture often takes the blame for the diminishing conception of the hero with its “absence or trivialization of the heroic dimension” (p. 214). Much in the vein of Whitehall’s work, Porpora suggests that perhaps “we have not so much lost our faith in human greatness as altered our cultural notion of what greatness is” (1996, p. 214). This suggests that a change has taken place, not in a negative or positive sense, but simply an evolution in how our culture views heroes/non-heroes and the fabric out of which they are made.

Porpora (1996), in agreement with Campbell (2008), goes on to argue that our current de-emphasis on transcendental metanarratives has led to the change in our perception of heroes. “Without a transcendental plane in which we are required to orient ourselves, we may find little need for personal heroes. As the mythic dwelling place of heroes is culturally marginal, perhaps its heroic residents are marginal as well” (p. 227). Overall, Porpora suggests that as our culture changes, so does our vision of heroes, not through any misguided step, but as a reflection of our culture. In many ways Porpora makes a case that our heroes on all levels are evolving over time. The exact nature of the relationship between culture and the conception of the hero is outside the scope of this study. However, a systematic examination of the observable changes in media could serve as a first step in understanding the portrayal of heroes.

Porpora’s (1996) thesis on the decline of the hero is echoed by Rollin (1983) in *The Hero as Popular Culture*. The study outlines the decline of the hero throughout our modern society and the stories we tell about it in movies, television shows, and books.

However, he also argues that “yesterday’s hero was less likely to become yesterday’s news” (p. 21). While critics of the time proclaim the hero is dead, Rollin suggests that their proclamation may be premature – the hero is not dead, he/she is simply in a state of change as he/she always has been. Browne (1983) proposes a reason for the change. In more advanced societies, as compared to the tribal societies most often referenced by Campbell (2008), heroes become more complicated in step with their societies. That is, as our society becomes more and more complex, so do our heroes. This change of heroes over time, posits Browne (1983), is a change based on our societal values and norms.

One of the most illuminating ideas to arise from this review of pertinent scholarship is the idea that our heroes are no longer the demi-gods of the past. Our heroes have changed over time from invincible super-humans to the ordinary. This means that once our heroes were untouchables whose abilities exceeded those of any human by leaps and bounds. Our heroes today are the man or woman next door, the receptionist at our office, or the barista at the local coffee shop. Our heroes of today are those cut from the ordinary, everyday people who momentarily do extraordinary things. Our society no longer has an appetite for the god-like heroes of the past. This need for everyday heroes derives from our everyday culture.

If indeed our older and perhaps more idealistic conception of heroes has diminished over time, we should expect to observe the gradual change of the hero soldier in war films. With the gradual changes in our society over the past century, we have seen our films take on and reflect our current societal values, such “changes in media, lifestyle, priorities, [and] ideologies are reflected in our heroes” (Fishwick, 1983, p. 12).

As noted by Porpora (1996) “the study of heroes is important because heroes are one indicator of who we are and what we stand for” (p. 209).

Research Questions

From this exploration of the literature, the following questions emerge:

1. How are hero soldiers depicted in war films?
2. Is there a change overtime in the depiction of the hero in war movies? If so, how and why?

These research questions are meant to direct the exploration of the hero soldier concept in film. In answering these questions, this study will examine the cultural and societal changes that might have contributed to the observable changes.

Chapter Three

Method

The general methodological approach of this study is a version of narrative analysis. “Narrative analysis is analysis of a chronologically told story, with a focus on how elements are sequenced, why some elements are evaluated differently from others, how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past, and how both shape perceptions of the future” (Garson, 2011). Using films as our primary source of the narrative and treating them as one would treat a person giving a narrative, in this sense it adheres to the spirit and conceptual foundation of narrative analysis.

“Narratives vary by social context... and evaluative data extracted from narratives will vary by the social context within which they are collected. Consequently, it may be fruitful to gather narratives on the same reference objects from otherwise similar respondents in varying social contexts. Likewise, gathering narratives on the same objects... will yield differences in evaluative components and consequent insight into the process” (Garson, 2011). The “reference object” of this narrative analysis was the hero theme. It was analyzed using the previously discussed conceptual framework (concept of the hero, the hero soldier in film and the changing hero) in the context of the film and era in which it was made.

Each film can be understood as a narrative – a story told from a certain point of view about a specific event or chain of events. In this study, the films were analyzed from both the perspective of the filmmakers as well as the audience by taking each film and examining the plots, actions, situational interactions, stories told, as well as the social context of each film and its relation to other films. All aspects of the film were taken into account, including: “...the personal and the social (the interaction); the past, present, and future (continuity); and the place (situation)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 56) as well as any themes that arise from the film to render a deeper analysis of the meaning of the story (Huber & Whelan, 1999).

With this method, this study qualitatively analyzes five films, all produced in different eras and all depicting soldiers in wartime scenarios. The study focuses on the soldiers and how they are portrayed. Specifically the focus falls on the heroic and non-heroic actions undertaken by these characters as well as the historical context of the films. This study analyzed the following films: *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon, Sperling, Yordan, & Annakin, 1965), *A Bridge Too Far* (Levine, Levine, Palmer, Stanley-Evans, & Attenborough, 1977), *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986), *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998), and *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow, Boal, Chartier, Shapiro, & Bigelow, 2008). While many films were viewed, these five were chosen for specific reasons.

First, the film had to feature soldiers in combat scenarios. Second, year of production was a factor. The films are spaced roughly 10 to 15 years apart from each other in order to represent characterizations of heroes portrayed during different periods in cinema. Lastly, the films were chosen because they contained a rich depth of heroic

action and character development. In analyzing films, the time period in which the film was made must be taken into consideration as films reflect both the era which their content mirrors as well as the era in which they are produced (James, 2010).

One of the most difficult parts of analyzing the hero soldier is finding the line between where a soldier's simple duty ends and where heroism begins. Throughout this analysis I endeavor to draw that line and explain how the conclusion put forth was reached. Throughout the analysis the terms heroic and non-heroic action will be used and are defined as follows. A heroic action is defined as an action that falls beyond or outside a soldier's duty that exhibits the previously discussed characteristics. These characteristics are: life saving actions, risk-taking, and doing the right thing (Campbell, 2008; Henderson, 1968; Harvey et al., 2009; Sullivan & Venter, 2005; Schlenker et al., 2008; Hankins, 1983; Wansink et al. 2008).

An action that would not be considered heroic is a normal action without a negative outcome, i.e., an act performed in the normal capacity of a soldier's duty as well as any action that is in contrast to a heroic action, specifically an act displaying cowardice, falling victim to overwhelming fear, or the like. This definition was derived as the antithesis of the heroes' definition posited above. Heroes are those with the capacity to choose and while they may not choose what they have to do (soldiers have their orders), it is in how they go about executing their duty that makes them heroes.

A degree of judgment was exercised on the part of the researcher in terms of how to interpret specific actions on the part of soldiers. When analyzing any form of art there is always the clouding factor of subjectivity. However, based on the literature and research of other scholars this definition of what comprises a hero provided a solid

foundation for analysis. Heroic actions were those in which a character demonstrated one or more of the aforementioned heroic traits in a way that went above and beyond their duty as soldiers. For example, a soldier drawing a weapon and firing when fired upon is not heroic; it is simply that soldier doing a job. If a soldier tells his/her squad to stay back as he/she charges the enemy at a great personal risk, that action crosses the line into heroism.

When these actions occur, they will be analyzed through the lens of the literature and the definitions that have been established thus far. They will then be analyzed as the narrative of the film, or the sum of the actions within that film. Finally, they will be compared and contrasted to the other films covered by this study.

Chapter Four

Analysis

As we look into to the analysis of the films at hand, aimed at understanding the hero and exploring the existence or absence of the changing hero, we must remember that these films rarely if ever walk the audience through the entire nuclear unit of the hero's story, that is the journey of separation to initiation to return (Campbell 2008). We usually glimpse the hero at the point of initiation, especially as this is the climax of the separation and films about soldiers fighting or "going away" to war fits beautifully into this criterion. Campbell (2008) calls this "the trials and victories of initiation" where we almost exclusively experience the soldier in war films, at least those depicting combat.

The Battle of the Bulge

The Battle of the Bulge (Harmon et. al, 1965) is a film that follows various characters as they weave their way across each other's path before and during the monumental battle of the bulge during World War II. The film follows Lt. Col. Kiley, Lt. Weaver, and Col. Hessler, they represent the hero, the non-hero, and the villain respectively. The archetype of the villain will not be discussed at length in this study as this study aims to focus specifically on the hero and non-hero. Much like *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) the film begins with an already established hero, personified in Lt. Col. Kiley, who makes all the right decisions, risks himself for the good of his men and his country, and exhibits strong leadership.

The *Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al), released in 1965, was made in a time marked by domestic civil unrest as well as global turmoil. In the previous year, the conflict in Vietnam was beginning to heat up with U.S. military bases being attacked and general tension in Southeast Asia. In the western hemisphere, the current President of Brazil was removed from power by a military coup backed by the United States, a debatable action. Domestically in 1964 the Civil Rights Act had passed, outlawing racial and gender discrimination. This led to much racial tension all over the U.S., more so in the southern states than the northern states but the tension and reaction to the Act was palpable. The military draft increased in 1965 leading to many anti-war protests beginning in Washington and spreading to other cities (Dittmar & Michaud, 1990). In 1965 the first U.S. combat troops made landfall in Vietnam officially demarcating a milestone in U.S. involvement. Also, to note was the counter-cultural movement of the sixties, this resulted in widespread anti-war sentiments as well as the advent of the “hippy” (Gitlin, 1987).

Lt. Col. Kiley who is main focus of the film embodies the established hero. His actions personify the criteria of the hero, specifically: leadership, risk-taking, and loyalty (Wansink, Payne, & von Ittersum, 2008), all evidenced in his actions throughout the film. His leadership is made evident through various actions during the course of the battle. Most notably in pre-battle where he fights for his ideas and eventually is proven right, both in his inclination to believe that the Germans are mounting a full-scale assault and also during the following battle.

Notable as well are his risk-taking actions – the hallmark of the hero soldier. For example, before the onset of the battle he fights with his commanding officer to be

allowed to go on a mission to collect German P.O.W.s and question them. He leads a small group of men out into the freezing night in an effort to capture some of the opposing forces and succeeds. Immediately after the battle begins his drive for victory coupled with his willingness to take risks and garner information about the enemy demonstrates his propensity for risk-taking.

An intercut montage of the various soldiers waking up to the sound of tanks signals the onset of the battle. Wide panning shots of hundreds of soldiers moving to setup a front conveys the scale and danger of the battle about to take place. Kiley and Wolenski move quickly through the lines to the front. Wolenski stops to tell his Sergeant that he is the anchor position and must hold. Afterwards, he turns to Kiley and says,

“You might as well stay here, one more man won’t make any difference.” Kiley responds, “I need to look inside one of those Tigers [tanks].” As the shot shifts to the German tanks pushing through trees, we see a quick shot of Lt. Weaver; the shot is framed wide, and Weaver is positioned behind a log barricade. His position in the shot, his slouching body language, and the look in his eye convey the fear he is feeling. As the German tanks roll toward his position, we once again return to a shot of Weaver; he is motionless and paralyzed by fear. Those around him are firing grenades and rockets at the tank; their constant motion adds the effect of Weaver’s paralysis.

In stark contrast to Weaver’s fear, we cut to Kiley and Wolenski rushing forward to find a Tiger to “get a look at.” They stop at a forward rocket position, where a tank has just machine-gunned the rocketeer. Wolenski grabs the rocket launcher, Kiley loads it, and they disable the tread of an oncoming tank. Then Wolenski says “There’s your Tiger,” hands Kiley a grenade and a “greaser” (machine gun) and Kiley sets off on foot

into the thick of oncoming tanks to singlehandedly disable the Tiger. He succeeds after gunning the driver and dropping a grenade inside.

This display of risk-taking behavior outside the normal duties of a soldier shows the extent of Kiley's heroism. Throughout the battle and the film he continues to display his selfless heroism. He takes a shot at Hessler from a distance away in an effort to avoid the impending tank battle. He borrows a rifle and jumps into the firefight at Ambleve without orders to do so and has to be pulled out of the battle by his superiors. He repeatedly takes risks to further benefit his men and his country.

He even goes as far as taking up a plane in a thick fog so he can pinpoint the tank battalion trying to ambush the Allied troops. In the process of this daring and heroic action his plane is shot down and he suffers serious injury. This quick thinking and myriad heroic actions on the part of Kiley epitomize his ability to adapt to change, a key facet of risk-taking and the hero (Wansink, Payne, & von Ittersum, 2008).

Conversely, Lt. Weaver in this case is the non-hero; his actions endanger other soldiers and eventually lead to some of them being killed. Lt. Weaver starts out his journey under Maj. Wolenski, in the bunker visited by Kiley in his search for Germans to interrogate. He expresses his disinterest in the war and displays a generally apathetic attitude toward the war in his conversation with a fellow squad mate. He reaches the apex of his non-heroic cowardice in his trek through the woods with the same squad mate after their Jeep breaks down. Weaver, when confronted with the possibility of conflict with the Germans, instantly surrenders while the Germans examine his broken down vehicle.

Subsequently, he and his sergeant are taken to the prisoner gathering in a clearing and then massacred by the German troops. Lt. Weaver narrowly escapes death and flees

into the forest. Through his cowardice and surrender he indirectly caused the death of his squad mate. This realization pushes him over the line from non-hero to hero.

Later in the film the Weaver is trying to stay warm and away from Germans in a half destroyed barn. The buildup to the scene is unlike any other in the film. The camera circles the building then zooms to Weaver trying to cover up behind a broken pallet. The music lends itself to a very dark mood, and the composition of the shot suggests that something of importance is going to occur. Symbolically and literally, Weaver is hiding in the dark. A group of young, lost, American privates stumble into the barn searching with their light. The light falls on Weaver, and he stands up, also symbolic in that he is rising to his responsibility as a hero. The privates pepper him with questions before he utters a word; the last question asked before the group quiets down is "...do you think we should surrender Lieutenant?" Before he answers we witness the change from the scared Lt. at the opening battle to a battle-hardened hero. His eyes take on a determined look and as he squares his jaw he replies, "Surrender? No!" He then goes on to issue a few orders, and take command. As noted before, this scene marks a turning point in Weaver's heroic journey. The privates look to him as a leader since he is an officer. In that moment of his first interaction with the scared group of soldiers he realizes that he must step up and lead these men.

From that point on he is a changed man. This is shown through his actions at the fuel depot at the end of the film – both his courage in calling out the fake MPs as well as his actions in taking down the tank advance. He exhibits his newly found leadership in the moment when he orders that the fuel dump be destroyed, and upon issuing the order he is questioned by a soldier who asks where the orders are, "We got no orders,

Lieutenant!” He replies, “Yeah, well, I’m giving the orders,” and shows himself a hero who has crossed the line from non-hero and embraced his heroic identity.

Kiley on the other hand is an established and unflawed hero. His determination to do the right thing, even though his superiors doubt him and his intuition, override and prevail over the other shortsighted officers. His brand of heroism is seen in Sgt. Elias of *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) and, to a lesser degree, Capt. Miller of *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998). It is characterized by an unflawed, shining hero who lacks the cowardice and other negative traits of the non-hero; however, he is not invincible. His plane is shot down after he reports on the movement of the German tanks in the fog, although he survives albeit with some serious injuries. He is mortal, and a hero in action not in physical stature or immunity to mortality.

The techniques used in the shooting of the film also point to Kiley’s heroism. When alone or among equals, he is shot as the power of the screen (left side). His placement in key shots subtly illustrates his heroic placement. Many times he is shot from a low angle; this creates the effect of power and heroism, as one might look up to the statue of a hero. This heroic placement and intentional way of framing the shots of Kiley conveys the heroic ideal upon him.

Lt. Weaver, on the other hand, is in many ways a precursor to Pvt. Taylor of *Platoon* and Cpl. Upham of *Saving Private Ryan*, inasmuch as all of them undergo the hero’s journey, albeit in slightly different ways. They all make mistakes that are markedly non-heroic and lead to the deaths of others. But in the end they all find their courage and become heroes. While some remain a bit more flawed than others (e.g., Pvt. Taylor), all undergo the journey (Campbell, 2008) that leads them to the path of the hero.

A key difference in this film from the subsequent films is that the villain is a character present in the film. While this is not uncommon in war films, it is worth noting nonetheless (Fisz, Saltzman, & Hamilton, 1969, *The Battle of Britain*; Foster, Glattes, Hoblit, Ladd, Rifkin, & Hoblit, 2002, *Hart's War*; Davey, Lemley, McEveety, Schmidt, Wallace, Zapotoczny, & Wallace, 2002, *We Were Soldiers*; and more). The mere presence of Col. Hessler via juxtaposition makes the actions of Lt. Weaver seem less non-heroic and more heroic in comparison. His inclusion in the film falls in direct opposition to Kiley and creates perspective on Weaver that would not have existed. In this way, the villainy of Hessler makes Weaver's actions less reprehensible as the juxtaposition places Weaver in the middle of the hero and the villain, and not at the far end of the spectrum since he is not the most un-heroic character in the film. In essence, it softens the wrong actions taken by Weaver, in the same way the inclusion of Hitler in the film would have softened the wrong actions of Hessler.

Overall, Kiley represents the true hero – the hero soldier who always does what is right for both his country and his men. He lacks the flaws and poor decision making of Weaver and succeeds through his willpower, leadership, and risk-taking behaviors. For example, near the end of the film a heavy fog descends on the Arden (the valley where the battle is being fought) and the Allies lose track of the German tank movement. Kiley hatches a plan to find out where the tanks are. In his dialogue with the pilot he asks to take him up in the fog, the pilot, Joe asks to see the flying orders, Kiley responds, “There are no orders, Joe... if we don't find that Panzer column there's gonna be no tank battle, we'll have to stop them with infantry. A lot of guys are going to die to keep you safe and cozy.” He convinces Joe to take him up on a reconnaissance mission.

Due to the heavy fog they have to cut the plane's engine and glide to listen for the tanks, then quickly restart the engine. The mood in cabin is tense while they discuss this plan, more than once Joe tries to call off the mission. Kiley remains firm and is rewarded for his persistence. They locate the tank column and report back to headquarters. Moments after reporting they take a hit from the tanks, forcing them to crash land near the fuel depot. The pilot is killed while Kiley survives but is badly wounded. He risks himself in order to save the lives of his infantry men, his heroic determination and confidence carry him through the film as a hero.

Weaver, on the other hand, represents the hero undergoing his journey. He starts a non-hero, and through challenges and opposition becomes a hero by the end of the film. He realizes what strength is and displays the traits of hero. He thus becomes a hero much as Taylor does in *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986).

A Bridge Too Far

A Bridge Too Far (Levine et. al, 1977) is a film which revolves around Operation Market Garden, an allied offensive in World War II in which 35,000 paratroopers are dropped behind German lines with the objective of holding and preserving three bridges while they wait for the Allied ground advance to reach them. The story follows U.S. soldiers, British soldiers and Polish soldiers as well as German soldiers, albeit briefly. The allied forces are tasked with taking three bridges, and manage to take the first two but suffer heavy casualties and are unable to take the third bridge, hence the name of the film; they had tried to go a bridge too far.

The film was made in 1977 and saw the preceding years leading up the film mark the end of the Vietnam War. In 1975, President Ford officially declared that the United

States' involvement in the war was over. That same year South Vietnam officially surrendered to North Vietnam marking the global end of the war. The following year (1976) Vietnam was officially reunified, although the U.S. vetoed their request for acceptance into the U.N. on the basis of many suspected P.O.W.s still being held. The following year they were eventually allowed to enter the U.N. Also in 1977, President Carter covered all Vietnam draft evaders with unconditional amnesty. The conflict surrounding apartheid in South Africa is also heating up in the mid-seventies. At this time riots, inhuman treatment of prisoners, and a breathless global audience characterize South Africa (Dittmar & Michaud, 1990).

The heroes in the film are not hard to find. They display their heroism blatantly and, much akin to their predecessors in *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965), lack any sort of visible character defect. There exist multiple heroes within the film; at least one can be found in each partition of the allied force. For the Americans there is Maj. Cook, Col. Stout, and Staff Sgt. Dohun; the English force holds Lt. Col. Frost; for the Polish there is Maj. Gen Sosabowski. All exemplify heroism in their own way and tout its telltale characteristics via their actions throughout the film.

This film draws a clear line between hero and non-hero. Nowhere is there a gray area residing between the two. Most notable in its contrast to *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965) is that there is no non-hero who undergoes the journey from said state to that of the hero. The film clearly and unchangingly defines the roles of those it focuses on.

A prime example of heroism in the film occurs early on when Col. Stout and his 101st Airborne troops are dropped behind enemy lines; the manner in which the scene is

shot accentuates his heroic figure. First, he emerges alone from the woods, pauses to let us take in the idea that he is the leader. Then he is joined by a few men, then a few more, and so forth. They begin at the pace of a slow jog, and begin to build speed. This serves to create a tempo for the scene. The next shot from the front of the now running company. It is a low angle half shot and at first we see just regular soldiers. Then Col. Stout comes running through the pack, moving quickly, with a sense of purpose and a determined look on his face. The big band, patriotic music builds and builds until the Son Bridge is in sight. Just as they arrive, German artillery destroys the bridge. As the bombardment of the bridge commences all of the troops following Stout drop and take cover while Stout continues his advance on the bridge to assess the situation. He displays the classic risk-taking behavior associated with heroes as noted previously. The way this scene was constructed also highlights his leadership, from his first emergence from the woods, to his moving to the front of the pack of running soldiers, to his courageous run to the edge of the former bridge while his men take cover. The score and shot composition together painted him a hero.

Also notable are the actions of Staff Sgt. Dohun. Early on in the film his captain, many years his junior, in a moment of fear, makes Dohun promise him that he will not be allowed to die. Dohun makes the promise, not quite realizing what it will mean for him later on. When we return to this particular thread of story after focusing on others for a time, we find Dohun searching for the captain. He finds him barely alive in a field of the dead with a bullet lodged in his skull. He quickly loads his friend's limp body in his jeep and tears off down the road for the medical tent.

Just minutes down the road he sees a German tank column crossing the road ahead of him. He immediately leaves the road and takes his Jeep into the woods. After some weaving through trees and the like, the Jeep comes to rest behind a growth of underbrush. He pauses and watches the Germans moving in and out of the forest all around him. When he can wait no longer, he guns the Jeep's engine and goes careening through the different groups of Germans. When he finally runs out of room he accelerates hard and breaks through the line to get his friend to the medical tent.

Once at the medical camp, a doctor tells him his friend is as good as dead without barely a cursory medical examination. The doctor tells Dohun to leave him alone so he can attend to those he can actually help. Dohun refuses to take no for an answer, puts the captain's body on the doctor's table, and pleads, "Would you look at him please, sir?" The doctor's silence answers him, immediately Dohun pulls his gun, points it at the doctor, and states, "Right now. Or I'll blow your fucking head off." The doctor, without much of a choice, obliges. Dohun waits outside the medical tent and as it turns out his friend will live after surgery. The doctor recognizes Dohun's heroism and does not penalize him for his actions.

The cinematography in the scene is a study in control. Before Dohun gets the captain to the medical tent, the shots convey him as fighting the odds and without power or control. They are straight-on and high-angle shots, with Dohun positioned often at the right side of the screen (the weak side). Once he confronts the doctor, the shot composition shifts to paint him in a more powerful and heroic light. The lower angle shots with Dohun on the left side of the screen suggest that he has made a shift from powerless to powerful, and gained his hero soldier status via his actions in saving the life

of his captain at great personal risk. Without a care for the consequences to himself he risks both his own career and possibly his life via court martial as well as demonstrating his unflinching loyalty to his captain and the promise he made. These actions are prime examples of heroism as noted by Wansink, Payne, & von Ittersum (2008) and others, noted previously.

Another example of fearlessness and risk-taking is seen in Maj. Cook near the end of the film. He is tasked by his commanding officer to lead an amphibious assault across a river and take a German-defended side of a bridge in broad daylight. His subtle reactions and vocalizations make it very apparent that he is aware of the situation and its inherent peril. In talking with his superior, the dialogue is playful but with a heavy air to it. However, even in the face of an overly dangerous mission, he displays his leadership and penchant for risk-taking in his fearless and courageous leading of the assault.

His men grab the collapsible boats, charge the river and row across amid German artillery and gunfire. They paddle with their oars, rifles and hands to cross the river as fast as possible. When he reaches the far shore amid heavy fire from dug in German troops, he stands and leads the charge down the beach, up the hill, and to the bridge to reach his tasked objective.

In this way both American officers display not only risk-taking and loyalty but also leadership. They possess no flaws in terms of character or lack of heroism. They do not question their orders or hint that they disagree with the need for the action vocally; however, they understand how dangerous some of their missions are and we can see the weight of the task in their nonverbal reactions and facial expressions.

The non-hero is also present in the film. The overarching theme of how the non-hero differs from the hero is slightly divergent from the previous and subsequent films analyzed. In the case of *A Bridge Too Far* (Levine et. al, 1977) non-heroism manifests itself as vanity and cowardice to speak up, not specifically cowardice in combat.

For example, near the onset of the film the British communications officers are discussing the state of the radios that the troops will be taking into the field and after coming to the conclusion that they may not be adequate they decide not to bring up the issue with their commander as they do not want to “rock the boat.” This cowardly choice not to make sure that everything would work properly negatively impacts Maj. Gen. Urquhart and his troops as, for the majority of the film, his radios do not work and he remains out of contact with Lt. Col. Frost. This lack of communication nearly results in the complete extermination of Frost’s men.

Two examples of the vanity of the non-hero are found in Maj. Gen. Taylor and Lt. Col. Vandeleur. In the case of Taylor his vanity and choice to ignore the reports from the Dutch underground led to the commencement of Operation Market Garden, an offensive which ended with a higher number of casualties than D-Day and failed to accomplish its objective (Levine et. al, 1977). Even when confronted with photos of camouflaged tanks that were thought not to be present, he refused to cancel the operation citing reasons that were purely political.

His non-heroic actions led to the death of thousands of allied troops who could have been spared had he not disregarded the information presented to him. Another instance of a non-heroic action that cost allied soldiers their lives was on the part of Vandeleur, the British tank commander. After his victory in a skirmish, when asked why

he was not hurrying to take the next objective, he noted that he should be on time and it would be poor form to arrive early. He explained that he wanted to arrive in the nick of time to save the battle and not so early as to make it easy.

These displays of vanity and cowardice are clearly non-heroic and run counter to the risk-taking and loyalty displayed by the heroes in the film. In this film the heroes, non-heroes and villains (the German forces) are all confined to their own silos. There is no blurring in the lines between the two as there is in other films such as *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) and *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et. al, 2008).

Platoon

Platoon (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) follows Pvt. Taylor through his tour of duty in Vietnam in which he encounters the horrors of war and struggles with the dual nature of man. The central conflict in the film focuses on an internal dispute between the U.S. troops revolving around the killing of innocent villagers and how the platoon deals with the event. The 1980s were a turbulent time in the United States. The country was fresh out of the Vietnam War and Oliver Stone set out to make a movie that depicted his actual experiences in Vietnam.

The film was also made at a time of intense escalation of the cold war tensions between world powers. This tension between communist and free nations is directly reflected in the subject matter of the film. A renewed national opposition to communist nations also defined this time, as most of America's opponents in the cold war were communist nations; also of note was that this time in history saw the beginning of the Reagan era (Baker, 2007) whose singular goal for his presidency was the prevention of nuclear war. In many ways *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) reflected the focus on

truth and opposition to communism of the time, while all at the same time positing a social commentary suggesting that perhaps the free men fighting communism were fighting parts of themselves as well.

The eighties marked a shift away from the ebbing counter-cultural movement of the sixties and seventies (Gitlin, 1987) and a focus on realism (Baker, 2007). In many ways this spirit is embodied in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986). The years leading up to the film mark a relatively quiet time in U.S. foreign involvement save for the Reagan Administration's involvement with the Contras. While Congress turns down military aid, it does green light humanitarian aid for the "freedom fighters" (Dittmar & Michaud, 1990). While international turmoil continues as it always had, the U.S., with a lack of foreign focus, seemed to enter a more introspective state culturally.

Platoon (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) is a film in which, more than any other examined in this analysis, the line between hero and non-hero blurs while keeping them existent in separate characters. In many ways the main character, Pvt. Taylor is an unwitting hero. At the beginning of the film he struggles to understand the situation in which he is thrust. This film, more than most others, allows the audience to witness the hero's journey. Alongside Taylor in the heroic role is Sgt. Elias. Elias is much akin to Capt. Miller in *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) and Lt. Col. Kiley in *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965). He begins the film as the hero and ends it as the hero. His actions throughout closely align with the characteristics associated with heroes i.e., risk-taking, loyalty, and leadership (Wansink, Payne, & von Ittersum, 2008).

As evinced via the voiceover in Taylor's letters to his grandmother, he is conflicted about his reasons for being in Vietnam and the reasons behind the war. As with

any other hero, he needs motivation (Campbell, 2008). For the first act of the film, he struggles with this, and only after the conflict in the village between the village leader, Elias, and Barnes does Taylor realize what he must do to be the hero. Barnes unwittingly forces this realization on him when he kills the wife of the village leader. This is the point where Barnes “snaps.” He crosses the line from a soldier doing his duty to a villain.

Contrary to previous films, the non-hero/villain in *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) is embodied in the inhuman Sgt. Barnes. He is an extreme case of non-heroism, inasmuch as he lacks basic human decency. In other cases such as *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) and *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et al., 2008) non-heroism is minor character flaw or one side of the duality of the hero; here Barnes embodies not just non-heroism, but in many ways, evil.

In his slaying of the innocent villagers he crosses the line from gruff senior officer to non-hero and the subsequent murder of Elias further cements his transformation; one could even argue this makes him a villain. At the onset of the film both Taylor and Barnes are on even ground from a heroic standpoint. They are both non-heroes, doing their duty, albeit with varying levels of experience. But through the course of the film they diverge in their hero path, with one ascending to hero and the other descending to villainy.

The scene in the village is central to Taylor’s transformation. After the encounter and booby trap at the bunker, Manny disappears. They find him a thousand yards downriver with his throat cut. This fuels the platoon’s rage as they enter the village and deal with the villagers. Taylor comes close to crossing the line himself in dealing with the one-legged villager. After flirting the line with killing him, and Bunny yelling “Do him,

man, do him!” Taylor realizes what he’s doing. The scene shot in the dark of the hut symbolizes the dark place into which Taylor almost enters. After he stops and Bunny kills the villager, the guilt and pain are evident in his eyes. His turning point can be seen in the struggle in his eyes while the conflict at the village heightens.

After they find the cache of weapons in the village, Barnes and Lerner interrogate the village leader. The leader’s wife comes in screaming and yelling at Barnes and the platoon. We can see the building tension in Barnes’s face as well as feel it rising in the score. In a moment’s decision Barnes raises his rifle and fires a single shot into the woman’s head. She falls and takes with her Barnes’s humanity. Taylor all the while looks on; we can see the struggle in his expressions and subtle non-verbal cues. After the ensuing fight between Elias and Barnes, where Elias is horrified by the sequence of events that led to murder of the village leader’s wife as well as Barnes holding a gun to the head of his daughter, Elias displays his commitment to heroism both in his respect and defense of life as well as his desire to see justice served and stop the evil of Barnes.

At the end of the fight, Taylor is standing still and the camera focuses on him while the cast of characters walks by him out of the village. This shot symbolically underpins his path to heroism. As all the soldiers walk by, Taylor seemingly stares into nothing until Elias passes him. It is after Elias passes that he turns and joins the group, signifying his decision to follow the heroic path.

Taylor reaches the apex of his internal decision moments later when he saves the two girls from being raped by Junior, Bunny, and the others of the platoon after the incident with the village leader. He screams: “She’s a fucking human being, man!” and thusly foreshadows which side of the conflict he has decided to defend. He begins his

heroic journey here, in the same spirit as Elias, defending the weak and in opposition to the evil of Barnes. Elias sees what Taylor does in defense of the girls; they catch a knowing look between them as Taylor escorts the girls away from the four would-be rapists.

From that moment on Taylor displays myriad acts of heroism. He carries wounded comrades to safety through enemy fire; he charges bunkers and generally endangers himself for the greater good and his fellow soldiers. He begins to demonstrate his growing sense of justice not only in the saving of the village girl, but also in his uncontrollable feeling and need for justice in the situation with Barnes.

If Barnes's actions had not cemented Taylor's transition into the hero, his murder of Elias does. While Taylor was not completely sure that Barnes had murdered Elias, he suspected it and was given more proof when Barnes said Elias was dead and then Elias bursts from the underbrush in a hopeless run for the helicopter.

After his confrontation with Barnes in "the underworld" Taylor grapples with his conscience as to how to handle the situation. The climax of the conflict comes at the end of the final battle. In the heat of combat, Taylor is saved from a maniacal Barnes by a bombing run that strikes nearby and throws Barnes and Taylor apart. When he awakes in the morning, he finds Barnes hurt and in need of help. It is debatable as to whether Taylor should or should not have ended Barnes's life here, as noted by Sheen in *Tour of the Inferno*, a featurette on the *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) DVD, "I didn't look at it as killing Barnes, as much as I looked at it as releasing Barnes from Barnes. This may sound crazy but a gesture of peace than an act of violence... to release his soul." Taylor is in essence releasing Barnes from the evil he has become. In this way Taylor demonstrates

his heroism via his pursuit of justice and vision of the metaphysical outcomes. Sheen goes on to note that it “was more about freeing him [Barnes] from his own Hell.” But his decision is not without its consequences.

When found by the reinforcing forces later in the scene, he is moments away from pulling the pin on a grenade in his hand and killing himself. He drops the grenade when the soldiers find him and accepts his destiny to live. As he notes in the helicopter ride out of Vietnam: “I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy. We fought ourselves and the enemy was in us. The war is over for me now but it will always be there, the rest of my days. As I’m sure Elias will be, fighting with Barnes for what Rhah called possession of my soul.”

Taylor is by no means a perfect hero, but he embodies the era in which he was created as well as the spirit of the Vietnam War. He is a tainted hero, struggling not only with himself also but with external forces, both with soldiers on his side of the conflict as well as the enemy. In many ways this film shows the breadth of how a hero can be explicated. Elias resides at the very heroic end of the spectrum; he is the classic hero. As noted previously, he has no flaws, seeks justice, and fights hard. In the middle is Taylor, the central character within the film.

The action focuses on his journey from blank slate to hero. Specifically, the focal point rests on his struggles with the duality of man and the evil of which all are capable. In the end he pursues justice for Elias and the end of the non-hero, Barnes as well as the non-hero within himself. Barnes is an extreme form of non-hero; he starts out as an unlikable grunt but in the end allows himself to be lost in the rage and anger of his situation. He stands in opposition to those things which make a hero: loyalty, he defies in

his slaying of Elias; leadership, he subverts the chain of command with his disregard for the Lieutenant; risk-taking, his only motivation within his risk taking behaviors is self-gratification and enjoyment of battle. His actions all run counter to those of heroes and place him at the opposite end of the spectrum as the non-hero and worse, the villain.

Saving Private Ryan

“This was going to be some brand of current, definitive document about a day of decision unlike any other in the history of the world” – Tom Hanks, *Into the Breach*, (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998)

Saving Private Ryan (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) is a film about a group of soldiers led by a select captain who lands in Normandy on D-Day. They are ordered to traverse the French countryside in search of Private James Ryan so he can be sent home. While the focus of the film is on the “saving of Private Ryan,” the captain is the main character the action follows throughout the movie. He epitomizes the ideal of a hero soldier. He always makes the right decision, empathizes with his unit, and has its best interests at heart, all the while standing up for the orders issued to him whether he agrees with them or not.

The film *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg) was released in 1998. The nineties were a conflicted time in the United States. In the nineties the United States was involved in various overseas conflicts including the Gulf War, the Yugoslav wars, NATO intervention in the Balkans and the Chechan Wars (Baker, 2007). But in many ways the conflicts signified a return to the traditional modes of warfare and views of heroes in the military as evinced in *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998). Long past the anti-military sentiment of the Vietnam era and the tension of the cold war the nineties

signified a renewed faith in the military and by extension in the hero soldier. In the film this is shown through the portrayal of the captain and his men. They are heroes, fighting hard and dying for their country. They lack the tainted worldview common among Vietnam era films such as *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986).

Capt. Miller displays his heroism time and again throughout the film and the techniques used in shooting the film also lend to this. The first scene in the film is the D-Day invasion of the Normandy beaches. While the scene contains a plethora of violence, survival, and disregard for one's well-being, one cannot recognize any specific acts of heroism from the sequence. Specifically, this opening scene was viewed as soldiers simply doing their job, i.e., there was no choice in how the soldiers behaved in the Normandy invasion. They did not have the capacity to make a choice and thus choose a heroic over a non-heroic action. They were merely fighting for survival without a capacity for decision.

The captain begins to display his heroism at the encounter at the radar site. First, by the decision to attack and destroy the machine gun so that it is no longer a danger to any other Allied unit which passed through the area, and second is the part the captain takes in the assault. While his men suggest that they simply detour and avoid the danger, the captain understands the bigger picture and makes a heroic decision to endanger himself and his unit.

His understanding that they aren't only there to find Pvt. Ryan but to win the war shows his deeper understanding of his duty that escapes his men. Mellish notes, "Uh, Captain, we can still skip it and still accomplish our mission, I mean, this isn't our mission, right sir?" Miller responds "Oh, that's what you want to do, Mellish? You just

want to leave it here so they can ambush the next company that comes along?" Mellish backs down, "No sir, that's not what I'm saying. I'm simply saying it seems like an unnecessary risk given our objective." Miller retorts, "Our objective is to win the war." He was well within his rights and could not have been chastised had he chosen to detour around the machine gun nest, but instead he chose to behave heroically and risk the assault on the nest.

The action in the shot illustrates Miller's leadership and power. While the company sits in a circle, moping about the decision, Miller rises and runs off through the woods. His action juxtaposed against their inaction shows him to be the leader and a capable one at that. The motion conveys his perseverance in contrast to their cowardice or lack of understanding of the gravity of their position.

The captain's own courage and heroism is displayed not only in his decision to attack the nest but also in his assertion that he will be the one going up the middle, the most dangerous part of the attack. In the pre-attack huddle the men are reluctant to even be part of the main assault; as no one will volunteer to go up the left until the captain asks numerous times. He could have easily ordered three of his men to make the attack and supported them from the rear, but instead he heroically puts himself in danger unnecessarily. Also of note is that the audience views this entire scene and the heroism of those involved from Upham's perspective. In many ways the film is shot from the non-hero's perspective. Upham is the scared pencil pusher shoved into action on merit of his ability to understand German and French. His ascent to a hero is a slow one but his journey is witnessed first-hand by the audience.

In the aftermath both Upham and Miller display varying degrees of heroism, Upham in his efforts to prevent the killing of a P.O.W. and Miller in his decision to acquiesce to Upham's efforts. His leadership and ability to diffuse the situation which arose with Reiban demonstrate his heroism and loyalty to duty as well as the good of his men, even if they don't immediately realize it.

Another notable instance of heroism occurs on the outskirts of Ramelle, France (a fictional village) where the squad first encounters Pvt. Ryan. As they are making their way through a field, the captain hears a German half-track incoming. At his order the men take cover in the field. As it passes an RPG hits the half-track. Miller's unit fires on the Germans who pour out, then in a heroic move the captain charges the half-track. He orders his men to take the left flank while he works his way around the right flank killing multiple Germans in the process in the effort to secure it. He could have easily ordered Horvath, Mellish, or another squad member to lead the charge but instead took the risk himself in a heroic action without thought of risk to himself.

The final display of heroism in *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998), finds the captain, concussed by a tank shot, with his men crumbling around him, making a heroic rush for the detonator to blow the bridge and thereby stop the German advance. He is shot multiple times in this rush and as he lies dying, he un-holsters his pistol and fires on an advancing tank. A moment before he blows the bridge an Allied bombing squadron flies overhead and destroys the tank and advancing troops. This scene shows the captain heroically giving his life in order to save Private Ryan and the mission from death and failure respectively.

The presence of the non-hero in Upham serves to create the dichotomy between the coward and the hero and to help the audience understand the gravity of a hero's actions as opposed to the consequences of displaying non-heroic behavior. A display of cowardice is shown by Cpl. Upham in the final battle of *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) in which he succumbs to fear and is paralyzed to the degree that Mellish, whom he is capable of saving, is knifed in a hand-to-hand fight with a German soldier.

But in the end of the final battle Upham finally finds his courage and becomes a hero. His journey is not the central focus of the film as it was for Taylor in *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986). It is more akin to Weaver's in *Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et al., 1965) where it is one component of the story. In his confrontation with the German, whom they had originally let go at the radar site, he moves from the non-hero and the scared, crying soldier on the stairs to a hero who seized control of his own destiny and did what needed to be done. He served justice for Capt. Miller and those who died in his unit.

Saving Private Ryan (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) paints the hero soldier as a loyal, risk-taking leader. All these characteristics were posited by Wansink, Payne and von Ittersum (2008) as the traits which are most commonly associated with war heroes. One thing absent from the film was the presence of major character flaws within the hero. Capt. Miller possessed no flaws that ran counter to his heroic presence. While he may have a very minor physical defect, i.e., his shaky hand, he possessed no character flaws; he commits to his duty and goes above and beyond. According to Spielberg (1998) the

hero soldiers in the film were "courageous, ordinary guys" and this film was made to honor them and the sacrifice they made to stop the Nazi expansion.

According to *Into the Breach*, a featurette on *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) this film is meant to be a story of sacrifice and heroism. On a base level Spielberg in the aforementioned featurette notes that the idea behind the film moved him on an emotional level and was the reason that he made the film.

Overall, this film is a study in heroism almost unparalleled in war films. It contains a deep explication of the hero's character that is rarely matched. Throughout the film Capt. Miller, the hero, is defined through his actions as well as his interactions with others and the resulting self-explication. While the film paints Miller as an almost infallible hero, there are subtle changes present in contrast to earlier films. While the character himself may be a shining example of a hero, his mission is not without moral ambiguity.

Over the course of the film Miller and more vocally his squad, state and hint at their disapproval of their assigned mission. Best stated by Pvt. Reiban, "You want to explain the math of this to me? I mean, where's the sense of risking the lives of the eight of us to save one guy?" The hero myth as noted by Campbell (2008) includes distinct acceptance of the task at hand or the "journey" as a piece of the hero; however, in the case of these soldiers there is no belief in their task, simply their duty to follow orders.

One might conjecture that as a soldier one loses the ability to accept or decline the hero's task. This is a valid concern but one that is always shaped by the filmmaker. By giving the soldiers in the film a morally ambiguous task, Spielberg comments on how he and our culture view heroes. Specifically in this case, they question their journey and

while they may behave heroically, they have doubts about why they are doing what they are doing. This doubt is a characteristic not common with those heroes in earlier films and provides one benchmark by which we can trace the change of the hero over time.

As noted by Matt Damon, these were regular guys who were put into an extraordinary situation and as a result were able to exceed their normal capacities and act heroically. This idea that these are just ordinary men is one that speaks to the cultural view of heroes. All of the "real" heroes today are ordinary people, not the demi-gods of times past (Whitehall, 1966-67). But most revealing is a comment that Spielberg makes when discussing the film in the *Into the Breach* featurette; he notes, "my films are windows into war" (1998). This single quote shows that Spielberg is painting the hero and the war in terms of how he, as a filmmaker and our cultural shaman or guide (Zehnder & Calvert, 2004), views these situations and the way those involved, i.e., the soldiers, behaved. This secures this film as a cultural marker in the evolution of heroes.

The Hurt Locker

The Hurt Locker (Bigelow et. al, 2008) is a film following an elite bomb squad operating in Iraq during the early years of the Iraq war. The main character and hero of the film is Sergeant First Class James, an Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) Technician. While he is a bit reckless, he embodies the spirit of a hero, unlike some of his predecessors in the aforementioned films. He is deeply flawed and his reckless heroism endangers his team on more than one occasion. K. Bigelow, in an interview in the supplemental materials on the DVD, notes that, in regards to the movie as a whole, "the hope is to be able to replicate the feel of war, the chaos of war, the messiness of war" (Bigelow et al., 2008). The movie was made in 2008, the end of the Bush presidency and

a time of dissatisfaction and unrest among Americans with regards to the war in Iraq as well as an escalation of violence in Afghanistan as well as characterized by a general disillusionment with place of government in the U.S..

Early on in the film a notable heroic act occurs and sets the tone for the rest of the film. In the scene, James and his team are called on to investigate a possible car bomb, and discover a massive amount of explosive ordinance in the trunk of the car. James immediately realizes that his bomb gear is useless and removes it to be more effective at his job. He displays a different kind of heroism than one might expect to see from soldiers, i.e., disarming a bomb is a very selfless act insomuch as the diffuser is risking his own life and putting himself directly in harm's way to prevent anyone else from being harmed by the bomb.

Bigelow (2008) points out the job of the EOD Tech is probably one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, and by extension selfless. This selflessness noted by Wansink et. al (2008) suggests that one major "characteristic of risk-taking for heroes may be selflessness;" they then go on to point out that this "may not involve risk-taking for the sake of excitement as much as it involves the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of the group" (p. 549). In this way one can deem the vast majority of James' actions as heroic actions. In many ways, an EOD specialist can be viewed as a more heroic soldier than most. While an infantryman may have brief moments of action followed by long periods of inaction, bomb techs risk death on a far more regular basis.

Another important aspect of the hero's character is that of leadership. In the sniper standoff James displays his leadership by empowering Specialist Eldridge to make the call and decide how to react to the possible threat on the hill behind them. While James is

occupied in the task of spotting the sniper for Sanborn, he entrusts their rear flank to the weakest member of the team. Trust is an integral aspect of loyalty when addressing the hero soldier (Wansink et al., 2008). In this scene he also begins the hero's journey for Eldridge; in helping him find his courage, he starts Eldridge on the path to being a hero.

Most telling of James and his heroic predilections in the film is the part in which the squad arrives at a scene where a bomb has already been detonated. As carnage and death surround the squad, James gives the order to pursue the possible bomber into the dark streets surrounding the scene. In the end, James, in firing on the assailants who have taken Eldridge hostage, hits Eldridge in the leg. This is a pivotal moment – up until this point James has simply been a reckless hero, well-intentioned but keeping his squad safe via his good decisions and EOD skills. In the moment when he decides to unnecessarily pursue a phantom bomber (they didn't know whether the bomb was set off remotely or was a suicide bomb) into a dark alley, he crosses the line from reckless hero back to non-hero. In a way he almost regresses from being a hero to taking a step back into the area before that, to the area where Upham spends the majority of *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998).

In this fall from heroism the film explicates our cultural feeling toward both the Iraqi war and heroes. Our heroes are no longer the smart, strong half-gods they once were. They are mere shadows of their former selves. While still possessing many of the heroic qualities, they have an added dimension, one of human fallibility and doubt (Whitehall, 1966-67).

While a non-hero does exist in the film and undergoes a subtle journey, it by no means is the central focus of the film. The non-hero in this case is Specialist Eldridge; he

is scared and dealing with his own internal issues while trying to follow and learn from the example of either Sanborn or James. One telling fact about the non-hero in this film is that he never completes his journey; he is perpetually stuck in transition. Part of this could be attributed to the fact that he is not the focus of the film. More notable, however, is the idea that this was an intentional choice around our conception of heroes. Taking this idea we understand that the film is meant to comment on our current heroes and the idea that they are not as fully formed as they once were. Our main hero is a flawed man who endangers his team and does the wrong thing many times. The non-hero on the heroic journey is one who never completes his journey, and forever falls short of a heroic destiny.

The flaw in Sgt. James is made apparent in both the opening quote of the film - "The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug" (Bigelow et al., 2008), and when he is talking with his infant son:

"You love playing with that. You love playing with all your stuffed animals. You love your Mommy, your Daddy. You love your pajamas. You love everything, don't ya? Yea. But you know what, buddy? As you get older... some of the things you love might not seem so special anymore. Like your Jack-in-a-Box. Maybe you'll realize it's just a piece of tin and a stuffed animal. And the older you get, the fewer things you really love. And by the time you get to my age, maybe it's only one or two things. With me, I think it's one" (Bigelow et al., 2008).

He is, of course, referring to his addiction to war. He realizes that he craves the rush of battle. No longer is he a hero, disarming bombs to save lives; he is an addict getting his fix. Without the rush of battle James cannot handle ordinary life, as evinced by the scene with his wife in their house as well as in the grocery store. He is a fallen hero, a commentary on how our society now perceives heroes.

Anthony Mackie (Sanborn), in the supplemental DVD materials, notes, “I think there has to be a kind of superhero aspect to soldiers going into a war. Because if you wake up everyday in fear, you’ll drive yourself crazy because you realize every minute is possibly your last” (Bigelow et al., 2008). Here Mackie hits on the central idea that just by definition, soldiers on a base level can perhaps be considered heroes. People who live normal lives don’t have to deal with death on a daily basis. This fact alone can qualify our soldiers as heroes. The quality of the hero, however, is a different story. This film, different markedly from the other four films analyzed, paints the hero as a darker, tainted version of himself.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study has focused on the hero soldier in war films and their actions in those films. The study of heroes is important as heroes are connected to who we are as a society and have been a part of our traditions as far back as we can recall. Through narrative analysis of five war films this study endeavored to answer the question of how the hero soldier is depicted in war films and then determine if there is a change over time in the portrayal. If indeed there is a change in the hero soldier over time, how does the hero soldier change and why?

Film is an art form and by its very nature is subjective. The same can be said of this thesis. I write as a white male that has never served in the military. These films, while a small sample of the dizzying array of war films, are meant to represent a small slice of how our culture looks at heroes and non-heroes. The most salient finding of this study lies in the relationship between the hero and non-hero within the films analyzed. By taking all films into account, we, the audience, begin to realize the gradual evolution of the hero/non-hero over time. From the chronologically early films, i.e., *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965), *A Bridge Too Far* (Levine et. al, 1977) and *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986) to *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) and finally *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et al., 2008) the evolution of the hero concept was traced and analyzed.

It should be noted that at the onset of this study the presence of the non-hero was not anticipated. Its use is intended to act a reference point for the hero, much as the analysis of the villain would. It can be understood, for purposes of this study, as a point on the continuum of the hero, as the findings suggest, and not necessarily as a separate entity.

This analysis reveals that over time, starting with *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965) and culminating in *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et al., 2008), the hero and non-hero slowly merge into one character. The clear distinction between the two shown in films from more than 40 years ago ceases to exist in present filmmaking. We clearly see this begin in Taylor (*Platoon*) and find fulfillment in James (*The Hurt Locker*), as the latter portrays the hero and non-hero personified in one individual. While this merger is significant on its own, it demonstrates the degeneration of the hero.

In *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965) we have the hero, Lt. Col. Kiley and the non-hero, Lt. Weaver. Both are American soldiers who never come in contact with each other until the climax of the film. As outlined previously, Kiley begins and ends the film as a hero while Weaver undergoes the journey from non-hero to hero throughout the film. Notable is the fact that Weaver does not interact with Kiley at all in the film until he has achieved heroism for himself. This lack of juxtaposition serves to show that the non-hero must undergo his journey to know the hero. This subtle journey and subsequent achievement is a telling insight into the culture of the time because it marks a starting point for this analysis.

The next film made was *A Bridge Too Far* (Levine et. al, 1977). In this film the audience can once again see the clear distinction between hero and non-hero. Through

dereliction of duty and a cowardly and lackadaisical attitude the radio officer made evident the clear line that is drawn between the hero and his counterpart. As time wears on through *Platoon* (Kopelson & Stone, 1986), *Saving Private Ryan* (Bryce & Spielberg, 1998) and finally *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et al., 2008) the distinction fades. From *The Battle of the Bulge* (Harmon et. al, 1965) through the decades to *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et al., 2008) we see the changing face of the hero as suggested by the literature. Earlier filmmakers created the dichotomy between hero and non-hero, e.g., Capt. Miller and Cpl. Upham in *Saving Private Ryan*, and Taylor and Barnes in *Platoon*. In *The Hurt Locker* they are both embodied in the character of James as well as the non-hero in Eldridge. The schism between light and dark sides of the hero has ceased to exist and both sides are now visible in the same character. This displays a stark departure from the films of the past and is a valuable cultural marker in the understanding of heroes in war films.

The pivotal moment in *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow et al., 2008), where the audience realizes that James is human and possesses both light and dark qualities, marks a new turning point for the hero. The hero has certainly changed from one decade to the next. However, one must keep in mind that changes in hero and non-hero portrayals are not linear. To suggest such an explanation of the films runs counter to their complexity. However, we can see a gradual shift in both the actions of the hero as well as his contrast to the non-hero. A consistency in all the films, however, is the presence of the Campbellian journey from separation to initiation to return (Campbell 2008). While not exactly adhering to Campbell's full hero journey myth, these films do represent a small

slice of the non-heroes' journey to becoming the hero. All the films possess this slice of Campbell's hero in some form or another.

The historical relevance of each of the films to the time in which it was made was another finding of this study. Each film corresponded to its historical. In many ways each reflected the feelings of the American zeitgeist in its onscreen portrayal of heroes and non-heroes and how the characters interpreted the events in which they took part. Each film was a commentary on the culture and the cultural modalities towards war in the time that it was made, which certainly stands to reason because nothing happens in a vacuum. There will always be external influences on media content and audience perception. In this case the historical and social context in which the films took place were reflected within the film's content.

This study also showed that the hero soldiers more often than not are somewhat physically frail. Kiley was a thin man who relied on his courage and wit, same for the majority of heroes in the rest of the films. This suggests that our idea of heroes has shifted away from the idea of the physically "tough" hero to one who is heroic in wit, leadership, and words. James (*The Hurt Locker*) was without a doubt the most physically tough of all the hero soldiers analyzed here, but he also was the most flawed and weak from a leadership aspect. This may suggest that as a hero soldier in film becomes physically tougher, he/she loses the leadership and decision making capabilities of a hero. This idea presents a venue for future research that examines in greater detail the complex hero characters.

The limitations of this study lie in the subjective nature of qualitative analysis. In terms of the subjectivity, we encounter the issue as with the interpretation of a piece of

art – most people see something at least slightly different. Second, films are unique. To make more valid comparisons of hero change over time we would need films telling the same story of the same war, in the same battle with the same hero behaving in different ways. In the realm of film this comparison doesn't exist. So a broad selection of films over time is used to draw general, between-film comparisons.

As noted by Browne (1983), "Heroes come in different sizes at different stages in a nation's development. When a nation is admittedly young and naive, heroes stand ten feet tall. But when people are more advanced, more sophisticated, more cynical, they like their heroes more of their own size – at times even the dwarf of non-heroism" (p. 97). This idea comes into play in a mesh with the ideas of Campbell and the results of this study. We see that the ideas of Campbell (2008) hold up in comparison to war films. As discussed previously, one tenet of Campbell's work on the modern hero was that we have lost our heroes because we no longer need them.

Our focus on science, according to Campbell (2008), has led us to the conclusion that our heroes must be devoid of mythic attributes and be "cut from the same cloth" as we are. The hero soldier is an ordinary person doing extraordinary things without a magical component. The hero soldier does not have any powers that the rest of us do not have. They are heroes who, unlike their ancient predecessors, possess flaws and can make mistakes. They are mortal and fallible. This facet of the hero myth can expand our definition of the hero. The expanded hero definition is clearly illustrated in the five films analyzed in this study.

Indeed, what we can garner from this study is a new, contemporary definition of heroes. While the heroic archetype holds true throughout the films, the new definition has

taken on a more human characteristic than its predecessors. We can add to the current definition of hero: he has lost the god-like characteristics and struggles with the issues of an ordinary person.

The lesson we can learn from this exploration of the hero soldier in war films is that a hero is a constantly changing entity. However, the changes do not reach down to the fundamental levels of what makes a hero a hero. At the core and archetypal level, the hero's journey remains the same. The stages in which a hero must venture seem to stick true and apply to the hero soldiers' journey. Although, as noted earlier, we usually only get to see a small slice of this in films. But there are some changes in the characteristics of the hero soldier over time as evinced in these films. The hero soldier becomes more flawed over time. Granted he does not end up fully flawed, as one would consider a villain to be but definitely becomes more human. This means that heroes are portrayed as more on the level of the average American, as you and I, as the audience of U.S. films.

These hero soldiers have changed from the clean cut, straight arrow characteristics of Kiley and Dohun, to the flawed struggling characters on par with Taylor and James. This suggests that as Browne (1983) pointed out, our heroes have diminished. They are no longer the dashing men and women without a flaw or a doubt, rushing ahead to save the world. They have their doubts, they have their own struggles, and more often than not, the forces against which they fight are the other side of themselves. Heroes are becoming more human with each passing decade. These films progressively showed more and more flaws within the hero. This could be a product of a focus on honesty. Our culture is certainly one that demands more transparency of each other as well as our government. The decline in heroes could well be a reflection of this attitude.

This is both an interesting indictment of our culture as well a negative path for the hero. Our hero should be the beacon of light in our culture, forever inspiring us to greatness and betterment. Campbell (2008) was right in his point that the salvation of the hero lies in no longer reflecting societal values but more in leading them. While change is inevitable, it does not have to render the hero as someone who is no different from the masses. Perhaps this symptom of degeneration of the hero is only local to the hero soldier and other heroes have fared better over the course of time. Modern day superheroes such as Superman, Spiderman, and the X-Men enjoy popularity and they are anything but the average person. The framework of this study could be applied to those films for an interesting extension and comparison of the evolution of the different types of heroes.

In analyzing a form of art such as film there are many struggles with which the researcher must grapple. Film is a massively complex cultural phenomenon. In all honesty an entire book could be written about each film and the levels of meaning, both manifest and latent. It is not humanly possible to analyze the full depth of a film, even five, within the confines of this study; therefore, specific areas were chosen as a focus. The main areas of focus were the characters themselves and their actions. This study represents an initial and incomplete search for meaning in one of the richest art forms in terms of the layers of meaning that are present. There were many messages that were undoubtedly missed and could offer further avenue for extension of this study.

This study creates a host of questions along with its answers. Specifically, future research could focus on the relationship between the war and the hero/non-hero. Particularly, does the war being depicted influence the demarcation between the two or are they products of the time in which the film is created? One must take this idea into

account when analyzing films about historical periods other than the current era. While answering these questions are outside the scope of this study, they do offer up an avenue of study that could illuminate more of the hero myth within our culture.

In many ways the modern hero is a study in the duality of humanity. Where sixty years ago the hero was flawless and good, now the hero is tired and tortured. While the outcome of the battle or war may still be the same, our heroes have become shadows of their former selves much like the heroes of the western films studied by Porpora (1996). What will happen to the hero next? One cannot tell, perhaps the audience will tire of the introspective, tortured hero. This may explain the recent surge in popularity of superhero films, but that is a question for another day. Though the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond the films in question, they can, on one level, be thought of as examples of a small portion of contemporary culture and an insight into hero mythology in film, its relationship with culture, and ultimately our perception of the hero and the hero soldier.

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