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Source: *Film History*, Vol. 14, No. 3/4, War and Militarism (2002), pp. 243-260

Published by: [Indiana University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815431>

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# The depiction of war reporters in Hollywood feature films from the Vietnam War to the present

Stephen Badsey

The Hollywood depiction of war reporters in feature films (taking a loose definition of a 'Hollywood' film to mean one made chiefly for an American and generally anglophone commercial audience) presents a number of conceptual problems. War films other than comedies or science fiction are usually set in a historically real war. In many war films, historical events are considerably changed for cultural or commercial reasons, such as in the Errol Flynn version of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936). But often war films make claims for factual authenticity, creating a tension with the narrative structure and characterisation of the film itself. A further layer is added to this issue when the film is based even notionally on a war history, a novel, or on personal memoirs.

At the time of writing, the most recent Hollywood film to feature a war reporter is *We Were Soldiers* (2002), based on an account of the battle in the Ia Drang valley in 1965 between the US Army's 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and the North Vietnamese Army, written by Harold G. Moore, former commander of the 1st/7th Air Cavalry, and Joseph L. Galloway, who as a UPI reporter accompanied the Air Cavalry in the battle. In a letter written to 'the men of the 7th Cavalry' director and screenwriter Randall Wallace set out his view of the distinction between truth in documentary and feature filmmaking. 'The main difference between our approach and that of other media,' Wallace wrote, 'is that in movies – dramatic, as opposed to documentary, filmmaking – we are out to communicate on an emotional level – to communicate emotional truth'.<sup>1</sup> This claim of an

emotional or subjective truth as both different from objective factual truth and equal in value, justifying the departure from factual narrative, also reflects a position common to many war memoirs, that the personal experience of infantry combat is the only perspective on a war of any validity. 'What we see, what we live, "is"; what contradicts our experience "is not",<sup>1</sup> wrote a French veteran of the First World War, 'The high command could not know, for only their intelligence was in contact with the war, and war is not to be perceived by intelligence alone'.<sup>2</sup> In the context of war films, it also cannot be ignored that this idea of emotional truth transcending reason is found in many military or militaristic value systems, appearing in Nazi ideology as 'thinking with the blood'. Yet a further issue concerning objectivity and the nature of truth is added to those war films that include reporters.<sup>3</sup> Most Hollywood films, and most war films, are highly formulaic, but this is particularly true of films featuring war reporters, which fall into only a small number of easily recognisable categories dependent on these issues. In war films that have American soldiers in combat as their main

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**Fig. 1.** In uniform and ready to shoot. Barry Pepper on the battlefield and looking every inch a soldier as UPI photojournalist Joe Galloway in *We Were Soldiers* (2002). [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

focus, the reporter is either an important secondary character who is won over to the military in the course of the film, or a minor character who is a figure of contempt. In films that do not feature American wars, the reporter is the central character but the story is about personal relationships, never about actual reporting.

It has been plausibly argued in the context of the Vietnam War that journalistic ethos and culture in the United States underwent a significant change between the First and Second World Wars in response to changes in the newspaper industry. As the news media became a bureaucratized production industry, so in response journalism became a profession; the American press came to see itself as both objective and as independent even of newspaper owners. The issues raised by this transition appear in the confrontations in *Citizen Kane* (1941) between Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) and his journalist employees. From these concerns came the ideal of the journalist who was committed to report the truth, detached from events and free from ideology, fitting well with the 1950s American political consensus that also saw itself as free from ideology,

reflected in several Hollywood films of that period.<sup>4</sup> Among war photographers the attitude was exemplified by the catchphrase, 'I don't take sides, I take pictures'.

In the 1960s, the character of the enquiring journalist also began to take on the narrative function previously occupied by the private detective or investigator. In such films the actual mechanics of journalism are secondary to the role of the journalist as observer on behalf of the film audience. Just as Hollywood war films, for reasons of dramatic narrative or characterisation, often depict behaviour in combat that seems comically inept to real soldiers, so the behaviour of war reporters is often quite unlike that of actual journalists, reflected in particular in actions or statements that appear impossibly naïve. Often a Hollywood reporter will also double as a photographer. The photojournalist or news cameraman is largely absolved from the need to also ask questions, and it is sufficient in film terms that he is there to act as a witness. The Cold War thriller *The Bedford Incident* (1965), made while the Vietnam War was being fought, explores contemporary anxieties through the eyes of journalist Ben Munceford (played by Sidney Poitier). The film's plot centres on the determination of Captain Eric Finlander (Richard Widmark) of the warship USS *Bedford* to harass and pursue a Soviet submarine, an example of Cold War brinkmanship that leads finally to their destroying each other. Munceford, on board the *Bedford* to interview Finlander and photograph events, functions foremost as a plot device enabling the other characters to explain things to the audience through him. But in the climax as death looms, Munceford becomes the film's own voice. 'You knew there was this chance, *do something!*' Munceford yells at the stunned Finlander, speaking for the film against military guarantees of Cold War safety, 'Answer me, damn you!' The ending in a nuclear blast is ambiguous; it is not clear whether only the *Bedford* and its antagonist have been destroyed, or the entire world.

In addition to the value of the reporter as a plot device, going anywhere and asking questions on the audience's behalf, any reporter in a Hollywood war film who occupies more than a minor role also fits the conventions of the private detective genre by being a flawed human being; one who starts the film detached from events but is forced by the war to take a moral stance. An early case is *The Quiet American* (1958), set in and near Saigon (modern Ho Chi Minh City) during the First Indochina War 1945–1954, in



**Fig. 2.** The moment of bonding between soldier and reporter as portrayed in *The Green Berets* (1968). After the battle at 'Dodge City', journalist George Beckworth (David Janssen) tells Colonel Mike Kirby (John Wayne) that he can do him more good with his typewriter. [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

which the French fought unsuccessfully to keep Vietnam as part of their empire (and filmed partly on location in and near Saigon itself). The film follows British journalist Thomas Fowler (Michael Redgrave) and an idealistic young American for whose death Fowler becomes responsible (listed only as 'The American' in the credits and played by Audie Murphy), his rival for the affections of a young Vietnamese woman.<sup>5</sup> Part of *The Quiet American* is a debate between Fowler and the American on the war and the United States' perspective on it. Fowler insists that as a journalist he is not involved, and the American replies, 'My friend, you are a mass of involvement'. In Fowler's case the journalistic ideal of detachment proves humanly impossible.

The way that the United States fought all its major wars of the later 20th Century, from the Second World War to the 1991 Gulf War, depended heavily on bureaucratisation, industrial production, and overwhelming firepower based on technological superiority.<sup>6</sup> Hollywood action war films, in contrast, frequently focus on a small group of footsoldiers (or more rarely airmen or ships' crews, but never for

example the crew of an artillery battery), who are a very small minority in any real overall war-effort, but engage in fighting as Homer understood it. The Hollywood formula frequently shows the 'bonding' process, military training or assimilation and subordination of the individual to the group that is crucial to this form of military organisation, followed by the experience of the bonded troops in combat. Hollywood films of the Vietnam War are more often set in the 'main force war' between American ground troops and the uniformed forces of the North Vietnamese Army 1965–1973 that resembled the jungle and city fighting of the Second World War, than in the more ambiguous guerrilla or 'village war' against the Viet Cong.<sup>7</sup> American soldiers featured are also usually from exceptional or elite units, such as the US Marines, the Special Forces, the Airborne Forces or the Air Cavalry, rather than from the line infantry divisions or other more typical units.<sup>8</sup> Michael Wayne, son of John Wayne and producer of *The Green Berets* (1968) about the Special Forces in the Vietnam War, described this film in 1975, 'It was the story of a group of guys who could have been in any

war. It's a very familiar story. War stories are all the same. They are personal stories about soldiers and the background is the war. This just happened to be the Vietnam War'.<sup>9</sup> An important part of this bonding is the adoption of a military *patois*. In the late 20th Century, United States armed forces used a mixture of acronyms, obscenities, euphemisms, borrowings from other languages and nonce-words (particularly marked in the 'Nam-speak' of the Vietnam era), which is almost unintelligible to anyone not part of the group. The extent to which a Hollywood film adopts Nam-speak or its later equivalents for its military characters is a good indicator both of its likelihood to claim authenticity and of its support for the values of the group that it portrays.

In the Second World War, American war reporters were integrated or assimilated into the military structure. Although continuing to work for their respective media employers, they wore uniform and held military rank, were subject to formal military discipline and censorship backed by law, and were generally supportive of the perspective of the armed forces as a patriotic duty. Although this relationship was never as harmonious in fact as in theory, it lasted at least until the Korean War 1950–1953.<sup>10</sup> By the Vietnam War (which lasted 1961–1975 with American 'main force' involvement 1965–1973) the circumstances had changed significantly. In the face of the Cold War and nuclear confrontation, the Soviet Union as the real enemy could not be attacked and destroyed. Instead, from the later 1950s the United States' global strategy was to fight wars of 'containment,' also known as 'limited wars,' against what was perceived as a Soviet-backed Communist strategy of world domination. For those who espoused this world-view, such wars were fought just as much for the survival of the United States as the Second World War; but the destruction of the 1950s political and cultural consensus in the 1960s made this strategy highly controversial, another repeated theme in Hollywood war films.<sup>11</sup>

In the same period, the relationship between the United States military and war reporters changed significantly from 'incorporation' to 'manipulation,' with the result that controversies about American wars were accompanied by parallel lesser controversies about American war reporting.<sup>12</sup> The reporters often remained dependent on the armed forces for access to the war zone, information, protection, transport, and especially for communications, and might still wear uniform. But formal censorship

backed by law was abandoned, and reporters were no longer incorporated and assimilated into the military, instead asserting an institutional independence. The result was not, on the whole, direct confrontation but an accommodation reached politically between the United States government and the news media, and in the war zone between the armed forces and war reporters, whereby the media accepted limited military control in practice in return for access to the story.<sup>13</sup>

The first Hollywood Vietnam War film, and also the first about Vietnam to feature a war reporter as a character, was John Wayne's *The Green Berets*, released in July 1968.<sup>14</sup> The film's main plot features an attack on a US Army Special Forces ('Green Berets') camp in the central highlands of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese Army. Although a moderate commercial success that was quite popular with audiences, the film attracted considerable criticism for its poor production values and the large gap between its stance and the factual events of the war. The final scene, in which Colonel Mike Kirby (John Wayne) walks along a beach supposedly at Da Nang on the coast of South Vietnam with the sun setting into the sea – a geographical impossibility – is particularly notorious. The film was overtly propagandist. Wayne wrote to President Lyndon Johnson in December 1965 about his intention to make the film, citing *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *The Alamo* (1960), and *The Fighting Seabees* (1944) as examples of his work and asking for presidential 'guidance' and support:

We are fighting a war in Vietnam. Although I personally support the Administration's policy there, I know it is not a popular war, and I think it is extremely important that not only the people of the United States but those all over the world should know why it is necessary for us to be there.<sup>15</sup>

The character of reporter George Beckworth (David Janssen) of the fictitious *Chronicle-Herald* illustrates many themes that re-occur in Hollywood films that feature war reporters. If the small bonded group of American soldiers appears, then they are the centre of the plot and the reporter is a secondary character. The reporter's moral worth is judged entirely by the extent to which he supports the values of this military group. In films in which the reporter is more than a passing character, he – it is almost always he – begins by establishing his detachment

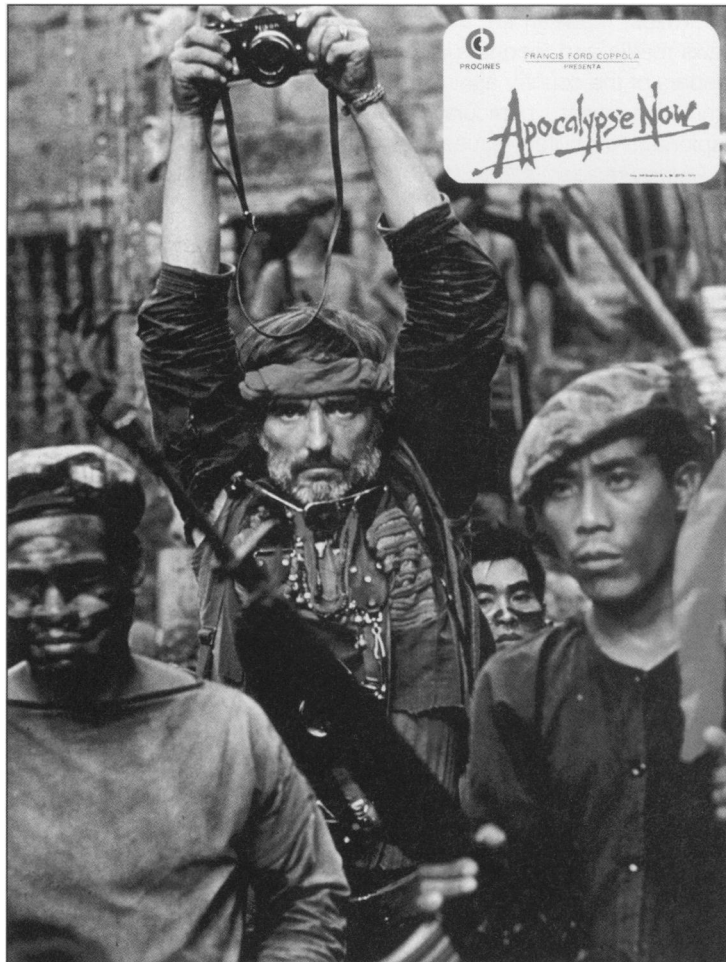
from events and from the group, but proves attractive to the group by displaying military-like courage, and is quickly won over into the group's values, symbolised by his picking up a weapon. The idea that a reporter or anyone else might share the group's experience and not adopt its values is not entertained. The character of the reporter is also a plot device, asking naïve questions of the soldiers on the audience's behalf, and acting as the film's witness. If the reporter remains outside the military group, or is only a minor character, then he is a contemptible and frequently a comic figure, especially if he attempts to portray himself as a soldier by wearing uniform.

*The Green Berets* starts with a press conference at Special Forces headquarters at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, where soldiers earnestly explain the war to the journalists, who mostly react uncritically. Master Sergeant Muldoon (Aldo Ray) tells them passionately that 'What's at stake here is Communist domination of the world!' Beckworth is openly hostile, reflecting his newspaper's policy that the United States should not be involved in the war, and is challenged by Colonel Kirby to come and see for himself. At Da Nang, Beckworth is still hostile, but accepted by Kirby as being brave enough to travel with him to the Special Forces camp 'Dodge City' in the central highlands. There the process of assimilation starts. The Beckworth character adopts military uniform in some scenes, and during the climactic battle sequence he acts as part of a mortar crew. This dramatic moment at which a war reporter becomes a soldier in combat is by no means completely counter-factual. The reporter Michael Herr, in his own widely-read book *Despatches* about the Vietnam War, described 'one night when I slid over to the wrong end of the story, propped up behind some sandbags at an airstrip at Can Tho with a .30-calibre automatic in my hands, firing cover for a four-man reaction team trying to get back in'.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the battle sequence, Beckworth carries a carbine rather than his typewriter, and has abandoned both his journalistic detachment and his newspaper's prejudices. 'If I say what I feel I may be out of a job,' he tells Kirby, who replies 'we'll always give you one'. Beckworth says that he can do Kirby more good with his typewriter. At the film's end Beckworth, wearing uniform and with a military kit-bag to balance his typewriter, returns to 'where the war is' to continue reporting.

In Hollywood political conspiracy thrillers of

the 1970s, made in the aftermath of Vietnam, the news media and reporters are positive figures, defenders of the country against the excesses of government power particularly when related to espionage or military issues, a position made overt in *All the President's Men* (1976), the dramatisation of the role of *Washington Post* reporters in uncovering Watergate. Pessimism in these conspiracy films almost seems to diminish visibly with time. In *The Parallax View* (1974) investigative journalist Joseph Frady (Warren Beatty) is defeated and killed, and then a government investigation whitewashes his murder. At the end of *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) CIA analyst Joseph Turner (Robert Redford) gives information on a government espionage scandal to the newspapers as his last hope and defence, but the ending is left uncertain. In *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977) renegade US Air Force General Lawrence Dell (Burt Lancaster) seizes a nuclear missile silo in an unsuccessful demand for newspaper publicity about 'the truth' behind the United States' involvement in Vietnam. Only in the far-fetched *Capricorn One* (1978) does a journalist defeat the system: Robert Caulfield (Elliott Gould) uncovers a plot to conceal the faking of the first landing on Mars by killing those involved; and in *The China Syndrome* (1979) television journalist Kimberly Wells (Jane Fonda) wins out over both establishment attempts to conceal the risks of nuclear power and over her own television company's sexist attempts to control and stereotype her. In all these 1970s films, although the establishment is powerful, journalists or those who appeal to the news media at least have a chance. But war films of the period are an exception: there is no portrayal of a war journalist as a positive character, and in fact very few films of the Vietnam War at all. Michael Herr complained of this in 1977, adding '*The Green Berets* doesn't count. That wasn't really about Vietnam, it was about Santa Monica,' not the only adverse comment about Wayne's film made by those who experienced the war.<sup>17</sup>

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), reissued with restored scenes as *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2001) is an overt fantasy rather than a factual portrayal of the Vietnam War; and like *The Green Berets* it includes impossible geography: there are no really major rivers into the central highlands of Vietnam, and the river on which the American boat crew travel on their voyage of discovery would have to flow uphill to reach their objective.<sup>18</sup> This fantasy aspect to the film is in tension with some



**Fig. 3.** The war reporter as fool at the surreal court of a mad warrior king. Dennis Hopper as 'Photo Journalist' greets Captain Willard and his boat crew at the end of their journey in *Apocalypse Now* (1979). [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

specific factual references, particularly the depiction of the 1st/9th Air Cavalry, a real unit which fought in the Ia Drang battle that is the basis of *We Were Soldiers* (although it does not feature in that film). Michael Herr, whose book *Despatches* shows admiration for the Air Cavalry, has a minor screenwriting credit in *Apocalypse Now*, partly for dialogue and for some scenes based on factual events in his book or a related article. In addition, there are two appearances by war reporters in the film. One is a very brief director's joke: as Captain Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen) and the boat crew first encounter the Air Cavalry during a battle they move past a filming television crew, whose director (played by Coppola himself) calls out 'don't look at the camera!' a frequent cry of real war cameramen.<sup>19</sup> The other appearance by a war correspondent is a familiar plot device: the presence at Colonel Kurtz's (Marlon Brando) sanctuary of a hippy-like and eccentric war

photographer (Dennis Hopper, credited only as 'Photo Journalist,' and partly based on Herr's friend photojournalist Sean Flynn), who in Coppola's words functions as 'a foil and a fool to Brando's king' and as 'comic relief'.<sup>20</sup> He is also a commentator and guide to Willard, and disappears from the film when he has fulfilled this function.

A variation on the theme of the war reporter that has appeared in two Hollywood films about Vietnam is that of the reporter who has no need to struggle with assimilation or detachment because he is also already a serving soldier. The unusual low-budget *84 Charlie MoPic* (1989) made with a cast of unknowns, features a US Army Combat Cameraman introduced only by his job title as 'MoPic,' for 'US Army Motion Picture Division,' (played by the scarcely seen Byron Thames) accompanying a patrol of soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade into the South Vietnam jungle in 1969. The film is ostensibly the unedited material shot by 'MoPic' for a training film on the patrol's methods. Essentially the same format was later used for the low-budget psychological horror film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). The film ends with 'MoPic' being himself killed on camera while rescuing a wounded soldier, once more in the tradition of a journalist abandoning his detachment to participate in events. A better known Vietnam War film using the device of the soldier-reporter is Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), also written by Kubrick with Michael Herr, and Gustav Hasford, on whose novel it is based.<sup>21</sup> In the Hollywood formula, the film follows a group of recruits including the cynical 'Joker' (Matthew Modine) through basic training as US Marines at Parris Island in South Carolina, and into battle in South Vietnam with 1st Marine Division in the recapture of Hué City during the Tet Offensive of January 1968. In a significant departure from the novel version, Joker's posting to South Vietnam is as a Sergeant Combat Correspondent reporting for *Stars and Stripes*, the official military newspaper.<sup>22</sup> In the Da Nang hut that is their newsroom, these soldier-reporters are ordered by the equally cynical Lieutenant Lockhart (John Terry) to modify their stories to fit military needs, since 'it is our job to report the news that these why-are-we-here civilian newsmen ignore'. The Joker character has no need to pick up a weapon, symbolically or otherwise, as he already carries one; as his accompanying photographer 'Private Rafterman' (Kevyn Major Howard) explains, 'I'm here to take combat photos' but in actual combat if neces-



sary 'I'll go to the rifle . Joker is simultaneously part of the fighting and a detached commentator upon it, moving between locations unencumbered by responsibilities, while quite uninvolved in his ostensible task of reporting. This ambiguous position is exploited by the film's climax, in which Joker abandons his cynical detachment to shoot a mortally wounded Viet Cong girl prisoner (played by Ngoc Le) rather than leaving her to die. In a position of command among the party of marines Joker could do this with unchallenged military authority; as a civilian reporter he would not do it at all; but as neither he must make a personal and human decision.

The brief appearance in the film of a television camera crew during the Battle of Hué is for comic purposes, highlighting the difference between the 'emotional truth' of combat and whatever can be caught on documentary film. Kubrick underscores the point by introducing the camera team with a long sideways tracking (or crabbing) shot – showing them filming the marines with a long sideways tracking shot. The director's camera duplicates the action of the supposed combat documentary camera. This is followed by a sequence, very similar to those in *84 Charlie MoPic*, of the marines being interviewed. In all cases except for Joker they put on their public faces for the camera, replying in language utterly different from the manner in which they talk among themselves.

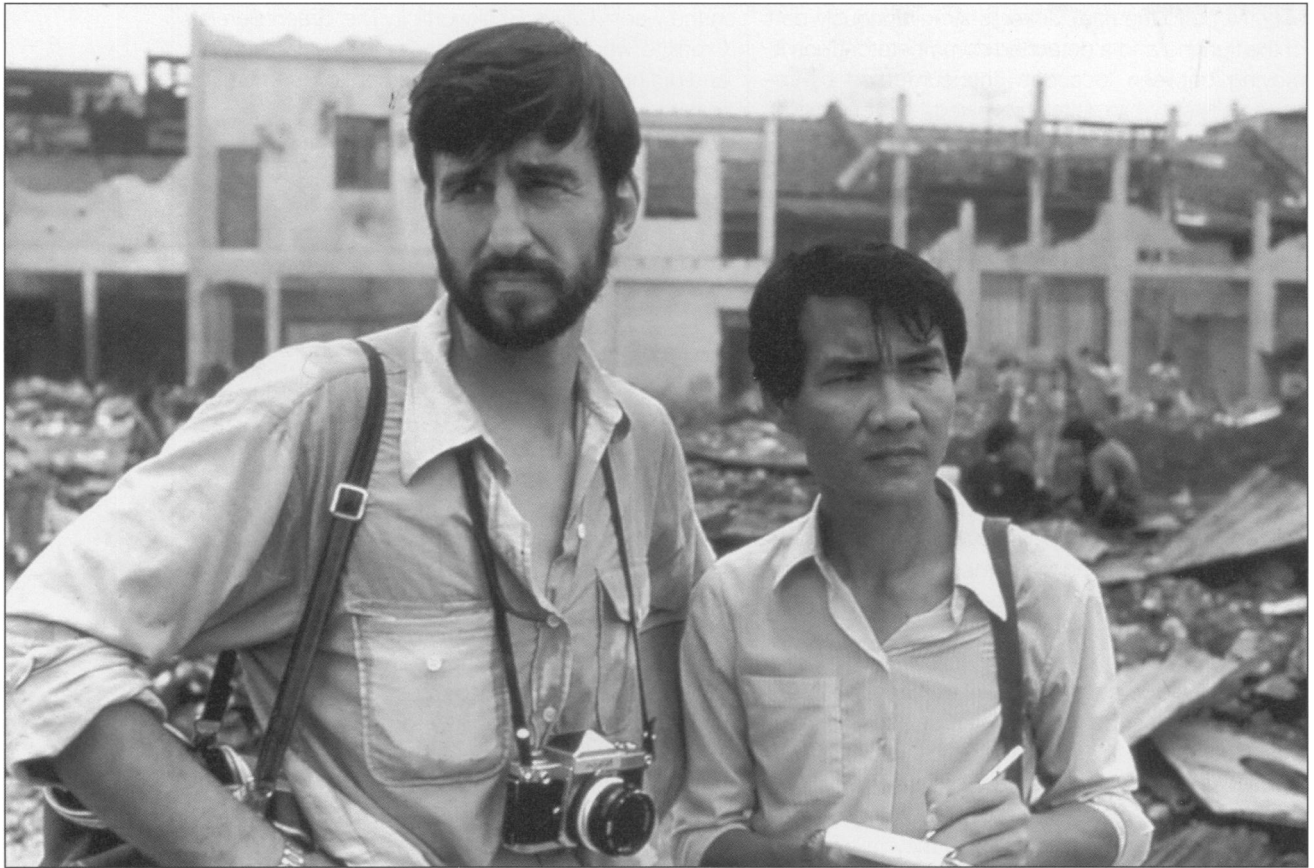
*Full Metal Jacket* includes an important scene of a briefing by Lockhart to his reporters on the first day of the Tet Offensive. Although a military victory for the United States and South Vietnamese forces, Tet was in retrospect the turning point of the Vietnam War, since it convinced Washington that the war was far from being won, and the military demand for increased numbers of American combat troops was politically unacceptable. The paradox of a won battle leading to a lost war led to the controversial and frequently repeated military claim that biased American war reporting was to blame; that, in the clichéd phrase, the Vietnam War was lost on the television screens of America. In the film, the unseen news media are indeed held responsible. Lockhart tells his people that 'the civilian press are about to wet their pants, and we've heard even Cronkite's going to say the war is now unwinnable'. The subsequent visit to South Vietnam of veteran television newsman Walter Cronkite, himself an American institution, and his announcement that the United States' war effort was 'mired in stalemate' is identified as a critical moment

in the war.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Beckworth in *The Green Berets*, Cronkite went to South Vietnam to see for himself and did not share the military perception, something many found hard to comprehend.

The Tet Offensive took place a few months before the release of *The Green Berets*, and the fact that Wayne's film was a reasonably popular success is itself supporting evidence that American popular opinion had by no means turned against the war. But *The Green Berets'* portrayal of American newspapers as ignorant and as hostile to both the military and to the truth about the war reflected the start of a long and acrimonious debate. The issue of whether the Vietnam War was lost through its depiction by the United States' news media has been subject to thorough historical investigation, and remains one of the war's most studied areas of controversy. Taken literally, the charge cannot be substantiated either by statistical analysis or by any other forms of evidence. The belief that the American forces in the Vietnam War were betrayed by their own country's news media has even been compared to the German 'stab in the back myth' after the First World War, which formed a critical part of Nazi propaganda.<sup>24</sup> But in the manner of 'emotional truth,' the attitude persists strongly that war reporters lost the Vietnam War, and by the 1980s this had become American military orthodoxy.

Of all the Hollywood films about the Vietnam War, this attitude to war reporters is portrayed most emphatically in *Hamburger Hill* (1987), a film made very much from the perspective of the American soldiers as victims, good men in a bad war; its publicity tag line was 'War at its worst. Men at their best'. Based on a real battle fought in May 1969 in the Ashau valley by 173rd Airborne Brigade against the North Vietnamese Army, *Hamburger Hill* again follows the bonding of a small group of soldiers and their experiences in combat (which are modified slightly from those of the historical battle). The screenplay, so full of 'Nam-speak' to be at times almost incomprehensible, emphasises repeatedly the need for military subordination of the individual to the group. In a mid-film scene that otherwise serves no plot purpose, a uniformed war reporter (J.D. Van Sickle, credited only as 'Newsmen') with an accompanying cameraman attempts to interview the men as they return, dazed, exhausted and filthy, from yet another attempt to capture the hill. The group's leader Sergeant Frantz (Dylan McDermott), an entirely positive character within the film, delivers





**Fig. 4.**

Witnesses to 'other peoples' wars'. Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston) and Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor) survey the devastation of Cambodia in *The Killing Fields* (1984). [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

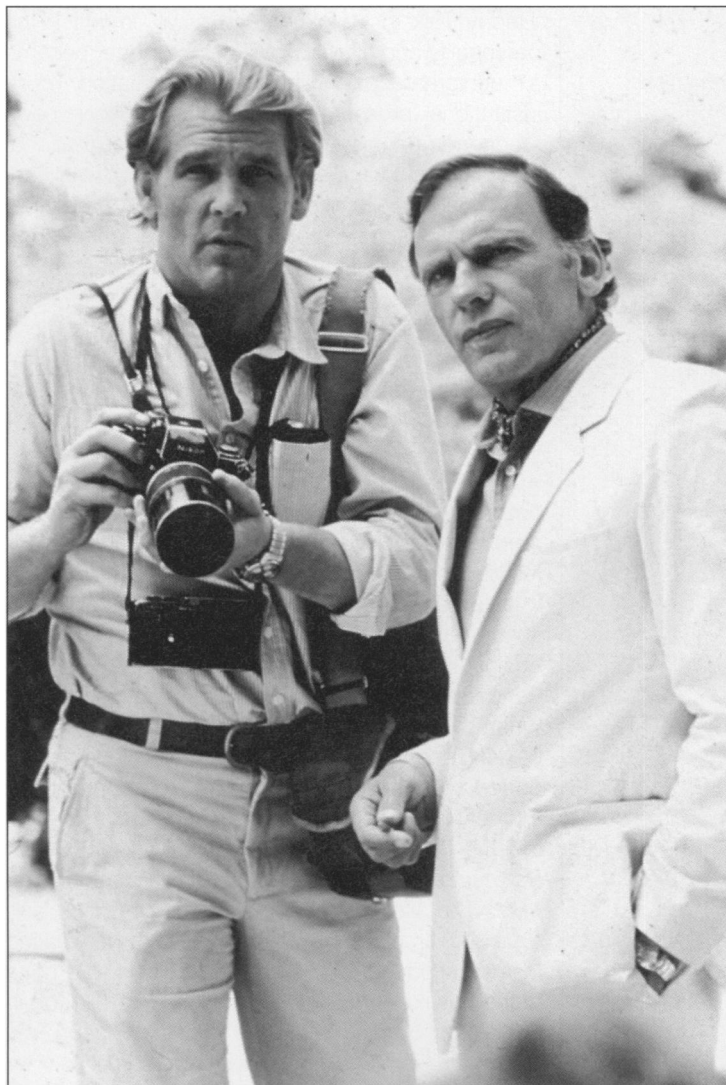
an abusive, foul-mouthed, angry speech that is an eloquent summary of widespread 1980s military beliefs, telling the humiliated newsman that 'I got more respect for those little bastards up there. At least they take a side. You just take pictures,' and threatening to kill him if he sees him on top of the hill after its capture since 'You haven't earned the right to be here.' Screenwriter James Carabatsos also wrote the war action comedy *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986), a very similar film in structure dealing with the bonding process of US Marines in training, and climaxing in a triumphalist interpretation of the 1983 invasion of Grenada, an operation from which United States' forces controversially excluded all reporters, behaviour widely believed by the media themselves to be in revenge for Vietnam.<sup>25</sup>

One consequence of the Vietnam War for American journalism was a challenge to the idea of professionally detached reporting, but not in the way that the military expected. In a complex war that was impossible for any one person to describe or comprehend, some journalists reverted to the tradition of

'advocacy journalism,' also later known as the 'journalism of attachment,' whereby the journalist takes a side and expresses personal emotions and opinions. It has been well argued that both the American political attitude and manner of news reporting is markedly different in 'other people's wars' in which American combat troops are not directly involved than in 'our wars,' and it is unsurprising to see a different treatment by Hollywood also.<sup>26</sup> In all these films, as in *The Quiet American*, the war journalist and his personal relationships become the centre of the film, although the process of journalism itself is virtually irrelevant to the story. An early and untypical case – arguably not a 'war film' at all – is Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), set during the 1965 Indonesian revolution. But subsequent Hollywood films of 'other people's wars' follow a very consistent formula. They are set in a poor country that is disintegrating through civil war, with an emphasis on urban destruction and civilian deaths; and the film utterly demonises one side. The journalist figure, although established as an experienced war

reporter, is a naïve innocent abroad in his behaviour; he starts detached or indifferent to circumstances, but achieves his humanity through emotional involvement that includes someone that he loves deeply. He becomes a human being exactly at the point that he stops being a journalist, and success is equated not with professional achievement in reporting the war, but with escaping alive from it. The political context of the war, a subject that otherwise rarely features in Hollywood war films, is that in a human disaster the United States is ineffectual, both in the face of bureaucratic niceties and because of political convenience. Real television film of events and major political leaders is cut into the film's narrative, in such a way as to criticise or condemn them. The film makes no distinction between the evils of United States policy and those officials in the war zone who carry it out. If portrayed at all, American soldiers are villains and hostile to the reporter, although some American civilian officials are sympathetically portrayed if they defy orders from Washington.

These themes, together with the constant theme of the war reporter as witness and commentator, are central to *The Killing Fields* (1984), based on the exploits in Cambodia of Sydney Schanberg of the *New York Times* (Sam Waterston) and his Cambodian partner Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor).<sup>27</sup> The film opens with an episode based on a real incident in August 1973 at the village of Neak Luong, in which Schanberg and Dith Pran report on a Cambodian village destroyed by American bombers, and in which American military officials attempt to sanitise the story.<sup>28</sup> It then follows events from the fall of Phnom Penh to the Kymer Rouge in 1975 and the country's collapse into anarchy through to Dith Pran's eventual escape to safety and his reunion with Schanberg in October 1979. Dith Pran's odyssey through Cambodia as a witness to events in the country, a survivor not a journalist, is the main plot. The Schanberg character starts the film risking his life unthinkingly for the story, assuming that his American passport and journalistic detachment will be respected by all; Dith Pran remains in Phnom Penh after his family is evacuated to demonstrate to Schanberg his own journalistic professional commitment; but when the Kymer Rouge arrive Dith Pran is forced to stay in Cambodia while Schanberg and other Western journalists are repatriated. In a mid-film scene in New York, Schanberg receives a 1976 'journalist of the year' award for his reporting and



pays tribute to Dith Pran's contribution; but this professional triumph is soured by the accusation of a fellow war reporter that Schanberg forced Dith Pran to stay with him for selfish reasons in order to win the award. When they are reunited at the film's end, Schanberg asks Dith Pran to forgive him.<sup>29</sup>

By the early 1980s the nature of the American news media was again undergoing major changes with the advent of real-time television direct satellite broadcasting, illustrated by the rise of CNN, and the convergence of different communications media reflected in the amalgamation of news and entertainment industries. One result was a shift in news presentation towards a more entertainment-based style, contemptuously described by its critics as

**Fig. 5.** The war reporter and the spy. In *Under Fire* (1983), the photo journalist Russel Proce (Nick Nolte) meets the ambiguous and ambivalent Nicaraguan 'businessman' Marcel Jazy (Jean-Louis Trintignant). [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

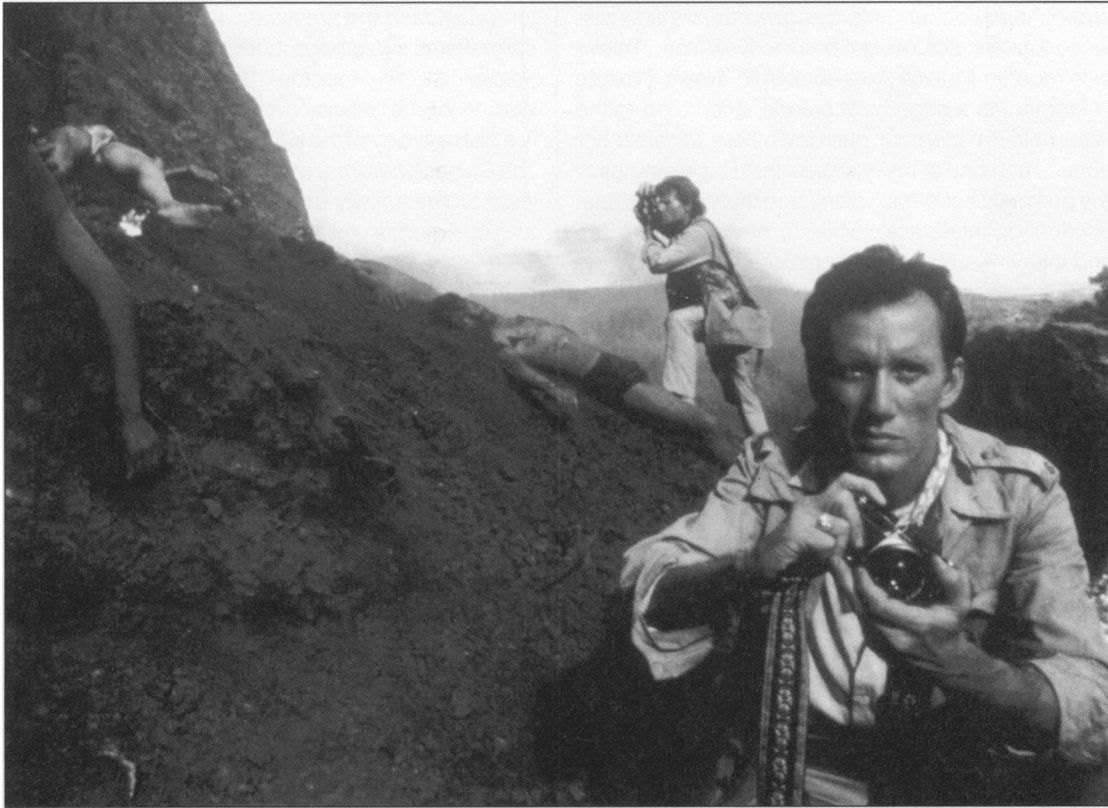
'Happy Talk' or 'Infotainment' news, in which the personality and appearance of the reporter became a much greater part of the news presentation. These institutional pressures caused rifts between news media companies and reporters who believed that their profession and its values were being trivialised. In a broader cultural sense, the values of the older 'advocacy' journalists of the Vietnam era were coming into conflict with the 'yuppies' or 'me generation' of the 1980s, whose attitudes also contrasted sharply with the group values of the military.<sup>30</sup> These issues are reflected in two very similar and formulaic war films of the 1980s, *Under Fire* (1983 – one year before *The Killing Fields*) and Oliver Stone's *Salvador* (1986).

The main plot of *Under Fire* is a love-triangle between photojournalist Russel Price (Nick Nolte), reporter 'Clair' (Joanna Cassidy), and reporter and television anchorman Alex Grazier (Gene Hackman), Price's friend and mentor. Grazier is eventually killed accompanying Price in search of a story, played out against the civil war in Nicaragua in 1979, when the Sandanista rebels overthrew the Somoza regime. When the film was released, the United States was backing the Nicaraguan 'Contras,' including supporters of Somoza, against the new Sandanista government in fighting that lasted until 1988, and which together with the accompanying civil war in El Salvador was often described as potentially another Vietnam. The film contains several ambiguous and cynical characters that are assumed to be working for the United States government, but who have none of the conviction exhibited by Sergeant Muldoon in *The Green Berets*. Hub Kittle (Richard Masur), the American public relations representative for Somoza, dryly tells Price that a Sandanista victory could mean 'the Commies take over the world'. 'Oates' (Ed Harris), a clean-cut American mercenary who is Price's military *alter ego* and dark side, personally cheerful and utterly professionally detached, greets Price as an old friend at the film's start, set in 1979 in the bush war in Chad, and at its end calls to him 'See you in Thailand!' But by then Price has undergone the familiar transformation from journalistic detachment to commitment. It is established that Price got his first journalistic success covering South Vietnam in 1963. But when arrested by Nicaraguan military police he produces his American passport and announces that he is a journalist; and in the holding cell he actually tells a prisoner, 'I don't take sides, I take pictures'. Price is later astonished

to find that photographs he has taken of the Sandanistas are being used to identify them for Oates' death-squads. His slide into commitment starts when one of the guerrillas that he accompanies is shot by Oates, and Price grabs a rifle rather than his camera, although he does not open fire and is afterwards shocked by his behaviour. Price's abandonment of journalistic values comes with his agreement to fake a photograph of the dead guerrilla leader 'Raphael,' showing him apparently alive despite Somoza's claims, in order to influence United States' government policy and prevent a large arms shipment to Somoza. This belief in the very direct impact of visual images on government policy, latterly called the 'CNN Effect' is a common one among journalists themselves, although little substantiated. The photograph is hailed as a great professional triumph for Price, who is greatly troubled and confesses the fake to Grazier. Later, Grazier is killed by government troops and Price nearly killed, but rescued by Clair together with his photographs of Grazier's death, which again make a considerable impact in the United States. 'Maybe we should have killed an American journalist fifty years ago', a Nicaraguan woman doctor tells Clair sombrely. The film ends with the Sandanista victory in July 1979. 'Do you think we fell in love with too much? Clair asks as they prepare to leave; 'I'd do it again,' Price replies.

While in Nicaragua the United States was supporting the insurgents against the government, at the same time in nearby El Salvador 1980–1994 it was supporting the government against the insurgents. *Salvador*, which again appeared while the war was being fought, was directed by Oliver Stone who also co-wrote the screenplay with Richard Boyle, on whose exploits the film was based. Boyle was an experienced war reporter who covered Vietnam including the My Lai massacre, and wrote a book highly critical of the American forces.<sup>31</sup> Although real events in El Salvador 1980–1982 are featured, notably the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador in his own cathedral, the film opens with the disclaimer that 'characters have been fictionalised'

In *Salvador* the Boyle character (James Woods) lays claim to impressive war reporter's credentials: Vietnam, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, most of central America, and being the last journalist out of Cambodia in 1975, 'Schanberg was running to get his Pulitzer Prize and I was almost getting cholera, but we managed to save 1100 refu-



**Fig. 6.** Heading for redemption? While in the background photojournalist John Cassady (John Savage) gets good shots of corpses left by right-wing death squads in *Salvador* (1986), Richard Boyle (James Woods) has other things on his mind. [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

gees from the *Kymer Rouge*. This Boyle is a self-confessed 'weasel' but fundamentally 'a good-hearted person'. At the film's start in San Francisco, his wife takes their child and leaves him, he is evicted for non-payment of rent, and he no longer has his job with Pacific News Service (PNS) or his Press Card. His disc-jockey friend 'Doctor Rock' (James Belushi), described as 'a walking museum of the 1960s,' bails him out of jail for a driving offence, and they set off for El Salvador in a car loaded with drink and drugs. Boyle's transition is not from journalistic detachment but from self-absorption, as he finds redemption (a word used more than once in the film) not through journalism but through his relationship with 'Maria' (Elpidio Carrillo). Many of the film's earlier scenes are horror-comedy as he bumbles his way from one lethal situation to another, becoming more sympathetic as a character as his commitment increases. He is at his most attractive as the voice of the film, delivering impassioned speeches on his belief in America as a force for good, and the need to think of the people of El Salvador rather than strategic interest. Boyle's attempt to rescue Maria and her – possibly their – children from El Salvador

is thwarted at the very end of the film by American immigration officials, leaving him to deliver the film's message, 'You don't know what it's like in El Salvador'.

Secondary to this main plot is the film's criticism of American government policy. In *El Salvador*, Jack Morgan (Colby Chester) of the CIA tells Boyle that if the guerrillas are not stopped 'in five years time you're going to be seeing Cuban tank divisions on the Rio Grande' (the Mexican-American border). The only American military figure to feature as a significant character, Colonel Bentley Hyde (Will MacMillan), who wears Air Cavalry insignia and has served in Vietnam is, like Morgan, superficially polite to Boyle while utterly hostile. 'I happen to hate the species you belong to,' he tells Boyle, although the screenplay suggests 'a sort of camaraderie as Boyle has at least seen combat'. In the course of the film Boyle also interacts with various war reporters as witness to the war. He attaches himself to photojournalist John Cassady of *Newsweek* (John Savage), a figure very close to Russel Price in *Under Fire*, who wants to rival legendary war photographer Robert Capa. Inevitably, Cassady is killed taking photo-

graphs in action, and his dying words are an insistence that his pictures get back to New York. Television reporter Pauline Axelrod of 'ANS News' (Valerie Wildeman) is a superficial blonde, according to the screenplay a 'glamour pus down here to make her bones,' and one of the 'yuppies' that Boyle loathes.<sup>32</sup> It is precisely her detachment, and that of others, that Boyle finds intolerable; while at press conferences and interviews other reporters (and anyone else trying to co-operate with the system) find Boyle's intrusive, committed questions and behaviour an impediment and an embarrassment. In addition to the wider issues that it raises, the film portrayal of Boyle reflects well journalistic debates of the period, culminating in the controversies of reporting the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to these portrayals of the committed print reporter or photojournalist as generally a positive and sympathetic figure, the new 'Infotainment' style of instant television news of the 1980s rapidly produced a stock Hollywood character of the television reporter as a comic and contemptible figure. The action adventure *Die Hard* (1988) successfully combines the conventions of several Hollywood genres, the war film among them. The film's premise is the taking of hostages in a Los Angeles corporate tower-block by foreign terrorists, with a plot twist that they turn out to be robbers instead. The response is by the police rather than the military, but both sides possess firepower and equipment that, together with levels of death and destruction and the behaviour of hero Detective John McClane (Bruce Willis), are more appropriate to a war film. An important sub-plot is the behaviour of television news reporter Dick Thornburg (William Atherton) of 'WWTW-TV News,' whose irresponsible and self-obsessed pursuit of the story endangers McClane and his wife Holly (Bonnie Bedelia). At the film's end Thornburg attempts to interview Holly, who punches him on the nose; but Thornburg's only concern is if the camera got the picture. By the 1990s this portrayal of the television reporter – individually or as part of a 'press pack' – as a comic intruder into the world of the fighting man was well established, and used repeatedly in science fiction or fantasy action films with a war theme aimed at family audiences. In the opening scenes of *Star Trek – Generations* (1994) Captain James Kirk (William Shattner), on the new spaceship *USS Enterprise B* for its inaugural cruise, is amusedly tolerant of the accompanying mob of pressmen; but as soon as danger threatens he orders the cameras

turned off, and the pressmen are co-opted as medical staff and into other subordinate roles. In *Universal Soldier* (1991) reporter Veronica Roberts (Ally Walker) of the television cable news network 'CNA' is a near-parody of the Kimberly Wells character from *The China Syndrome*, an aggressive reporter fired for insubordination who goes in search of a story about an elite American military unit. She discovers that Luc Deveraux (Jean-Claude Van Damme) is like the rest of the unit a technically dead but cryogenically preserved human robot, who escapes with her as his human personality starts to re-emerge. In a familiar Vietnam War theme, Deveraux and Sergeant Andrew Scott (Dolph Lundgren) were both victims of the war, killed in South Vietnam in 1969, and Deveraux's over-riding motivation is to return home. Once the plot is established, the Roberts character changes from dominant reporter to subordinate woman under Deveraux's protection, and the film becomes a conventional pursuit and escape story. Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (1997), a finely-judged satire on one of the most controversial books in the science fiction canon, portrays the soldiers of earth at war with an alien species of giant insects, the 'bugs'.<sup>34</sup> As in his earlier *Robocop* (1987), also set in a near-future dystopia and also with Edward Neumeier as a screenwriter, Verhoeven uses television broadcasts both as a plot device and for satirical effect. The war reporter in *Starship Troopers* (Greg Travis, billed as 'Network Correspondent') is 'incorporated,' in that he wears military uniform and apparently works under government and military control. He remains nevertheless a comic figure. On his first appearance at a space station before a battle he is sharply corrected by the film's hero Johnny Rico (Casper Van Dien) of the Mobile Infantry for suggesting that the enemy species may have acted in self defence. On his second appearance (which also forms the television-style 'tease' at the start of the film) on the enemy planet 'Klendathu' he is seized by an angry 'bug' and is literally ripped in half, filmed by his cameraman who makes no effort to help him. In the action comedy *Streetfighter* (1994), which presents the American child's view of United Nations' peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in the 1990s, heroic leader Colonel William Guile (Jean-Claude Van Damme) is contemptuous of reporter Chun-Li Zang (played by Ming-Na) of 'Global Television News'. 'He doesn't like women, does he?' Chun-Li asks 'Cammy' (Kylie Minogue), one of Guile's officers, who replies 'No, he doesn't like journalists. I assure

you it's an Equal Opportunity dislike'. As might be expected, Chun-Li Zang goes in pursuit of her story and uncovers a crucial military secret, but then casts off her reporter's role to reveal that she is a martial arts master and allies herself with Colonel Guile, who disregards orders from his ineffectual political superiors and storms the enemy stronghold with his forces in the name of 'peace, justice and freedom'.

*Street Fighter* appeared in the same year that a controversial American humanitarian military intervention force left Somalia, amid arguments that television reporting had dictated both its deployment and withdrawal.<sup>35</sup> Even at its most serious, Hollywood has addressed the difficult issue of American military intervention in civil wars for humanitarian reasons in the 1990s by turning it into traditional and formulaic war films, including Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001) set in Somalia, and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), set in Bosnia.<sup>36</sup> The British-American production *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), set in 1992 during the siege of the city, is in the tradition of *The Killing Fields* and *Salvador*, with the added journalistic preoccupations of the 1990s. At the film's start British television journalist Michael Henderson (Stephen Dillane) is critical of his American rival 'Flynn' (Woody Harrelson) for his 'news-is-entertainment' grandstanding under fire. Flynn explains that American audiences have heard of him, not of Sarajevo.<sup>37</sup> Henderson soon loses his early journalistic detachment ('we're not here to help, we're here to report'), smuggling a young orphan girl to safety in London where his family adopts her. Again, real television interviews with political leaders (and some reconstructions) are cut into the film, which is highly critical of the United Nations and its humanitarian forces. These forces (which included American aircraft but not ground troops) and their work barely appear in the film – indeed it is their non-appearance to fight alongside a people at war that is the criticism.

One reason that 'limited war' had originally appeared attractive as a concept in the 1950s was the expectation that these wars could be conducted by professionalised armed forces with little impact on the United States' civilian public or their economic prosperity. After the Vietnam War, political and military thinkers concluded that, even if the war had not strictly been lost on television, lack of political and popular support in the United States as a positive force had been a critical factor in the defeat. If the United States was to go to war in future then the

government and armed forces had the right and duty to secure that public support before committing American troops to battle. As with the original idea of 'limited war' itself, this need to secure public opinion seemed to its proponents so obvious as to be beyond the need for debate.<sup>38</sup> It meant major changes in the way that the United States military considered both the role of war reporters and the news media as a whole, and provoked considerable further controversies.

The establishment of viable civilian commercial global television communications by the end of the 1980s also marked the decline of any automatic American military monopoly on communications from a war zone, their main strength in dealing with the American news media. The news media themselves were becoming more international in all respects, and there was little point in appealing to the American patriotism of a news television crew from another country whose material would nevertheless reach American networks. Together with other aspects of the increasing globalisation of the media and of society including better access to all forms of transport, this meant that the news media were beginning to achieve significant independence from the military in reporting wars. The American military response was a further – although gradual – change of policy towards the media that marked the 1990s, from 'manipulation' to 'courtship,' adopting the techniques of public relations and spin-doctors to influence the media and seek their co-operation.<sup>39</sup> This policy was viewed with suspicion by journalists and by political commentators in the belief that the armed forces were not sincere in their 'courtship,' and that the hostile attitude of the 1980s deriving from Vietnam still remained. The 1991 Gulf War saw a major dispute between war reporters who accepted manipulation and limited incorporation into the American military in the 'press pools,' and the 'unilateralists' who functioned outside the system; as well as a parallel dispute back in the United States over the extent to which government striving for public support for the war had been, in Noam Chomsky's well-known phrase, a case of 'manufacturing consent'.<sup>40</sup>

During the Gulf War the United States called on the Iraqis to revolt against Saddam Hussein. Then after the war Saddam massacred his Iraqi opponents while American troops were forbidden to intervene. This gap between United States' strategic and political interests and the expectations of the Ameri-





**Fig. 7.** The war did not take place – except on television. Robert de Niro as the cheerful arch manipulator Conrad Brean in *Wag the Dog* (1997). [Courtesy of The Cinema Museum.]

can public is the background for the plot of *Three Kings* (1999), a war comedy in the surreal traditions of *Apocalypse Now*. Major Archie Gates (George Clooney), a former Delta Force soldier serving as a press escort officer in the Gulf War just after the ceasefire and two weeks from his retirement, leads a team of soldiers to steal a fortune in gold taken from Kuwait City by the Iraqis during the occupation; a victimless crime in the context of the greater crime of war.<sup>41</sup> Caught up in events and pursued by their own side, the soldiers end up helping a group of Iraqi refugees to safety across the border into Iran.

At the film's start Gates' superior Colonel Horn (Mykelti Williams) tells him 'This is a media war'.<sup>42</sup> Gates is first seen having energetic but dispassionate sex with television reporter Cathy Daitch (Judy Greer) of 'NRG,' after which she immediately asks him for a story. The film's metaphor is obvious: the media and the military make use of each other, but they are not in love. This portrayal of women war-reporters as sexually voracious also reflects a common military myth. Reporter Adriana Cruz of 'NBS' (Nora

Dunn) pursues Gates' team into the desert in search not of the gold but of her own 'gold story,' risking her life and those of her cameraman and hapless military driver. Both reporters are self-obsessed, fixated not just on the story but on the immediate event. Like Pauline Axelrod in *Salvador*, Daitch is a glamorous blonde content with conducting vapid interviews. Cruz is a five-time Emmy award runner-up, aware that her career is fading with her looks. 'I was managed by the military,' she complains self-pityingly, 'I try to be substance-based not style-based,' but 'There is a sexual politics to this business. It's about looks. It's about sex. It's about style'. Cruz becomes committed to Gates' side in the showdown at the Iranian border, where Gates and his men give up the gold to Colonel Horn to save the refugees. Captions over the end sequence inform the audience that the men were honourably discharged because of Cruz' television reporting of the story. In a 'media war' they escape punishment for their crime not because they did the right thing, but because television took their side. Gates becomes a military consultant on Holly-



wood war films, emphasising the link between the media portrayal of actual war and the Hollywood version, a trick reminiscent of the ending to *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970).

In the war's aftermath, postmodernists argued in Jean Baudrillard's famous phrase that 'the Gulf War did not happen,' in the sense that what the media portrayed was not the truth, but that any distinction between the media version and an objective truth had become meaningless.<sup>43</sup> The emphasis on visual images rather than factual content implicit in 'news-is-entertainment,' combined with industry financial and time pressures, led to concerns that major television news companies would take material from the daily and global 'video stream' offered to them, regardless of its origins, rather than sending their own reporters. The faster global 24-hour news cycle due to new technology, coupled with American military 'courtship' of the media, and ambiguous intervention justified on humanitarian grounds in 'other people's' confusing civil wars, also contributed to an extensive debate on the probable nature of future 21st Century war, including the war reporter's place in it.<sup>44</sup> Some Vietnam veteran reporters and radical critics of government see these changes as a political crisis and conspiracy marking the end of truthful reporting. Although strictly not a war film, and with no war reporters making an appearance, the political satire *Wag the Dog* (1997) reflects all these issues.<sup>45</sup> Faced with a presidential scandal, spin-doctor Conrad Brean (Robert de Niro) and Hollywood producer Stanley R. Motts (Dustin Hoffman) successfully create for the American public an entirely fictitious war with Albania by media manipulation, including an elite military unit who march to a pastiche of *The Green Berets'* title song. American television news shows as evidence of the war Motts' faked video (a creation of blue-screening and computer editing), with only the thinnest of warnings about its unknown provenance. For Brean the truth has no existence, whatever is on television is reality for that moment. He claims to have faked a famous

piece of documentary film from the Gulf War, but when challenged replies with flippant unconcern. Brean lists for Motts political slogans and images from American history remembered after the events themselves are forgotten, with the implication that the 'media war' has always been central to American politics.

This brings the account back to *We Were Soldiers*, the most recent Hollywood film to feature a war reporter, dealing with the start of the 'main force war' in Vietnam in 1965. In their prologue to their book on the battle, written in 1992, the authors complain that 'Hollywood got it wrong every damned time, whetting political knives on the bones of our dead brothers,' a statement that director Randall Wallace took as a challenge, citing his historical costume drama *Braveheart* (1995) to them as representative of his own approach. The book's co-author Moore confirms that 'he got it right and has honoured all Vietnam veterans'.<sup>46</sup> The character of the other co-author, UPI photojournalist Joe Galloway (Barry Pepper), is uniformed and incorporated into the 1st/7th Air Cavalry from his first appearance flying into battle. When asked on the battlefield by Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore (Mel Gibson) why he is not in the Army as he is obviously brave enough, Galloway cites his family's military credentials back to the American Civil War, explaining that he is there in the same tradition, but hopes to understand the war by photographing it. In almost his next appearance, rather than picking up a rifle he is handed one and uses it with increasing effectiveness, only later returning to his camera and performing the function of witness for the audience. After the battle is over Galloway is contemptuous of other reporters who arrive on the battlefield. The film's ending includes a scene of him back in a newsroom in the United States, alienated from other reporters by his military experience. When compared with war and the news media at the start of the 21st century, this portrayal of a war reporter in *We Were Soldiers* could be described as a return to the certainties of a bygone age.

## Notes

1. Quoted in Randall Wallace, *We Were Soldiers – The Screenplay* (New York: Wheelhouse, 2002) 172–173; see also Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* (New York: Random House, 1992).
2. Jean Norton Cru, quoted in John Terraine, *The Smoke*

and the Fire: *Myths and Anti-Myths of War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992, first published 1980), 209; see also Terraine's analysis and criticism of this view.

3. For a guide to sources on the representation of journalists in Hollywood films see the website of the University of Southern California Annenberg School

- for Communication project on 'the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture,' posted at <http://www.ijpc.org>, visited at 1 July 2002.
4. Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 63–68; Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Theodore Peterson, 'The Social Responsibility Theory,' in Fred S. Siebert et al., *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963, first published 1956), 73–104.
  5. A more recent Hollywood film treatment of the novel, *The Quiet American* (2002) stars Michael Caine as Thomas Fowler and Brendan Fraser as Alden Pile ('The American').
  6. The literature on this subject is immense; for an introduction see Stephen Badsey, 'The Doctrines of the Coalition Forces' in John Pimlott and Stephen Badsey (eds.), *The Gulf War Assessed* (London: Arms and Armour, 1992), 57–80.
  7. An important exception, and one of the few Hollywood films to address the issue of Viet Cong terrorist attacks against urban areas, is the war comedy and vehicle for Robin Williams *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987), set in Saigon in 1965.
  8. An exception is Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986).
  9. Interview with Michael Wayne, 5 August 1975, *The Green Berets*, Georgetown University Special Collections Library, Washington DC, reproduced in Lawrence H. Suid (ed.), *America in Film and Propaganda: A Documentary History: Volume IV: 1945 and After* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 404–405.
  10. For conflicts between American (and British) reporters and the military authorities in the Second World War I am grateful to Matthew McPartland, whose PhD thesis, 'The Dynamics of War Reporting: The Media-Military Relationship in the Second World War' (Leeds University, 2002) will shortly become available. For the Korean War and the erosion of the Second World War consensus see Peter R. Young, 'A Restatement of the Problem: Theory and Practice,' in Peter R. Young (ed.), *Defence and the Media in Time of Limited War* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 69–86; Stephen Badsey, 'Propaganda, the Media and Psychological Operations: The Korean War,' in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds.), *The Korean War 1950–53: A Fifty Year Retrospective* (Canberra: Army History Unit, 2000), 150–162.
  11. For a brief and clear discussion of this strategy see Robin Brown, 'Limited War,' in Colin McInnes and G.D. Sheffield (eds.), *Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 164–193.
  12. I owe this model of the change from 'incorporation' of the media by the military in modern warfare to 'manipulation' in late modern warfare and then to 'courtship' in postmodern warfare to Charles C. Moskos, 'Towards a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm,' in Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams and David R. Seagal (eds.), *The Postmodern Military* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14–31.
  13. For some of the critical issues in the context of Vietnam see Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington DC.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1988).
  14. Adopted from the best-selling novel by Robin Moore, *The Green Berets* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965). See also Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Apocalypse Now* (New York: Proteus, 1981), 35–51; Albert Auster and Leonard Quart, *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 31–34; Philip Taylor, 'The Green Berets,' in David W. Ellwood (ed.) *The Movies as History* (Stroud, Gloucs.: Sutton, 2000), 36–43.
  15. Letter 28 December 1965 from John Wayne to Lyndon B. Johnson, reproduced in Lawrence H. Suid (ed.), *America in Film and Propaganda: A Documentary History: Volume IV: 1945 and After* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 390. See also subsequent letters and memoranda reproduced in the same volume for the White House response.
  16. Michael Herr, *Despatches* (London: Picadore, 1978; first published 1977), 60.
  17. Michael Herr, *Despatches* (London: Picadore, 1978; first published 1977), 153. The first Hollywood war film after *The Green Berets* to feature Vietnam and make any sort of impact was *The Boys in Company C* (1978), a Hong Kong-USA production and a familiar story of a group of soldiers passing through 'bonding' training and into battle, although critical of the broader American war effort. Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) also included scenes set in South Vietnam itself, but like most Hollywood films about the Vietnam War was chiefly concerned with the impact of the war at home, following the 'Americans as victims' theme.
  18. For details of the film and its making see Peter Cowie, *The Apocalypse Now Book* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), which provides evidence on many of the issues discussed in this section.
  19. This is actually the title of the memoirs of a famous British documentary filmmaker of the Second World War, Harry Watt, *Don't Look at the Camera* (London: Paul Elek, 1974)
  20. Peter Cowie, *The Apocalypse Now Book* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), 82. Sean Flynn disappeared while on assignment as a photojournalist in South Vietnam in 1970.

21. Gustav Hasford, *The Short Timers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); see also Stanley Kubrick, Michael Herr and Gustav Hasford, *Full Metal Jacket: The Screenplay* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987).
22. The published screenplay gives Joker as working for *The Sea Tiger*, the US Marines official newspaper, but in dialogue he twice says it is *Stars and Stripes*.
23. For brief summaries from different viewpoints see Michael Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* (London: Thames Methuen, 1981), 264–271; Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945–1990* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 216–231; Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 663–670. A very detailed analysis of the reporting of the Tet offensive is Peter Braestrupp, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (Boulder Colo.: Westview Press, 1977).
24. Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War* (London: MacMillan, 2000), 111. Again the literature on this issue is substantial. A good brief summary is Carlyle A. Thayer, 'Vietnam: A Critical Analysis,' in Peter R. Young (ed.), *Defence and the Media in Time of Limited War* (London: Frank Cass, 1992) 89–115. See also John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1985).
25. See Geoff Mungham, 'Grenada: News Blackout in the Caribbean', in Derrick Mercer, Geoff Mungham and Kevin Mercer, *The Fog of War* (London: Heinemann, 1987), 291–310; Peter Young and Peter Jesser, *The Media and the Military from the Crimea to Desert Strike* (London: MacMillan, 1997), 120–128.
26. Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media At War* (London: MacMillan, 2000), 197–243.
27. Specifically on the article, Sydney H. Schanberg, 'The Death and Life of Dith Pran,' *New York Times Magazine*, 20 January 1980; see also [Anon.], *The Killing Fields: The Facts Behind the Film: With Personal Accounts by Sydney H. Schanberg and Dith Pran* (London, Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1984); Haing S. Ngor with Roger Warner, *Surviving the Killing Fields* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988).
28. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: Fontana, 1980), 294.
29. In the account of the actual reunion given in [Anon.], *The Killing Fields: The Facts Behind the Film: With Personal Accounts by Sydney H. Schanberg and Dith Pran* (London, Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1984), Dith Pran confirms that Schanberg did ask his forgiveness, but in a rather difference context.
30. Francis Wheen, *Television* (London: Century Publishing, 1985), 97–98; Asa Briggs, and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 313. For personal account of these institutional conflicts in the context of war reporting see Arthur Kent, *Risk and Redemption* (Toronto: Viking, 1996); Martin Bell, *In Harm's Way* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995).
31. Richard Boyle, *Flower of the Dragon* (San Francisco CA: Ramparts Press, 1972). See also the published version of the film screenplay, which contains several scenes and characters not in the released version of the film: Oliver Stone and Richard Boyle, *Platoon and Salvador: The Screenplays* (London: Ebury Press, 1987).
32. The contrast with the Kimberly Wells character in *The China Syndrome* is instructive. The screenplay also contained scenes not in the released film portraying an American mercenary 'Mike Stankovich,' a rather more brutal figure than Oates in *Under Fire*, who tells Boyle that the press lost the Vietnam War.
33. Like many other aspects of factual war reporting, the literature on these debates is not only extensive but often highly partisan, and to some extent outside the scope of this article. For some introductory discussions see Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 131–145; Stephen Badsey, 'The Media War,' in John Pimlott and Stephen Badsey (eds.), *The Gulf War Assessed* (London: Arms and Armour), 219–246.
34. See Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959 and numerous reprints). The controversies surrounding this book, which is perhaps best understood as an essay on civic virtue and responsibility, are less relevant to the film given Verhoeven's very different use of the basic plot.
35. See Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media At War* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 218–224 for a summary of the arguments.
36. The plot of *Black Hawk Down* is based on the factual account Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (London: Bantam, 1999); the plot of *Behind Enemy Lines* is based very loosely on a real incident.
37. The film is based on the factual account by Michael Nicholson, *Natasha's Story* (London: MacMillan, 1993), later republished as *Welcome to Sarajevo* (London: Pan, 1997). There are significant differences between the grey-haired extrovert Nicholson, a veteran of 15 wars starting with Vietnam, and the character of 'Michael Henderson' portrayed in the film. See also Michael Nicholson, *A Measure of Danger: Memoirs of a British War Correspondent* (London: HarperCollins, 1991). Screenwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce states that the Henderson character is not intended to be Nicholson but 'Everyman, guiding us through the city'. See the published version of the screenplay, Frank Cottrell Boyce, *Wel-*

- come to Sarajevo (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), introduction viii.
38. See for example Eugene J. Carol and Gene R. La Roque, 'Victory in the Desert: Superior Technology or Brute Force?' in Victoria Brittain (ed.), *The Gulf Between Us* (London: Virago Press, 1991), 43–60; Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy* (Novato CA.: Presidio, 1982).
39. For this model of 'incorporation – manipulation – courtship' see note 12 above.
40. For a general introduction to the different perspectives on this issue see W. Lanz Bennett and David L. Paletz (eds.), *Taken By Storm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner and Herbert I. Schiller (eds.), *Triumph of the Image* (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1992); John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and see also Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (London: Vintage 1994, first published 1988).
41. Essentially the same plot and theme were used in the Second World War comedy *Kelly's Heroes* (1970).
42. Strictly this is probably an anachronism as the term appears to have been first used in 1992. See Stephen Badsey 'The Media War' in John Pimlott and Stephen Badsey, *The Gulf War Assessed* (London: Arms and Armour, 1992), 219–246; Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).
43. Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty* (revised edition, London: Prion, 2000) especially 501–526; Jeffrey Walsh (ed.), *The Gulf War Did Not Happen: Politics, Culture and Warfare Post-Vietnam* (Aldershot: Arena, 1995); Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism* (Monroe ME.: Common Courage Press, 1999); Richard Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1997).
44. See for example Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991); Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War* (New York: Warner, 1993); Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Stanford CA.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War* (London: Vintage, 2001).
45. Based loosely on the novel by Larry Beinhart, *American Hero* (New York: Pantheon, 1993). Much has been made of this film's appearance before the 1999 Monica Lewinsky scandal and the Kosovo conflict, during which Yugoslav television showed *Wag the Dog* frequently. Cf. the mythology that attached to *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) after the Kennedy assassination the following year.
46. Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* (New York: Random House, 1992), prologue, xx; correspondence and interviews reprinted in Randall Wallace, *We Were Soldiers – The Screenplay* (New York: Wheelhouse, 2002), especially vii–xi, 193–198.