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American Myth of War

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Abstract

This paper focuses upon some of the main historical events in American History and their effects on shaping the American way of thinking. It is mainly concerned around four periods of history such as World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War and the still ongoing War on Terrorism. This historical overview is of great importance for understanding how over the years American people changed their perspective on war and the world in general. While Americans felt great enthusiasm about fighting and being a soldier in World War I, after the Vietnam War that way of thinking changes and continues to change even more drastically today during the War on Terrorism. How the American attitude towards war and warfare has been shaped throughout history is well represented in three iconic war films: *Saving Private Ryan, the Platoon* and *Jarhead*. The American cinematography has had a great impact on people in America and worldwide and the films have greatly contributed to maintaining the American war myth and its representation. The American war myth, like the American dream, is deeply rooted in the head of every American.

Keywords: World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, War on Terrorism, American cinematography, American war myth

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine wars in which the United States was directly involved (WWI, WWII, the Vietnam War, the Gulf Wars) and their effects on shaping the American attitude towards war and warfare. How the American attitude towards war and warfare changed throughout history is well represented in the discussions of three iconic war films: *Saving Private Ryan, the Platoon* and *Jarhead*. The American cinematography has greatly contributed to maintaining the American war myth and its representation throughout American history. The American war myth, like the American dream, is deeply rooted in the head of every American.

1. History of American War Involvement

From the very beginning America has participated in a multitude of wars. Only a few were fought on American ground. This paper will emphasize the war involvement that had a great impact on the shaping of American society. Although they wished to stay neutral, America entered World War I on April 6th 1917. Unrestricted submarine warfare introduced by Germans was the cause of Woodrow Wilson to ask Congress to declare war on Germany on April 2nd and America joined the war on the side of the Allies ("America and WW I" 2006.)

Furthermore, in World War II, which started in 1940, America had a role similar to the prior. They provided war material and financial power to Britain, the Soviet Union and the Republic of China. America's official entry was on December 8th 1941 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Later, America won a major victory over Japan and continued to deploy men and planes to the UK. Strategic bombing of the Nazi Germany and the invasion of the occupied countries led to the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945 and the final surrender of Japan was brought by deploying atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ("US

History" n.d.). The United States became a dominant military power known for its air superiority and other strategies and tactics that redefined modern war history. The World War II era is also known as the greatest triumph of Americans and involved American soldiers who are also referred to as the "greatest generation."

The war that left Americans unsettled and made them wish to forget that it had happened is the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War known in Vietnam as the Resistance War against America was a war that occurred in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from November 1955 to April 1975. ("US History" n.d.) The war was between the Republic of Vietnam including the United States and other allies and the North Vietnamese Army as well as the National Liberation Front. The US involvement was different over the course of years but it mostly included many causalities that prompted public opinion back in America. The United States tried to justify the war aim as containment of Communism in Asia. But they encountered strong disapproval and a public outcry that resulted in overwhelming protests back in America. Nearly a third of the American population was strongly against the war. In the final years of Vietnamization many troops were removed. In 1973 American forces withdrew and in 1975 South Vietnam was finally conquered by communist North Vietnam. Many see this as a waste of American blood, resources, and treasure on a war that did not concern America ("US History" n.d.). This war was a turning point in the shaping of American character and opinion towards war. After the World War II triumph, and the feeling of victory and enthusiasm that followed, this war came like a cold shower.

Finally, to conclude the discussion on war involvement, the War on Terrorism must be mentioned for it is intended to neutralize international terrorist groups and ensure the safety of the United States and its allies. The United States had three interventions so far. The intervention in Afghanistan against the Taliban government and camps associated with al-Qaida. Then in 2003, the United States army invaded Iraq and their presence lasted 9 years

fighting various insurgent groups. The third intervention is Libyan, where the US along with other nations, among them Britain and France, fought against Gaddafi's forces. ("Military History of the US")

This historical overview is very important for understanding the American involvement in war as well as the American Myth of war. By looking at the myth in greater detail, we can get an insight into the message and the representation of the myth and understand how it changed and survived over the years.

2. The American Myth

Myth in general means a story but in this case we will observe myth as a collective belief that is used to justify a social institution and behavior. In his book, *American Myth, American Reality*, James Robertson states that: "Myths are not always narratives, they can be highly abstract; and complex myths, especially in literate societies like ours, are not easily separable from ideologies," (Robertson n.pag). Furthermore, he challenges "the modern assumption that the modern world is without myth" (Robertson n.pag).

The American Myth of war is represented in many spheres of life. From simple things like voting, signing up for the army, providing people with a strong reason for doing so, and finally going into the war. Americans see themselves as a democratic county, but nevertheless continues to impose that democracy on other countries under the pretext that all people should be allowed to enjoy the fruits of freedom that democracy provides. They interfere in the internal affairs of countries that do not accept the democratic system and criticize them harshly. Therefore, it makes it easier for a young man to find justification for going to war when the same reason is deeply rooted into his thinking. That is his moral obligation as an

American, a citizen of a country that is above all united for the cause to lead all others into a better future, freedom, and democracy for all.

3. New Way of Thinking and the Techniques of Studying Characters

The way Americans feel towards war has changed over the years. As time passed, some wars ended and new ones started. The enthusiasm that prevailed during the First and Second World War diminished significantly during the Vietnam War and still ongoing War on Terrorism. In the following discussion of three iconic war films, *Saving Private Ryan, the Platoon* and *Jarhead*, I will focus on the main characters, their behavior and what type of hero they represent in order to explain the change of thinking that occurred.

Canadian literary critic and theorist Herman Northrop Frye in his book *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* gives as a "formula" of literary criticism. The four essays are titled "Historical Criticism: A Theory of Modes", "Ethical Criticism: a Theory of Symbols", "Archetypal Criticism: A Theory of myths," and "Rhetorical Criticism: A Theory of Genres." The one that is needful for this research is "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes." In this essay Northrop divides character on different levels. To be exact his study is divided into five modes: mythic, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic and ironic (Northrop, n.pag). The one we will be focusing upon is low mimetic. Low mimetic hero is as Northrop states: "If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience" (Northrop, n.pag). The hero in a war movie demands to be an ordinary individual so that other people could connect with him on some level. He needs our sympathy and that feeling can be evoked only if we can relate to a character. That idea is closely connected with pathos and is essential for understanding the low mimetic hero:

> The root idea of pathos is the exclusion of an individual on our own level from a social group to which he is trying to belong. Hence the central tradition of sophisticated pathos is the study of the isolated mind, the story of how someone recognizably like ourselves is broken by a conflict between the inner and outer world, between imaginative reality and the sort of reality which is established by a social consensus. (Northrop, n.pag)

Furthermore, besides the observation of characters, a significant role goes to cause of the war and its reality, whether it is mythic or sensory. Mythic and sensory realities of war are seen in the enemy and the way in which war affects the soldier and his psyche. The distinction between these two realities will be explained further in the research by examples and comparison.

4. Films that Speak of War

In the previous section we have a brief introduction to war history and some of the techniques that will be used for observation and describing the character in the already mentioned films. All three films are works of highly praised American filmmakers that managed to shake the public and somewhat change their opinion for better or worse. Their role in the shaping of the American way of thinking is significant because the media is a powerful weapon that can shape the thoughts of multitudes of people. Also, I will focus mainly on the main characters of the films and their connection to the war to prove my point.

5. *Saving Private Ryan*

Saving Private Ryan is an American war movie directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Robert Rodat. It is set during the invasion of Normandy in World War II. The main theme

of the movie is a pursuit of the United States Army Rangers Captain John. H. Miller and his fellow soldiers for Private First Class James Francis Ryan, the last surviving brother of four soldiers. The story was inspired by the author when he saw a monument in 1994 dedicated to eight brothers who died during the American Civil War.

The movie opens with a half an hour scene which portrays the war in the most realistic sense. That is also the essential scene in the film where the film maker manages to use sound, editing and setting to grab the viewer's attention and leave him in suspense. After being released on the ground, soldiers start to move forward despite the bombs and shots fired at them. They continue to move forward even though a lot of their comrades die in a most gruesome way. The graphic portrayal of war used for that scene and throughout the movie helps to depict the horror and terror those people suffered. It is graphic due to the violence that happened in World War II. The twenty minute long battle scene, depicting brains blown out, people screaming, blood everywhere, dismemberment, decapitations and other brutalities, was necessary for the integrity of the story. In that scene we are introduced to the main character of the film, although the film does not carry his name, Captain J.H. Miller.

5.1. Captain J.H. Miller as Low Mimetic Hero

Captain J. H. Miller (Tom Hanks) was a man who served in the 2nd Rangers Battalion of the United States Army during World War II. He is introduced immediately in the opening scene of landing on Omaha Beach, where after a long and tough battle they manage to breakout. Later he finds out from his superior that three of four brothers of the Ryan family were killed and their mother received the news the same day. However, the fourth son James Francis Ryan is hoped to be alive but missing in action somewhere in Normandy. Miller, along with six other men assigned to him, receives the order to bring Ryan back home.

Throughout the search we do not find out much about Miller. He is very mysterious about his personal life and his life prior to the war. After the conflict over the release of a German soldier we finally get a glimpse at his life. He confesses to his comrades that he is a teacher at the Thomas Alva Edison High School in Addley, Pennsylvania and that he teaches English. He also tells them about his wife and his insecurity whether she will accept the new person he has become: "Back home, I tell people what I do for a living and they think well, now that figures. But over here, it's a big, a big mystery. So, I guess I've changed some. Sometimes I wonder if I've changed so much my wife is even going to recognize me, whenever it is that I get back to her" (*Saving Private Ryan*). At this point he immediately becomes a low mimetic hero, one we all can relate to, an ordinary individual who became a hero under the circumstances he is put into. At this point we can also talk about pathos and the emotions this character leaves on us. In his moment of confession he becomes vulnerable, an ordinary man who finds himself in war and takes that assignment seriously and does it with great success. His profession of teacher and a local baseball team coach before the war gives a feeling to the audience that John. H .Miller could be any of us. No exception.

5.2. Captain J.H. Miller as the Common Man

In the article, *How American Myths Are Made*, the author gives a great comment on the triumph of the common man that is portrayed by Tom Hanks by saying: "The Triumph of the Common Man is a myth deeply rooted in American culture, and unlike some popular myths, it is true enough. Tom Hanks may have played a fictional character in "*Saving Private Ryan*"--the small town American called to arms—but World War II was won by a million citizen soldiers very much like him" (Romano). I agree with this statement on every point because

only when an ordinary man does extraordinary things do Americans believe that everyone has the potential to do so.

Furthermore, he does not lack determination throughout the film whereas his soldiers begin to lose hope. Even though he does not question the war or its cause, he does question himself and his actions as a Captain: “Do you know how many men I’ve lost under my command? Ninety-four. But that means I’ve saved the lives of ten times that many, doesn’t it? Maybe even 20, right? Twenty times as many? And that’s how simple it is. That’s how you ... that’s how you rationalize making the choice between the mission and the man” (*Saving Private Ryan*). That was his way of justifying his actions. Lives lost under his command would save the lives of others. Sense of doubt whether they are doing the right thing is present throughout the film. Soldiers express their doubts more often than Miller because as their superior he is not allowed to doubt the cause he is fighting for.

5.3. Private Ryan

Moreover, not only the title of the movie but also the essential part of it, *Saving Private Ryan* happens to be a quest where many people lost their lives but many found their purpose. Hopeless at the beginning, even on a verge of quitting, Miller and his six soldiers continued to search for the only survived son of four brothers. Private Ryan represented hope, not only to his grieving mother but also to Captain Miller and his soldiers: “Ah, Ryan. I don't know anything about Ryan. I don't care. The man means nothing to me. It’s just a name. But if ... You know if going to Rumelle and finding him so that he can go home. If that earns me the right to get back to my wife, then that’s my mission” (*Saving Private Ryan*).

When Captain along with his soldiers finally finds Private Ryan he leaves the impression of a determined young man. Private Ryan is portrayed by Matt Damon. On first glance he is a

young, seemingly inexperienced soldier. But in fact, there is one universal truth when it comes to war, and that is that war knows no age. Even young boys as Ryan lost their youth and were forced to grow up faster than they should. That is why his decision doesn't come as a surprise. In the end, the Rangers and paratroopers joined forces and managed to defend the bridge at Ramelle until the U.S air and ground reinforcements drove off the Germans. Sadly, Miller was shot by the German soldier that he had set free earlier. His death, tragic as it was, did leave a mark. In his last moments Miller whispered to Ryan: "James, earn this. Earn it" and exactly those words left such an impact on that young man that he strove his whole life to earn it (*Saving Private Ryan*).

5.4. Mythic and Sensory Reality of the War

The enemy is portrayed as evil, merciless and no communication can be reached between the two opposing sides. Moreover, we find out that the enemy has no sense of compassion and is willing to betray even the ones who saved their life. For example, when the German soldier shoots Captain Miller, although he had freed him when all the others agreed that he should be executed. The enemy, incapable of any good, hides his true intentions and no communication is possible. He is portrayed as evil while Americans are portrayed as fair and good. That clear distinction between two opposing sides brings us to the mythic reality of war. Negotiation is also impossible and therefore force and deception are the sole means of communicating.

The opposite of mythic reality is sensory reality and the shift between those realities is not easy but it is possible. In this film there is a clear line between mythic and sensory reality of war. Sensory reality occurs when Captain Miller recognizes that war involves human beings killing human beings. Although he tries to avoid killing at any price he still looks for justification in shots he had to fire and people who died under his command. The fact that he

even knows the approximate number of soldiers who died under his command shows us how much it is stuck in his head.

The film has gained many awards and was praised by critics and the audience for its graphic portrayal of the battles and the realistic portrayal of war. It is also listed as one of the best films in the epic films genre. Other directors also praise Steven Spielberg for this achievement but nevertheless some claimed it as a war promoting film. The continuation of worshiping World War II as the good war that contributed to public approval of conflict that followed in American history.



Fig. 1. *Saving Private Ryan. Photograph. IMDb. IMDb.com, 29 Dec. 2010. Web. 26 Aug. 2014. <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm1597017600/tt0120815?ref_=ttmi_mi_all_sf_9>.*

6. *Platoon*

Platoon is an American war movie written and directed by Oliver Stone. It is also the first movie of Stone's Vietnam War trilogy, followed by *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Heaven & Earth*. Briefly, *Platoon* is a story about a young college dropout, Chris Taylor, who volunteers for combat duty in Vietnam. It also has references to Oliver Stone's life and

experiences in Vietnam, since it is an autobiographical movie. The analysis of Lee's movie will show that the first thing lost is innocence.

6.1. Chris Taylor as Low Mimetic Hero

Chris Taylor is the main character of this film and the narrator. He is portrayed by the actor Charlie Sheen. As a college dropout he decided to volunteer for his country in the Vietnam War. Although scared and uncertain of what to expect at the beginning, he felt proud for volunteering for his country. Eventually his view on things changes as he changes. "Somebody once wrote: 'Hell is the impossibility of reason.' That's what this place feels like. Hell. I hate it already, and it's only been a week" (*Platoon*). This is the statement that opens up a movie narrated by the main character Chris Taylor. It represents the first impression that the war leaves on him. He is very unsatisfied with the way other members of the platoon treat him, and as he is worn down by the exhausting conditions and his reasons for heroic volunteering begin to fade. His first moment of breaking is in the Vietnamese village. He is appalled by the way his fellow soldiers treat villagers, beating one of them to death, killing them and even trying to rape them. In that moment his fantasy-like vision of war begins to fade and he transforms from a passive to an active character. The violence of war was starting to change him and his behavior.

Given these facts, we describe Chris Taylor as a low mimetic hero. He is an ordinary, average human being, one of us. He demands our sympathy because he is on our own level of experience. When talking about a low mimetic hero we are dealing with the morals of an individual, and pathos, an appeal to the audience's emotions. That helps us to better understand the hero, in this case Chris Taylor, his inner urges and reasons for going to war. But, in all fairness to this film, it is very hard to talk about a hero in particular because in my

opinion there is no specified hero in this movie. Every man is for himself, even though they are in this war together. Chris Taylor simply delivers the story to us from his point of view and shows us the true nature of war and what people are capable of when they start to lose their heads.

6.2. The Mythic and Sensory Reality of War

There is a clear line between the mythic and sensory reality war in this movie. For example, the enemy is portrayed as evil and demonic. The enemy fights in this war with the same devotion as the Americans and does not stop at anything. However, their enemies are not only the Vietnamese but also themselves. No possibility of reaching an agreement and the mutual disputes of Sergeants lead to many conflicts and even death. For instance, when Sergeant Bob Barnes kills Sergeant Elias on one of the patrols but tells the others that Elias was killed by the enemy. In addition, Chris Taylor later shoots Barnes and kills him in anger over the death of Elias. In moments like this the evil character of people is revealed. It has nothing to do with the war or the situation, just pure evil and hatred. In Sergeant Bob's case we can most certainly talk about the envy he had toward Elias.

However, it is mandatory to mention the cause of war. On the one hand, it is destiny and obligation to serve your country, to give something in return. This is what Chris thought when he volunteered for the war. It is a common thing even nowadays for young people to volunteer because of their low social status, no schooling or just running away from problems: "Two years' high school's about it. Maybe if they're lucky, a job waiting for them back in a factory. But most of 'em got nothing. They're poor. They're the unwanted. Yet they're fighting for our society and our freedom. It's weird, isn't it?" (*Platoon*). He thought that he was giving something back to his country for a greater good. Later on his opinion changes as

he witnessed the true horrors of war. Then comes the sensory side of the war. All the violence he witnessed, killing of the innocent, various diseases, and lack of morality, betrayal, terror and inhumanity convinced him that this was not the way he wants to repay his country. He starts to loathe that he is able to kill his man in command, doing this that early on only horrified him. All that horror is neither worth his ideals, nor his or someone else's life.

At the end of the movie, there is a picture of a post-apocalyptic world. Chris wakes up after narrowly surviving the battle, and all he sees is a quiet landscape, bodies of dead soldiers lying around waiting to be buried, surviving soldiers who are lost in desolated and demolished ground. The direction of this film left nothing to the imagination. A great effort had been made to make this film feel so realistic. The film showed the harsh reality of the Vietnam War and the physical and metal trauma it left on the people who served in it.

"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" (*Platoon*). The film ends with this statement and the point of the Vietnam War cannot have been said any clearer. This film captures the experience of Vietnam most accurately and realistically, blending the political and the personal and making this one of the first truly antiwar movies. It focuses on the men who fought the battles, suffered the wounds and lost their innocence.

There is a great comment in the article How American Myths are Made: "Later, better movies, including Stone's overwrought but masterful "Platoon" (1986), captured the alienation of the soldiers and the futility of the war. But Vietnam remains troublesome in the American psyche; it's as if we cannot reconcile the war with our mythic (and heroic) self-image" (Thomas, Romano) I agree with that statement, especially with the part that says how Americans remain troubled with this war because they cannot reconcile with it. On the one

hand there is the heroic self-image of American nation and on the other the clear aftermath of the Vietnam War that encouraged people to protest in the name of "unnecessary wars".



Fig. 2. *Platoon. Photograph. IMDb. IMDb.com, 29 Dec. 2010. Web. 26 Aug. 2014. <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm2660271104/tt0091763?ref_=ttmi_mi_all_sf_7>.*

7. *Jarhead*

Many films have been made with a harsh and clear antiwar stand. One of them is *Jarhead* and it stands out in the crowd of battle pumped films as the one with a passive plot where the character of people is revealed and then the reality of today's warfare is best depicted.

7.1. The Impact of War on Terrorism

The war in Afghanistan and Iraq are the starting point of Anti-Americanism. The Anti-Americanism in these countries has risen as a result of American strikes that were started by

President George W. Bush and continued by President Barack Obama. The United States is considered as the enemy and the Anti-Americanism has provoked much criticism. Public opinion of the United States has changed drastically since US interventions. Today, the opinion is mainly negative and people see these interventions as mistakes and think that things could have been done differently. The media has contributed to the increase of negative the attitude toward warfare in the Gulf Wars.

7.2. The Film: a Gulf War Memoir

Jarhead is defined as "a member of the United States Marine Corps" (Webster, Meriam). The film begins with a narration of Anthony Swofford, portrayed by Jake Gylllenhaal, as he talks about a soldier who whatever he does in life always remembers his rifle and remains that same person he became in the army: "A man fires a rifle for many years, and he goes to war. And afterward he turns the rifle in at the armory, and he believes he's finished with the rifle. But no matter what else he might do with his hands, love a woman, build a house, change his son's diaper; his hands remember the rifle" (*Jarhead*). This 2005 film is based on a Gulf War memoir of Anthony Swofford *Jarhead*.

7.3. Anthony Swofford as a Low Mimetic Hero

Anthony "Swoff" Swofford left college and joined the Marine Corps training. He also states many times that his father and grandfather both fought in Vietnam and he somehow feels obliged to continue in their steps. At first he does not get along with his fellow soldiers. He struggles to find friends and finds it very difficult to cope. Only after Marine Staff Sergeant Sykes recognizes his potential and orders him to attend a Scout Sniper course did he

find himself. After training he becomes a sniper and is paired with his roommate Troy as his spotter. Before he finished his Scout Sniper course Swoff is reticent and does everything in his power to avoid responsibilities. Not long after, he is dispatched to the Persian Gulf as a part of Operation Desert Shield.

Swoff is a low mimetic hero or a low mimetic character at least for it is difficult to talk about these characters as heroes because no real war action happens throughout the film. Soldiers go day to day through the same old dull routine. They find themselves so bored with repetitive actions of training, hydration, waiting, patrolling the area, and dehydrating that at the end of the day they just talk about their cheating girlfriends and wives waiting for them at home. They are eager for combat but the hero sees little of the combat and his platoon suffers no casualties. There is constant waiting for something to happen and you can almost hear the irony in narrator's tone of voice as the days pass: "Suggested techniques for the Marine to use in the avoidance of boredom and loneliness: Masturbation. Rereading of letters from unfaithful wives and girlfriends. Cleaning your rifle. Further masturbation. Rewiring Walkman. Arguing about religion and meaning of life" (*Jarhead*). Even though Swoff does not prove himself as a hero he is a character we can relate to. He is an ordinary individual who finds himself in war after not knowing whether or not to continue college. Even though he never pulled a trigger against the enemy his vision of war is what defines him as a good soldier. At times he was almost certain that he had lost his mind: "For most problems the Marine is issued a solution. If ill, go to sickbay. If wounded, call a Corpsman. If dead, report to graves registration. If losing his mind, however, no standard solution exists" (*Jarhead*). The closest thing Swoof ever came to pulling the trigger was when he and Troy were finally given a combat mission. They were desperate to make a kill but were denied by the officer in charge. Instead, their whole mission was bombed by U.S. warplanes. They were devastated and broke down immediately. From the moment they step into training they are hungry for

war. All they can think of is real action, killing and proving themselves. Not one bullet is shot towards the enemy till the end of the film. No casualties, no action, no heroism. In a perfect world people would be happy with that outcome, but not the soldiers who were pumped up with war heroism and standing up for one's country before they even touched the enemies ground.

7.4. Atypical hero Sergeant Sykes

Another interesting character is Sergeant Sykes who is the total opposite of Swoff. He is a marine "lifer" and his approach is very rigorous and strict and sometimes even merciless. What is interesting about this character is that even at his only time of weakness when he confesses to Swoff what kind of life he could have had if he wasn't a Marine he ends his speech with: "Do you know why I don't? Because I love this job. I thank God for every f***ing day he gives me in the corps, oorah" (*Jarhead*). With that statement he goes out of the frame of a typical hero who in times of weakness reconsiders his life choices and in most cases regrets them. No, he is grateful for his job and would not change it for anything.

7.5. Unusual War Film

For the aforementioned reasons, there is no doubt that this is an unusual war movie. One of the few where the hero sees almost no combat and his whole platoon makes it out alive. But exactly that was the reason that this move managed to portray the already controversial war in Iraq. Once the combat action is put aside what we get is the psychology of each of the characters and the real struggle for a soldier in Iraq. Accordingly, we have a palette of human characteristics portrayed by soldiers in a platoon. The soldiers are depicted as unintelligent,

somewhat dull and pathetic most of the time. What they lack are all of the features that previous generations of soldiers had rooted in them: valor, companionship, courage, and tradition. *Jarhead* gives us real state of affairs in nowadays armies. The characteristics just mentioned are completely opposite to those of the soldiers who fought in WW I, WW II and the Vietnam War. Soldiers in *Jarhead* lose their minds after a few weeks of endless repetition, think about their cheating wives and girlfriends, and think more about firing the bullet than about the person standing in front of them. What are inevitable are the consequences. Even after that short period spent in Iraq with no casualties or real war action, the consequence of war still exist. This is present in such a subtle way but all these characters will be scarred for life. We even get proof of that when they come home. They are dehumanized not much by the battle but by the process it takes to become a soldier. Once they come home they realize that Iraq has its cost. Without doubt, the consequences are numerous and catastrophic.

7.6. The Mythic and Sensory Reality of War

The mythic side and sensory reality of war are also present. Once again the enemy is portrayed as evil and demonic. This time Americans see themselves as the makers of peace, and that peace will be democracy once the Taliban organization is chased into a corner. We do not get much of the enemy in this film, probably because of the passivity of the film alone and no real combat scenes except for the end of the movie when the Marines are dispatched to the Saudi-Kuwaiti border. Casualties are only taken when fire from an A-10 close air support aircraft hits U.S. vehicles. Interestingly, when Swoff and Troy are sent on a mission at the end of the film, Swoff, finally sees how Iraqi people actually look when sees an Iraqi target at

gunpoint. The fact that he does not even know how his enemy looks like gives the impression of how much he knows about that war and what is he fighting for.



Fig. 3. *Jarhead.* Photograph. *IMDb. IMDb.com, 1 Nov. 2005. Web. 8 Sep. 2014.* *<http://www.imdb.com/media/rm1505138944/tt0418763?ref_=ttmi>*.

CONCLUSION

American attitudes toward war have been shaped by American involvement in World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War and the still ongoing War on Terrorism. A more thorough knowledge of historic events leads to a better understanding the changes within the American society that led to a changed perspective on war and warfare. The great enthusiasm for fighting and being a soldier from World War I changed greatly after the Vietnam War and attitudes continues to change even more drastically today during the War on Terrorism.

The changes in the American views on war are well represented in the three iconic war films: *Saving Private Ryan, the Platoon* and *Jarhead*. The American cinematography has had a great impact on the public view in America as well as worldwide. In addition, the films have greatly contributed to maintaining the American war myth and its representation. Along with the American dream, the American war myth is deeply rooted in every American mind.

The Myth of War, aimed at the implementation of democracy, is the cause of almost every American involvement in war. Imposing that same democracy and its ideals is considered as the only correct decision. That is why every American, regardless of status, race or education, has a chance to serve his/her country in its greater cause. Then, an ordinary individual can prove himself/herself as extraordinary by taking part in war.

In *Saving Private Ryan* that Myth is represented by The Triumph of the Common Man. Captain J. H. Miller is an ordinary individual who represents the common man. Every American male can recognize himself in this character. Precisely that is essential for the survival of the Myth. The Myth of the Common Man is perhaps the strongest and the safest way of reviving the myth. This myth dates way back, even back to the Revolution, and will stay in the psyche of every American as long as every individual thinks he/she has the potential for greatness. This kind of thinking is present not only in the films we mentioned but

in every form of media, every politician and elsewhere. Its propaganda is so large that it will probably never cease to exist, and that is why the revival of this myth is unquestionable.

The same goes for the main character in the film *Platoon*. He too represents the triumph of the common man, but Oliver Stone made an excellent antiwar film. Even though the Vietnam War was initially presented as "the good war" with propaganda and earlier films, the fact is that the United States went into that that war unprepared. Wrong military tactics, armed forces that were not suited, unfamiliarity of the country and its conditions led to America's withdrawal from Vietnam. By the time the war ended more than sixty thousand American soldiers were killed and many more suffered wounding and posttraumatic stress disorder. Oliver Stone managed to capture the real message and despair that war brought to people and soldiers involved in it.

The antiwar films reached their peak in last couple of years while the war on terrorism is still ongoing. Public criticism is more and more active and heard addressing the problems of economics, morality and other questions. Even though the United States withdrew their forces at one point further conflicts forced president Obama to reengage in Iraq once again. A decision like this one faces strong public disapproval by people who believe that terrorism cannot be brought to an end by military means and that resources are wasted as well as innocent lives.

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