WILL THIS PICTURE HELP WIN THE WAR? A TEXTUAL THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF RECRUITING THEMES IN GUADALCANAL DIARY

A Thesis by
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I have examined the final copy of this Thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Mark, for pushing me out the door to do this and being behind me every step of the way — I love you.

To my parents who instilled in me a love for education.

To my other family and friends without whom this would not have been possible.
Every nation at war seeks to instill in its people two things: unity of purpose and strength of purpose. It seeks general accord as to the objectives of the war and as to the methods used in the conduct of the war. It seeks sufficient strength of purpose to endure with fortitude and understanding reverses and sacrifices necessary to the winning of the ultimate victory.

—Walter Wanger, 1942
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ABSTRACT

This study is a textual thematic analysis that sought to identify recruiting themes embedded in a World War II combat film, *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943). The film was chosen on the basis of its representativeness of the combat films of the era. The study was completed through a deconstruction of the film, identifying scenes that contained, either manifest or latent, recruiting appeals. The appeals were those Padilla and Laner’s 2001 study identified as the predominant themes used in 1942 recruiting posters. Additionally, the study examined the film using Carey’s (1989) theory of a ritual view of communication, a view that focuses on the role of communication acts in the maintenance of society over time. An historical context addressing the relationship between the federal government and Hollywood, and the Selective Service, voluntary enlistments and the armed forces, is included for clarification purposes.

The film was found to exhibit both manifest and latent references to the four recruiting themes, which included a gain in status, recognition of patriotic behavior, adventure and challenge, and traditions and honor of the military. Further research is indicated in the areas of feature films and embedded recruiting messages, other forms of popular media during the war and recruiting messages, and the relationship between the draft and voluntary enlistments during war eras.
Military history interests me because my family has a long history of service in the armed forces, from my great-grandfather who served in World War I, to my son who serves in the Army (he enlisted in June 2004) during this “war on terror.” My son entered the military voluntarily, but many of those who went before him did not. Voluntary enlistments and the draft enjoyed a unique relationship during World War II, and popular culture reflected the experiences of American soldiers during the war in a variety of ways. As I observed the process my son went through in making his decision, I became interested in how recruiting messages reflected the attitudes of “average” Americans, and how the messages might have been constructed during World War II.

The events of September 11, 2001, are often compared to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and I wondered if the recruiting messages used following Pearl Harbor included content that drew on cultural responses to the attack. *Guadalcanal Diary* was released nearly two years after that event, but before the outcome of the war was certain. The Allied forces (especially the Americans) had suffered great setbacks in the European and Pacific theaters of the war in 1943, and this film was released at approximately the halfway point of the war. I believe classic films have much to tell us about the eras in which they were produced, about the culture, societal beliefs and values, and the nominal events of the period.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Not until Hollywood enlisted as an active agent in the Second World War did the ephemeral popular art dedicated to “mere entertainment” suddenly and seriously matter — to the War Department, to the Office of War Information, to spectators made sensitive to the educational import and ideological impact of the movies.

—Thomas Doherty, Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II, p. 5

When we think of World War II and recruitment, we often fail to realize there were deeper military concerns than enlistments. We think of the lines of men and women who rushed to military recruitment stations immediately following Pearl Harbor, but often forget about the draft. Manpower considerations for the war effort were an ongoing concern for President Roosevelt and his administration, particularly Henry Stimson, secretary of war, Gen. Lewis Hershey, director of Selective Service, and Paul McNutt, chairman of the War Manpower Commission. When President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9279 in December 1942, active recruiting on the part of the army was virtually halted as the order stated that no male between the ages of 18 and 37 “shall be inducted into the enlisted personnel of the armed forces (including reserve components), except, under provisions of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940” (2). However, while this order stated that all the armed services were beholden to the draft for members, the Navy and Army Air Force were granted the right to continue recruiting on a limited basis (Flynn, 1985). Therefore, from early 1943 on, the government faced difficulties with recruiting, as well as in maintaining the morale of those subject to the draft.
From November 1940, when the first men were inducted under the Selective
Service Act, to December 1945, more than 9.9 million men were drafted into the armed
forces of the United States (Hershey, 1948). By the time Japan surrendered in 1945,
more than 16.1 million men and women had served the United States in uniform
worldwide (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2001). Thus, the need to build and maintain
high morale for the military, for those who were serving as well as those at home, is
evident. The American government needed help in keeping up the morale of its citizens,
and it found help in Hollywood. Hollywood producers and directors produced movies
throughout the war that played to packed houses. In fact, 80 to 90 million viewers
regularly attended the cinema each week during the 1930s and 1940s (Doherty, 1993;

The movies that played during the war often embodied themes such as sacrifice
for the greater good, support of the war effort in general, and recognition of the “evils” of
fascism and Nazism, as well as the “old-fashioned” themes of romance, family, and hard
work (Fyne, 1996). But this thesis is concerned with another possibility — that
Hollywood films may have reinforced the military’s efforts to recruit men and women to
serve, and served as a source of encouragement for those who were drafted. While many
studies have focused on these other themes and values, little has been done to study the
recruitment and military values and themes embedded within these films. Influenced by
Carey’s (1989) approach that favors a ritual view over a transmission view of
communication, this research involved a textual thematic analysis of a popular
Hollywood World War II battlefield movie, Guadalcanal Diary. According to a ritual
view of communication, the role of media in reflecting, reinforcing, and relating cultural
ideologies is more important than simply the transmission of messages (Carey). Released in October 1943, approximately 10 months after President Roosevelt signed the executive order halting enlistments, the movie played at a time when the United States was still struggling in the war against Japan. The government was also working to meet military manpower needs at this time. Hershey, McNutt, and Stimson had conflicting views on draft deferments for age, job production, and marital status, but it was nonetheless necessary to meet the military’s manpower requirements.

This study seeks to determine if this film, a film that is representative of other war films of the era, is constructed in the same fashion as recruiting messages. As motion pictures were one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the late 1930s and 1940s, the value of the attention they brought upon the efforts of the armed forces cannot be overlooked. To provide a context for Guadalcanal Diary, the rest of this chapter provides information on the war movies produced by Hollywood, a discussion of the theory that influenced its analysis, and a description of the methodology used to conduct the study.

**Motion Pictures During World War II**

Film has captured the imagination of the public since the early American film industry made fictional films its production priority in 1904 (Library of Congress, 1999). With the appearance of nickelodeons in 1905, which featured movie shows all day, fictional films quickly outran the actuality films that had been standard fare at vaudeville theaters (Library of Congress). Men, women, and children have found motion picture theaters a comfortable and welcoming place to while away a few hours, enjoying an opportunity to escape from reality, however briefly, since the heyday of the grand
theaters in the 1920s. In addition, as Doherty (1993) points out, war and cinema have enjoyed a close relationship since the earliest days of the industry, although films are not always accurate depictions of history because of the “spectacular imagery, the vicarious thrill of combat, the titillating horror of death and destruction” (2). Regardless of the history of the industry, or the nature or format of the films that came out of World War II, the images, impressions, and ideals that were exhibited on the big screen from 1942 to 1945 have influenced and affected generations of Americans.

In the 60 years since the war ended, extensive research has been dedicated to both the films that were made during World War II (see, for example: Doherty, 1993; Fyne, 1994; Jones & McClure, 1973; Shindler, 1979; Shull & Wilt, 1996), and the genre of war/combat films more specifically (see, for example: Basinger, *World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, 2003). Scholars have undertaken studies that seek to understand in greater detail a single film of the era (for example: Alpers, 1998; Norden, 1995; Richards, 1995); others have worked to include exhaustive filmographies and improve our understanding of what filmmaking entailed during the war (for example: Fyne, 1994; Shull & Wilt, 1996). Still others seek to enlighten us as to the history and timelines of the films that were produced and distributed in that era (Jacobs, 1967).

Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series has undergone intense scrutiny, because it was originally intended to explain the reasons we were engaged in the war, first to the military and then to the civilian populations. Gen. George C. Marshall was a fan of Capra, and asked him to speak for the “John Does and Mrs. Smiths of America” (Rollins, 1996, 81) during the war crisis. President Roosevelt often referenced the common citizens or those who were overlooked during his Fireside Chats, and Marshall felt Capra
would be especially effective at reaching the common man (Rollins). Capra’s early films, particularly *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), were indicative of his understanding of who Americans were and the heritage Americans shared. This American heritage is exhibited in the fact that the individual plays a key role in the series, but is still absolutely a member of the society and culture that makes up “America.” This leads to potential conflict as group dominance may overtake the individual, as German (1990) points out. She explains that, for Capra, “the threat of group dominance is answered by the self-reliance and energy of courageous men and women” (240). German states that the series was “designed to indoctrinate” (237) the servicemen in training. President Roosevelt found the first film in the series, *Prelude to War*, released to the public in 1943, so powerful that he insisted, “Every man, woman, and child in the world must see this film” (German, 237).

In addition to the need filled by the film for the armed forces, that of “indoctrinating” service members “concerning the events leading up to the war” (German, 1990, 237), the film was also a rallying cry to the rest of the nation to come together to fight the evil that awaited both east and west (Rollins, 1996). However, despite the support of the president and Gen. Marshall, Capra had difficulties with other members of the administration. Lowell Mellett, director of the Bureau of Motion Pictures within the Office of War Information and the chief liaison with Hollywood, was sure the film would leave audiences “in a state of ‘nervous hysteria’” (Koppes & Black, 1987, 122). Mellett was trying hard to win the cooperation of Hollywood, but Hollywood also had close ties to the branches of the service. Sometimes directors and screenwriters were able to bypass the “censorship” of the OWI by going directly to the Army or Navy.
Mellett had carefully cultivated the cooperation he enjoyed with Hollywood, and he did not want the Army to unravel it (Koppes & Black).

Other films that came out of Hollywood, while not as obviously working to establish opinions and beliefs in American society, certainly played their own roles in helping to establish and maintain public opinion about the war, even before the war began. Warner Brothers released *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* in May 1939, a film that was, if not interventionist in tone, at least critical of the German regime (Rostron, 2002). The Warner studios had close experience with the brutality of the Nazis when its German sales representative was brutally murdered by Nazi thugs (Rostron). That may explain the studio’s more aggressive and controversial action. Some of the predominant themes that would show up in films made following the attack on Pearl Harbor showed up in the advertising for *Confessions*. Rostron describes one ad that appealed directly to the patriotism of the potential audience members: “You won’t dare see this picture if you take orders from them!” (89, emphasis in original).

Warner Brothers actually touted the propaganda value of the film, and encouraged theater owners to display proudly the letters that would surely come from their audiences, thanking them for being brave enough to show the film and expose the truth about the Nazi threat (Rostron). The true value of the film, however, was probably not so much in the advertising. Rather, it was the fact that it was the first film to step up and respond to the political tensions present in 1939 (Jacobs, 1967). Not only that, but it clearly explained the spread of ideologies held by the Nazi party and warned directly of the dangers of a Fascist Fifth Column rising up and challenging democracy (Jacobs).
In the summer of 1941, another interventionist film, *Sergeant York*, opened in New York (Alpers, 1998). This movie, unlike *Confessions*, was about a real-life World War I hero. The true-life Sergeant Alvin York was drafted in 1917, and originally registered as a conscientious objector. Reassured when he read a Bible verse in Matthew that said to “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s,” he joined up and served in World War I. He killed 25 Germans, captured a machine-gun nest, took more than 130 German prisoners of war, and, nearly single-handedly, destroyed the enemy’s position at the Battle of Argonne (Jacobs). When he returned from the war in 1919, he was awarded the Medal of Honor (Sergeant York Patriotic, 2000). When the film was released less than six months before Pearl Harbor, it was getting difficult for Americans to maintain a sense of isolationism.

Poland fell to Hitler in 1939, France in 1940, and the British faced the escape from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain in the few short months from May to August of the same year. The Lend-Lease Act was passed in 1940, providing desperately needed assistance to the British, and in September of that year, Congress enacted the first peacetime draft in U.S. history when it passed the Selective Service and Training Act. Isolationists were having a difficult time in the debate about war (Lyons, 2004). After the release of *Sergeant York*, York was invited to the White House with the star of the movie, Gary Cooper, where they visited with the president after a screening of the film (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996).

Once the door was open to interventionist themes from Hollywood, 1940 saw the release of several more films that demonized the fascists in Europe. One of the most controversial at the time of its release, joining *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, was Charlie
Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*. Fyne (1994) describes the film, released in October 1940, as “a daring film that indicted Nazi Germany for a variety of offenses” (25). Chaplin was determined to go ahead with the picture in the face of severe criticism because he believed that “Hitler must be laughed at” (Koppes & Black, 1987, 31). Chaplin ended the movie with a four-minute speech in which he shared his belief in humanity — in sharp contrast to the rest of the picture — that agitated many critics (Jacobs, 1967), but mainly on aesthetic grounds (Koppes & Black). Regardless of the complaints of the critics, Chaplin’s first talking picture was a triumph — politically, professionally, and financially, bringing in more than $5 million worldwide and earning Chaplin a profit of $1.5 million (Koppes & Black).

After the strike against Pearl Harbor, Hollywood joined the fight against Japanese tyranny. Filmmakers joined the recruits who lined the sidewalks outside military recruiting stations, as more than 7,000 workers from Hollywood, approximately one-third the normal number of Hollywood employees, joined the military during the war (Doherty, 1993). While some films were in the works before war was declared in the United States, Hollywood joined the rest of the country in moving from a peacetime pace and product, to a wartime pace and product. Major studios in the United States released 493 films in 1942 and 55 percent of them, or 269, carried messages relevant to the war effort (Shull & Wilt, 1996). In 1943, the total number of films released by the major studios was down by nearly 100 (397), but the number of war-relevant films remained nearly the same at 252, just 17 fewer than 1942 (Shull & Wilt). The government rationed film celluloid and studios were judicious in their choice of topics, still producing a significant number of films, but fewer than they had before the war.
The Army remained a topic in the movies throughout the war years, but was joined by other relevant topics depending on the year. In 1942, for instance, a number focused on shortages of food, supplies or other goods, and included spy- or sabotage-based storylines and references to Nazis. By 1945, women in the armed forces became a popular topic along with the Japanese, who were once again featured in war films, after having been temporarily put aside in 1943 and 1944 (Shull & Wilt, 1996).

A film released in 1943, familiar to most of us, that ended the year ranked seventh at the box office, and won an Oscar for best picture, was *Casablanca* (Nachbar, 2000). Nachbar describes the *Casablanca* period as one in which Americans generally could not explain why they were fighting the war. Although Americans knew whom they were fighting, the primary explanation for the war was the attack on Pearl Harbor. These films helped America recognize that more was at stake than the material goods that were rationed and the shortages its citizens faced. Nachbar (2000) points out that Ilsa remarks to Rick on their last day in Paris that she loves him “so much” and hates the war “so much.” This was a way to remind viewers that the war had put an end to the past and the past was happy, and if Americans wanted to continue the best parts of the past into the future, they must fight (Nachbar). As it was still early in the war, and the U.S. had seen significant defeats at the hands of both the Japanese and the Germans, the message of self-sacrifice found in *Casablanca* would have been readily accepted in 1943 (Nachbar).

Gray (2004) takes a look at one of the lesser-known films to come out of the war, *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943), which developed themes similar to those in *Casablanca*. He states at the outset that while films made during the war were intended as entertainment, they were certainly also vehicles of propaganda. Because of the many
layers of censorship in place over the traditional news outlets, Hollywood could not know much about what was really happening in combat (Gray). When a German U-boat torpedoes a merchant ship in the film, its intrepid survivors (after their rescue and return to New York) sign on to a Liberty ship (Gray). They have their revenge on the Germans later in the film when they sink a sub and deliver their cargo to Murmansk (Gray). Again, the theme of self-sacrifice is evident. The crew could have chosen to stay in New York after the first attack, but were willing to sign on to another ship and complete the “mission.”

A major concern discussed in the literature about films made during the war is that of what Alpers calls a “democratic military.” Segregation was still firmly in place across society during the war, and the services were segregated as well. Hollywood depicted a more integrated version of the services than was a reality. Irving Berlin’s *This is the Army* (1943) drew on the popularity of heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and portrays black soldiers and white soldiers associating with each other; the reality was rigid segregation (Culbert, 2000).

Other films worked to make the military units in the films more accurately reflect the composition of the country (an example is *Air Force* [1943]), and films often cast a military unit with a boy from Brooklyn (often Italian), a Jew, a Latino, and an assorted group of Caucasians that might include a Southerner, a guy from New England or a Midwesterner with a Slavic name (Alpers). Shull and Wilt (1996) describe this as a way to make a statement about national solidarity; however, as hard as Hollywood worked to show the “egalitarian ranks of the armed forces” (174), filmmakers only occasionally included African Americans in the ranks of those who were fighting fascism (Cripps &
Culbert, 1979). One notable exception to this is Alfred Hitchcock’s *Lifeboat* (1944). Of the eight survivors from a ship that was sunk by a German U-boat, one who plays a key role in the film is African American (MacGowan & Hitchcock, 1944). Other exceptions include *Bataan* (1943) and *Crash Dive* (1943), which features a heroic black cook (Shull & Wilt).

While a majority of the films released in the United States were concerned with an American point of view, a small number of films released during the war took the viewer across the Atlantic to spend two hours with our Allies, particularly the British. MGM’s *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), which won the Oscar for best picture in 1942, tells the story of a stalwart English woman, played by Greer Garson, whose husband is protecting and defending England. While he is in the service, she “comforts children in a bomb shelter and captures an enemy parachutist” (Turner, 2004).

It was important that Americans, who were not experiencing the pain of direct assaults of the German military upon their homeland, be reminded that they were fighting to help their brothers across the Atlantic. Humphrey Jennings evoked great passion and sympathy with his 1943 British film titled *Fires Were Started*. Jennings was particularly influenced to make this film as he watched the response of Londoners during the Blitz (Richards, 1995). Also released in the United States, it was a story of British firefighters who were defiant in the face of the German Blitz in 1940 (Richards). This film, as did others previously described, emphasized the need for sacrifice if the war was to be won (Richards). Jennings accomplished this through the use of real firemen, real locations, and authentic episodes in the film (Richards).
While *Fires* was the recipient of critical accolades (Richards, 1995), another British film released in 1943 received significant attention of another sort. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* is known as the film Winston Churchill wanted to ban (Chapman, 1995). Colonel Blimp was a cartoon character, created in 1934 by the New Zealand-born, left-wing David Low, meant to satirize the British establishment. By using Blimp as the main character in the film, the producers intended to “urge commitment to the philosophy of total war,” rather than playing it safe (Chapman, 25). Chapman theorizes that Churchill’s opposition to the film did not stem from the fact that it encouraged total warfare; Churchill was in support of that. Rather, Chapman suggests that it was the difference in views toward propaganda. Churchill held the belief that propaganda should “unite the people and promote national unity” (Chapman, 50), or maybe it was that Churchill could see a little of himself in the character (Chapman).

As the war ran into its third year and Americans began to become somewhat war-weary, Hollywood worked to incorporate themes that would encourage the welcoming of war veterans, including those who were disabled from their injuries. During the first four decades of movie production, two themes regarding men who were physically disabled were common: either they were restored to the ranks of the able-bodied through some cure (usually a “miracle”), or they were vengeful characters whose quests often ended in tragedy (Norden, 1995). The advent of World War II changed those traditional characterizations, even while having to resolve the paradox of prescribing masculine characteristics and heroism on “symbolically castrated, ‘feminized’ males” (Norden, 50). *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, released in 1944, was based on the story of the raid on Tokyo led by Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle. One of the members of the group was shot down and
lost a leg in the mission, which is the basis of the movie. Norden points out that Thirty Seconds serves as both a prototype for disability-related films and as a means of discerning the mentality of Hollywood at the time.

After the war’s conclusion, several films addressed the issues faced by disabled serviceman, as well as those faced by all the soldiers, sailors, and airmen who returned from the brutality of war. Faced with discharges from the Army and Navy of more than 1.5 million veterans monthly after V-J Day (Hershey, 1948), Hollywood changed its focus to the reintegration of those millions of returning servicemen and the readjustment that would be required by American society, especially women (Gerber, 1994). An example is the 1946 release Best Years of Our Lives. Harold Russell, a WWII paratroop sergeant who lost both hands in a demolition accident (Harold Russell, 2005), played alongside Dana Andrews and Fredric March in a film that seems, in a single blow, “to fulfill the promise of Hollywood’s wartime training” (Doherty, 1993) and, indeed, “broke new ground in its use of a severely disabled actor” (Gerber, 546).

This was a significant step when one considers that there was a widespread assumption that veterans, and especially disabled veterans, could disrupt society considerably (Gerber, 1994). Because of the “pervasive anxieties” of Americans about returning veterans, films like this one contain “suggestions that are sharply at variance with its positive symbolic moments” (Gerber, 551-552). While this may be the case, and there were surely multiple concerns and fears facing both returning soldiers and those who had served on the home front, others argue that the film was meant to represent the reality of what returning veterans might face, and to touch the emotions that would be
stirred by the disruptions in family life, adjustment to loss of limbs, and the disruption of a marriage (Manvell, 1974).

Only a few scholars have studied shorts, newsreels, and “B” movies released during the war. Many westerns were produced as “B” pictures to accompany the “A” films that were the main attraction, and because of this, they were able to avoid the conflicts between the Office of War Information, the Office of Censorship and Hollywood (Loy, 2003). In addition, these films rarely played at first-run movie houses; instead, they often went to second- and third-run urban theaters, or rural and small-town locations (Loy). These films quickly incorporated war-related themes as screenwriters drew on events on the world stage for their storylines (Loy). Loy describes three ways B-westerns included war topics. First, they may have referenced the war only casually, through a song or a sign in a store window. Others used a more developed plot line that might include “a Hitler-like villain” who “exercised dictatorial control over frontier towns” (199). Finally, there were a handful of B-westerns that wove war-related elements into the plot and action. One distinction between westerns with war-related themes and war-themed A-features was that the westerns included no combat scenes. Rather, the cowboy heroes were concerned with the home front, looked for spies and saboteurs, encouraged involvement in the war effort, showed anxiety over war production, and acted as a rationing exemplar (Loy). These films were aimed at juvenile audiences and worked in a way that helped children understand the war and “made them feel a part of it” (Loy, 200).

Shull and Wilt (2004) have put together the most complete study on wartime cartoon shorts, and their book includes an extensive filmography of animated short films
released by the major studios during the war years. With the recognition that while World War II research continues to grow and is extensive, and the “rigorous historical examination” of motion pictures during the era is still somewhat limited (Shull & Wilt, 2004), such studies contribute to the scholarly understanding of the war. The seven major studios in existence at the time produced the vast majority of commercially released shorts (Shull & Wilt, 2004). These films were produced for audiences of all ages, unlike A-features.

Shull and Wilt (2004) found in their study that war-related animated shorts in 1942 most often portrayed the U.S. military, as opposed to pushing war bonds, victory gardens, recycling, and other “home front” war topics. The “V” for Victory sign also was used more often in 1942 than in any other year. By 1943, 68 percent of commercially released animated short films that came from the seven major studios exhibited one or more topical references to the war. These cartoons included considerable anti-Japanese bias. The Allies experienced major victories in 1943 in the European and Pacific theaters of the war, including the destruction of Hamburg, Germany’s greatest port and second-largest city, and the battle for the Guadalcanal Islands in the Pacific (Lyons, 2004). By 1944 and 1945, the number of war-related themes in cartoons dropped as the tide of the war turned in favor of the Allies (Shull & Wilt, 2004).

Cartoons used animals with human characteristics to emphasize specific points. Those animals often sang upbeat songs with war-related lyrics or popular music (Shull & Wilt, 2004). An excellent article that addresses the propaganda value of the music used in motion pictures during the war is Sheppard’s 2001 study on anti-Japanese musical propaganda. Sheppard examined the soundtracks of 70 Hollywood features and U.S.
government documentaries, and investigated the “multiple roles assumed by music” in these films (308). The Office of War Information formed a National Wartime Music Committee that encouraged the music industry to create patriotic music, much as the Bureau of Motion Pictures arm of the OWI worked with Hollywood (Sheppard). Additionally, he argues that films “served as a primary connection to the war for those on the home front and as an introduction of sorts for those heading to battle” (307). And while the soundtracks did not generally utilize authentic Japanese music, the Oriental flavor of the “ominous” music certainly played a part in creating the image of the Japanese held by many Americans who lived during the war (Sheppard).

In summary, many films produced during the war era have been recognized as having significant propaganda value in their roles as entertainers, energizers, and, to some extent, educators (Culbert, 1983; Jones & McClure, 1973; Lavine & Wechsler, 1940; see also Evans, John Grierson and the National Film Board: the politics of wartime propaganda, 1984). In contrast, little attention has been given to the idea that films also may have served as vehicles that helped in the recruitment of members of the armed forces and providing encouragement for draftees, which is the purpose of this thesis. It is common knowledge that the attack on Pearl Harbor generated a tremendous outpouring of patriotic fervor that resulted in extraordinarily high levels of volunteer enlistments in the armed forces. It is not uncommon to hear descriptions of lines at recruiting offices that Monday morning that stretched around the block.

The government struggled to keep up with the numbers of people who were volunteering for service and had difficulty effectively processing them (Flynn, 1985). The government also was concerned war production might be hampered if enlistments
were allowed to continue at the pace they took during 1942 (Flynn). What is not as well known is that in December 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 9279, which effectively halted volunteer enlistments in the regular Army and placed Army manpower concerns squarely on the shoulders of the Selective Service System. Thus, from the beginning of 1943 through the end of the war, only the U.S. Coast Guard, Navy, and Army Air Force were authorized to actively recruit. But these branches of the service needed help, and films played a two-part role in assisting them.

Theoretical Perspective

Instead of adopting the approach of many propaganda theorists, whose emphasis is on the sending of messages, this study is in line with Carey’s (1989) ritual view of communication. A ritual view of communication, as defined by Carey, is one in which communication is still connected to its root words of “common” and “community” and works within society to build coherence and maintain social structure while reflecting the beliefs and values of members of the culture. In other words, as Carey puts it, “communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (p. 23). Shull and Wilt (1996) state that the content of the films produced by Hollywood during the war “accurately reflects the cultural consensus of American society of the period” (139). Roeder (1993) adds to that and brings us full circle in a discussion of the ritual view of communication when he states that the films not only reflected public opinion, but also helped shape it.

These films also have been identified as having engaged in the reshaping of culture and political ideology (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996). Motion pictures played such a significant role in society during the 1930s and 1940s that famed Hollywood director
John Huston claimed they acted as the “conscience of our people” (Erenberg & Hirsch, 75). Hollywood was not just the “dominant public entertainment medium of the time” (Shull & Wilt, 1996, 139), but also the “era’s most important medium of popular culture” (O’Brien & Parsons, 1995, 25). This combines to make a study of popular film critical to our understanding of the relationship between the medium, the audience, cultural norms, and societal values and beliefs. Finally, Shull and Wilt (1996) recognize that rather than working as a medium to effect immediate changes in behavior, film more accurately works as “subtle persuasion” and reinforces existing public attitudes (140).

These points lead us back to Carey’s (1989) contention that communication is meant to provide confirmation rather than information, and not to “alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things” (19). The 1930s saw a considerable change in the study of culture, as scholars had “discovered the interrelatedness of things” (Susman, 1984, 153). It was also during this decade that the idea of an “American” way of life first came into common usage, the idea that something could be shared by all Americans (Susman). This is a small part of how Carey defines communication: “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (23). He adds that the repair function of communication is essential, because reality constantly breaks down. Motion pictures, as a vital means of communication performed this function admirably during the war, acting as a method of repair for national unity, or, in other words, the glue that held society together when life got difficult and the American way of life was under attack.

Finally, it will be important to understand the movement for Americanism that took place in the first half of the twentieth century, to better clarify what is meant by
patriotic themes and personal sacrifice for the good of the nation. The influence of this movement is evident in the messages of these films, as shown by a discussion of the concerns of the movement, in conjunction with themes found in the film. Those concerns and themes were identified in the film by citing specific examples that exhibit them. Use of an Americanism lens is important because of its intent to create likemindedness among the people in the United States (Berkson, 1969). This idea of homogeneity and unity was a popular theme of films made during the war. A common story line reads something like this: A group of young men from around the nation (with many states/regions represented) come together at the beginning of the film as they are heading off to battle. Over the course of the film, and throughout the hardships they face on the battlefield, by the end of the movie they have come together as a cohesive unit and are homogeneous in beliefs and values. They have overcome their differences, recognized their similarities, and make a strong cohesive unit.

The overarching concern that led to this thesis was whether battlefield films made during World War II acted as recruitment tools for those seeking armed services enlistees, as well as those whose draft numbers were called. More specifically, this study looks at one film — *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943) — using four themes commonly found in military recruiting messages. These four themes were used in recruiting posters during World War II, as identified by Padilla and Laner (2001), and were discovered in the film by looking for scenes in the film that emphasize the appeals of the themes. These themes are 1) a gain in status for enlistment, 2) recognition of patriotic behavior, 3) adventure and challenge, and 4) the traditions and honor of military service. The film was analyzed
to determine if it does, indeed, exhibit the standard themes found in recruiting posters in 1942.

**Methodology and Research Questions**

I have identified two basic divisions among “war stories” of the era. First are those films that actually deal with individual battles and the war itself — what I have chosen to call “battlefield” films. Several examples of this type of film include the following titles: *Destination, Tokyo* (1944), *Objective, Burma!* (1945), *Gung Ho* (1943), *Sahara* (1943), and *In Which We Serve* (1942, British). Second are the films that deal with the war, but do so through telling home front stories or stories of civilians who are touched by the war but are not soldiers, sailors or airmen. These films include few, if any, actual battlefield scenes, but they may include scenes in which the enemy attacks noncombatants. These films include titles like *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), *Since You Went Away* (1944), *Tender Comrade* (1943), and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Lifeboat* (1944).

Because the number of films made during the war years (1942 to 1945) is extensive, I have chosen to analyze one film that is representative of battlefield films: *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943). This film was chosen on the basis of its representativeness of the whole, its moderate success in the box office, and its enduring themes. Doherty (1993) points out that “the combat films of the war years pay tribute to the disciplined component part” rather than the individual hero (103), and that the members of the combat unit are just “regular Joes,” or the guy down the street, and this is true in *Diary*.

Another reason *Guadalcanal Diary* was selected was its release date. The film was released in November 1943. At this point in the war, active recruiting on the part of the Army was halted, the Allied forces had not yet seen a complete turn in the tide of the
war, especially in the Pacific theater, and the outcome of the war was by no means certain. American forces had had scattered success in the Pacific, but the Japanese were still fighting fiercely. I wanted a film that was released in the middle of the war, so there had been some adjustment on the part of Americans to the duration of war, as well as the fact that the Allies were not going to rush in and immediately defeat the enemy.

It also falls into a category of film identified by Farber (1944) as a “half-fiction, half-historic account” of a battle. Other combat films of the war were similarly based on actual events, but with fictionalized storylines, such as *Air Force* (1943), *Bataan* (1943), *Wake Island* (1942), and *A Walk in the Sun* (1945). The storyline follows a Marine Corps unit that lands on Guadalcanal and spends several months wresting control of the island from the Japanese; during these months, it is apparent that while the group started out as an assortment of soldiers gathered from the four corners of the country, they quickly coalesce into a homogenous unit, rife with a unified spirit. This exemplifies what Shull and Wilt (1996) describe as the “team analogy,” which includes extensive references to sports, especially football or baseball.

Another theme developed among combat films was the melting-pot image of America (Roeder, 1993). Again, *Diary* includes a “melting pot” group, with a Brooklyn taxi driver, a Latino ladies’ man, a tough returning sergeant, an Irish Catholic priest — a graduate of Notre Dame, 1917 — and a young Caucasian from the Midwest (Koppes & Black, 1987). Basinger (2003) describes *Diary* as “perhaps the first really conscious mythologizing of fighting men, characters who are brave, jaunty, funny, and who sing” (65). She adds that this particular film seemed to approach the story from the thought
that the audience would be familiar with the basic elements of the account because they had seen it in newsreels and newspaper accounts.

Finally, combat films made during the war played a major role in demonizing the enemy, and they did this in a way that seems brutal today. However, one of the ways that Americans were unified was in their disgust for the enemy, seeing them as evil and American forces as good, what Nelson Poynter called “properly directed hatred” (Doherty, 1993, 122). *Diary* carries many derogatory references to the Japanese, and portrays them as sneaky, underhanded, and dirty fighters.

The film has generally been accepted as one of the more realistic war films that came out of the era (Fyne, 1994; Koppes & Black, 1987; Manvell, 1974). A review by film critic Bosley Crowther in *The New York Times*, printed upon release of the film, stated that the audience who viewed the film on opening day was “visibly stirred” (Crowther, Nov. 18, 1943). Crowther went on to describe the film as “stirring and inspiring in many ways” and filled with “heroic action of the grimmest sort.” In a second article in the *Times* just three days later, Crowther again praised *Diary* for its exceptional casting of Richard Jaekel as an underage marine recruit, saying he “is the most believable fighting marine on this Hollywood Guadalcanal” (Crowther, Nov. 21, 1943). The depiction of the armed forces in *Diary* was described as “more realistic and more dignified,” and without the swashbuckling influence that was resented overseas (Jones, Jan. 27, 1945, 94). Thus, of the several themes that appear fairly consistently in the combat films of the era, and its critical appreciation, *Guadalcanal Diary* exhibits each of them to some extent, making it a most representative film.
The film was viewed with the intent of identifying themes that would classify it as a potential recruiting tool. The themes were those used in 1942 World War II recruitment posters: “a gain in status in exchange for enlistment, recognition for patriotic behavior, and adventure and challenge, …[and] the traditions (personal sacrifice for the good of the nation) and honor of military service” (Padilla & Laner, 2001, 427).

These themes are evident even in the advertising used by the armed services today. Consider the Marine Corps ad that shows a young man climbing a steep rock face, and upon reaching the top, he picks up a sword and is transformed into a Marine in a dress uniform, accompanied by the tag line “The few, the proud, the Marines.” This is a solid example of the appeal to the tradition and honor of military service. In fact, the Marine Corps’ recruiting Web site appeals directly to the traditions of the corps. The U.S. Army’s current ad campaign, “An Army of One,” provides young people the opportunity to follow a “path of strength,” an inherent appeal to a gain in status. The Navy appealed for many years to young people’s desire to travel and see the world, and today its message is “Accelerate your life.” Whether guiding planes to the deck of a carrier or changing the world, this is a call to adventure and challenge.

The primary question addressed in the analysis of Guadalcanal Diary is whether its creators embedded recruitment themes within its content. To answer this question, I used the four recruiting message themes defined by Padilla and Laner (2001) in my examination of the film. More specifically, I addressed these questions:

1: Does the film contain explicit or implicit messages that those who are in the armed forces have in some way received a gain in status for enlistment?

Social status traditionally plays an important role in American society, and war periods are no different. Recruiting messages often emphasize that a recruit may experience enhanced social status by enlisting (Padilla & Laner). One of the key elements to identifying this improvement in social status was the uniform and special insignia authorized by the military unit to be worn on it (Padilla & Laner). All citizens were expected to sacrifice (through rationing and other means) for the war effort; it was their patriotic duty. But soldiers faced the ultimate sacrifice by showing their willingness to face death, and this, too, brought increased social stature. One must also remember that this study must be examined, not from a post-Vietnam perspective, but from the perspective of the 1940s. This era was one in which the military enjoyed a good reputation and those who served were respected, and those who went to war gained even greater respect and status. Thus, this theme and the next are closely related in scenes in the film.

2: Does the film contain explicit or implicit messages that those who are in the armed forces have in some way received recognition for their patriotic behavior? When Pearl Harbor was bombed, there was a great move toward national unity in the cause of the war, particularly against Japan. However, the events of the Great Depression were not forgotten overnight. President Roosevelt recognized the need for a national unity, and much of the language of the Americanization movement of three decades earlier was heard again. Patriotic behavior on the part of Americans was also dependent on the development of a national unity and identity; in the case of World War II, this was especially important because of the deep divisions between isolationists and interventionists in the late 1930s. Berkson (1969) states that Americanization theories
emphasized homogeneity and finding justification in the need for a national unity.

Common language was essential to communicate common interests and purposes, and in 1942, films were very much a common language.

3: Does the film contain messages that state explicitly or implicitly that military service involves adventure and/or challenge?

Service in the military brought with it the possibility of seeing distant locales, facing dangerous situations, learning challenging new skills, or experiencing the adventure of a special military deployment. There was also a depiction of the characters in these films starting their journeys with a carefree attitude, also lending credence to the idea that they were off on an adventure. Of course, the real challenge was to defeat the fascists and Nazis, but there was the possibility of adventure along the way.

4: Does the film contain messages that speak, either explicitly or implicitly, to the traditions and honor of military service?

Tradition and honor are rife in the military. Those who serve understand the immense value placed on these qualities of military life. From the tradition of military uniforms and insignia, to the pomp and circumstance that surrounds accomplishment and recognition, soldiers understand from day one the important roles of tradition and honor. For those who have experienced it, the traditions and honor of military service permeate their lives. The military unit becomes the soldier’s family away from home, and relationships are developed that lead members of the unit to a commitment that outsiders have difficulty understanding.

These four themes appeared regularly in recruiting posters in 1942; therefore, if they are evident in the film, it can be deduced that the film did, indeed, have the potential
to act as a recruiting tool and a means by which those who were drafted could feel positive about their service.

The purpose of the next chapter is to present an historical context so it will be evident what forces came to bear on Hollywood to present messages that were in support of the war, as well as an understanding of the process the U.S. military used to meet manpower requirements. Following that, Chapter 3 contains the analysis and presents the findings, and Chapter 4 provides a discussion and conclusion.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Yet of all the media journalism that brought the war home—the written dispatches of Ernie Pyle, the radio broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow, the combat photography of Robert Capa—the motion picture coverage had the most powerful impact and lasting consequences.

—Thomas Doherty, Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II, 227-228

Before describing the methodology used in this study and reporting on the study’s findings, a brief historical perspective of organizations involved in motion picture creation and military manpower is necessary. This chapter provides a description and account of the creation and interactions of the organizations that were most involved in the two processes. First is a brief overview and statistical picture of military service members in World War II, and the role of films in meeting manpower requirements. It is followed by a more detailed history of the government agencies that were involved directly with Hollywood, including the Office of War Information. Finally, the chapter concludes with a history of the Selective Service Act of 1940 and some of the considerations the government faced in meeting manpower needs during the war.

The Draft, Enlistment, and Recruitment During World War II

The Department of Veterans Affairs reports the total number of service members from 1940 to 1945 as 16,112,566 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2001). With approximately 10 million men drafted, this means that more than 6 million people voluntarily joined the military during the peak years of the war, which is remarkable because “restrictions against the direct recruiting of men in the age group acceptable for service were in effect” (Hershey, 189).
Because of these limitations, other methods of achieving manpower requirements were crucial. Feature films were one of several possible media that could be used to reach those who were eligible to volunteer with positive messages about the military. Attendance at movie houses during this era averaged 80 to 90 million per week. As films of the era have been generally accepted among scholars as a form of propaganda (Doherty, 1993; Fyne, 1994; Koppes & Black, 1987; May, 2000; Roeder, 1993; Winkler, 1978), I believe they can also be considered a propaganda arm of the military and that they acted, even if unintended, as recruitment tools. The release of Sergeant York in 1941 preceded a temporary increase in enlistments. The release of Wake Island in 1942 worked similarly for the Marine Corps, and became an effective means of recruiting during an enlistment recruiting drive that was running nationwide (Fyne, 1994). A story that revolved around the Marines landing on Guadalcanal Island during the battle for the Solomon Islands and based on a book by war correspondent Richard Tregaskis, Guadalcanal Diary (1943) was also used as a tool for recruitment, and recruiting stations were often placed near the theaters in which the film was showing (Manvell, 1974).

The Office of War Information and its Relationship with Hollywood

Mass communication forms popular during World War II, particularly motion pictures, magazines and radio (including popular music), have been studied at length by researchers interested in learning more about their role in disseminating propaganda, what kinds of messages were most popular, and how audiences were influenced by those messages. Messages that could be labeled as “propaganda” regularly draw significant interest, from propaganda researchers of the 1930s to today. This interest appears to stem from the use of propaganda materials by the U.S. government during the First World War.
In 1939, Lavine and Wechsler stated that the American experience with propaganda preceding the country’s entrance into World War I was “the greatest obstacle to Allied propagandists in World War II” (89). This resulted in reticence on the part of the U.S. government, especially President Roosevelt, to create a government organization that would handle war information and be responsible for maintaining morale (Weinberg, 1968). In the early months of the war, conflicting and confusing information that was intended to reassure the public arose from a number of bureaus and departments (Weinberg). In fact, the federal government attempted to use four different agencies — the Office of Government Reports, a Division of Information within the Office of Emergency Management, the Office of Civilian Defense, and, finally, the Office of Facts and Figures — before Roosevelt recognized the necessity of creating one entity that would control the flow of information from the government to the public. This was accomplished with the creation of the Office of War Information in June 1942 (Koppes & Black, 1987; Weinberg). Unfortunately, this pattern of confusion and interference continued through most of the years of the war and included the resignation of a group of writers from the OWI in 1943 (Weinberg).

President Roosevelt personally selected Elmer Davis, a journalist, author, and successful radio personality, to head the OWI (Fyne, 1994). Prior to the United States’ declaration of war, Davis had isolationist leanings, believing we should stay out of the
war unless American interests were at stake (Winkler, 1978). Although he had enjoyed a strong career as a journalist, Davis recognized that he was ill-equipped to determine the role motion pictures should play in the war effort, stating that he had “no ideas at all yet” about how to use them upon his appointment in June (Doherty, 1993). However, Davis stated in a communication to Byron Price in the Office of Censorship, that he believed “the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s minds is to let it go in through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized” (quoted in Koppes & Black, 1987, 64).

In a 1943 article published in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Davis added that the OWI was going to continue to tell the truth, as it was the “good story” of the United States, and the organization was going to tell that story through whatever means it felt would “bring results” (14). Nelson Poynter, another journalist and liaison between the war department and Hollywood, took seriously Davis’s call for propaganda messages to be inserted “casually” into film footage, and in May and June 1942, Poynter had extensive contact with the upper ranks of the film industry (Koppes & Black). As hard as OWI and Davis tried to bring Hollywood in line with their own aims, Davis lamented the lack of success on the part of the agency to encourage accuracy on the part of the studios (Dick, 1985).

From the start, Roosevelt recognized the potential motion pictures held as one of the most effective tools in informing the public (Koppes & Black, 1987). The letter of appointment Roosevelt sent to Mellett upon his appointment as coordinator of government films begins, “The American motion picture is one of our most effective media in informing and entertaining our citizens” (Letter of Appointment, 1941, 1). The
letter continues, saying that motion pictures have “a very useful contribution to make during the war emergency” (1). Mellett, like Davis, was a former newspaperman — an editor for the Washington Daily News; he had resigned from the Scripps-Howard news agency because it stridently opposed Roosevelt (Koppes & Black). Prior to his appointment as coordinator, he had served Roosevelt as a presidential aide, and later as head of the Office of Government Reports, the position he was holding when appointed coordinator of films (Koppes & Black). Mellett’s job description, as laid out by the president, included serving as a liaison “with theatrical, educational and industrial producers and distributors” in the matter of all steps of film production (Letter, 1).

Manvell (1974) describes Mellett as a “newspaper man without specific knowledge of film affairs” whose job was to “handle all matters connected with motion pictures so they could ‘usefully serve the National Defense effort’” (116). But Mellett did not act solely as liaison between Hollywood and Washington; his bureau also worked with other agencies in Washington regarding other films intended for public release (Jeffries, 1996).

When the Office of War Information was created by executive order in June 1942, Mellett’s office was absorbed by OWI (Executive Order 9182, 1942) and was named the Bureau of Motion Pictures. The executive order contained instructions to the director of OWI to use “press, radio, motion picture, and other facilities” to assure that the status of the war and the aims of the government were understood at home and abroad (2). The purpose of the bureau was to do its best to “influence the audience outside” (Winkler, 1978, 57). In addition to its role as a point of contact for Hollywood, the bureau also distributed films created by other government agencies as well as producing some of its
BMP had five divisions that included oversight of theatrical and non-theatrical production, coordination of government agencies’ scripts, production of newsreels, and the Motion Picture Industry Liaison with a field office in Hollywood (Larson, 1948). Over the course of the war, Mellet, Poynter, and others in the OWI had significant contact and interaction with the powers in Hollywood. While this did not usually lead to “interference” from the government, it did lead to a relationship, described by Koppes and Black (1987) as an “uneasy flirtation” (57), in which Hollywood writers, directors and studio owners at least conversed with OWI officials. Early in the war, these conversations occasionally led to hostility between the groups, especially when the BMP or OWI requested that Hollywood make post-production changes to meet the goals of OWI (Doherty, 1993). However, government also exerted some influence over Hollywood by threatening to withdraw its support through the supply of scenes (in *Guadalcanal Diary* it was Camp Pendleton) and equipment.

Censorship was a topic that created tension at every turn. President Roosevelt specifically stated, when he called Hollywood into service following the attack on Pearl Harbor, that he wanted no restrictions placed on the industry that would “impair the usefulness of the film,” except those necessitated by safety (Doherty, 1993, 45). Hollywood cited this presidential “directive” repeatedly over the next four years. Despite the president’s request for limited censorship, OWI issued repeated directives and goals it hoped would guide the decisions made about what motion pictures should hope to
accomplish. These took the form of private conversations, speeches or other pronouncements, or were published as informational memos and booklets (Doherty).

In fact, some of these conversations took a rather public turn. In the spring of 1943, Walter Wanger, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and president of the Motion Picture Society for the Americas, published a spirited criticism of the OWI in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*. In the article, Wanger pointed out the request made by Mellett for all scripts to be previewed by him before production started, and for all films to be viewed by OWI before final cutting. Wanger stated that OWI appeared to want to “write things into scripts” (emphasis in original, 100). Furthermore, Hollywood felt strongly that if OWI went too far in attempting to control Hollywood productions, they would be working in the same vein as Dr. Goebbels, the German minister of propaganda; this would lead to considerably less-successful films, which would then defeat the purposes of OWI altogether (Wanger).

One of Wanger’s main concerns was that the government would not reach its goal of maintaining the morale of the citizens on the home front, with motion pictures playing an important role to that end, unless the OWI backed down from its more strident requests to be involved in every step of the process. He stated that the ability of the movie industry to reach the common goals of OWI and the government was limited by each film’s ability to draw a significant audience, which was a goal of Hollywood and the industry.† Wanger said that if the OWI would change its attitude toward control of Hollywood productions, then “the power of the screen can be of …help” (Wanger, 106).

† The cinema is driven by cost, and unless filmgoers want to see a film, they will not “get up out of a comfortable chair” (Wanger, 101) and see it — it does not come into the house free like radio, and has much higher consumption levels than books.
OWI had no compunctions about offering its views on what stories moviemakers in Hollywood should be producing, as well as how they should go about making those stories. The agency did this through the dissemination of brochures, newsletters, pamphlets, and other materials. The most significant of these was the “Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry.” This manual was a “comprehensive statement of OWI’s vision of America, the war, and the world,” and, in fact, was issued in a loose-leaf format so changes and updates to it could be easily incorporated (Koppes & Black, 1987, 65). The “suggestions” in this manual cover everything from questions OWI encouraged filmmakers to consider (Koppes & Black), to six basic themes addressed by President Roosevelt in a speech given shortly after Pearl Harbor in January 1942. These themes included: the issues, the enemy, the United Nations and peoples, work and production, the home front, and the fighting forces (Short, 1983). OWI urged filmmakers to ask themselves these seven questions about every film they produced or were considering producing:

1. Will this picture help win the war?
2. What war information problem does it seek to clarify, dramatize or interpret?
3. If it is an “escape” picture, will it harm the war effort by creating a false picture of America, her allies, or the world we live in?
4. Does it merely use the war as the basis for a profitable picture, contributing nothing of real significance to the war effort and possibly lessening the effect of other pictures of more importance?
5. Does it contribute something new to our understanding of the world conflict and the various forces involved, or has the subject already been adequately covered?
6. When the picture reaches its maximum circulation on the screen, will it reflect conditions as they are and fill a need current at that time, or will it be out-dated?
7. Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda? (Koppes & Black, 66-67)

While these questions made no explicit references to films containing recruiting, enlistment, draft, or military morale messages, that these topics could be addressed can be inferred from questions 1, 4, and 6.

Other guidance found in the manual suggested that the information included in the manual was made available at the request of the industry (Government Information Manual, 1983). The manual also set out four basic premises on which it was based. First was that while the “overwhelming majority of people are behind the government in its war program,” they lacked the information they needed to understand the program (173). If Americans were not in full possession of the facts, and did not truly understand the aims of the government, they would not have been willing to make the necessary sacrifices for the war effort to end in Victory. Second, OWI believed that the public was intelligent and would support the government in its aims, but only if they were informed. Third, again, if they were informed they would also “support a program of decency and integrity [and] idealism” (174). Finally, the fourth premise was that support of fascism stemmed from those who were ignorant, frustrated, and poverty-stricken. Therefore, it was important for OWI to attempt to overcome the difficulties those people faced (Government Information Manual).

Military success was dependent upon the support of American citizens. When Hollywood came on board as an “active agent” in the war, then the art that had, up to that time dedicated itself to “mere entertainment, suddenly and seriously matter[ed] — to the War Department, to the Office of War Information, to spectators” (Doherty, 1993, 5).
Each of these groups recognized the educational and ideological value of the movies (Doherty). And although Hollywood could not accurately depict the full reality of war, because of its own limitations (Doherty), and the constraints of censorship within and without, it wielded considerable influence and generated messages of strength and unity.

One agency involved in the censorship of motion pictures was the Production Code Administration (or Hays Office), which administered the industry’s voluntary system of self-regulation. Before distribution, all films had to have the stamp of approval of the Hays Office. The Hays Office was established in 1934, but by December 7, 1941, other organizations were involved in determining what was depicted in Hollywood motion pictures, not the least of which were the branches of the military. Each service branch had its own agenda, and some of the powers in Hollywood had developed relationships with powers in the military. For instance, Jack Warner had a close relationship with Gen. H. H. “Hap” Arnold, commander of the Army Air Force (Doherty, 1993). Lowell Mellet and the chief of the BMP’s Hollywood field office, Nelson Poynter, were involved with setting guidelines and previewing scripts and finished productions for approval (Doherty; Koppes & Black, 1987). Other organizations whose involvement further complicated the censorship question included the Office of Censorship, which maintained control of productions slated for release in foreign countries (Executive Order 8985, 1941), and the FBI (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996). In fact, censorship in one form or another was enforced by more than 30 agencies (Roeder, 1993).

One concern of censors was the depiction of graphic violence on the screen; this was, after all, a war. During the 1930s, Hollywood had been quite successful at
censoring itself through the Hays Office. The director of that office, Joseph Breen, was actively involved in keeping motion pictures “moral,” and often suggested ways to make films more appealing to the BMP and OWI. He also suggested alternatives or identified scenes that were more likely to “run afoul” of the politicos in Washington (Doherty, 1993). One of Breen’s key distinctions was the ambiguity of “suggestion” and exactitude of “depiction” (Doherty). In his mind, it was quite unacceptable to show certain behaviors on the screen, but these same images could be acceptable if they were instead alluded to or implied. In combat films, this type of image generally related to some kind of violent act.

The government information manual also discussed how the armed forces were to be depicted on film. Here were found reminders such as “the mortal realities of war must be realized” and “the heroic sacrifice of individual soldiers can be exalted in dignified terms” (Government Information Manual, 1983, 179). Producers were reminded that the Navy’s functions of convoy and supply were easy to dramatize, as were the “more spectacular services of the Army” (179). And while it was more difficult to dramatize the infantry services and supply, efforts should be made to do so. Finally, Hollywood was instructed to depict the necessity of a unified command around the world. Just as American commanders had Allied troops under their command, it was also necessary for American troops to serve “under Allied commanders in other theatres” (Government Information Manual, 180).

The OWI was not only concerned with the portrayal of soldiers and sailors to the citizens on the home front, but in encouraging servicemen in their duties and reminding them that the country supported them and appreciated the sacrifices they were making.
Filmmakers were encouraged to glorify our military because “we are proud of it” (Government Information Manual, 180), but to do so in a manner that indicated that the military was engaged in a serious business. The Army and Navy were not to be ridiculed, “even in a friendly spirit” (180), but audiences should see that conditions in the military were good, and soldiers received the best medical care, food, and morale building. Finally, Hollywood was asked to remember the women’s Army and the Merchant Marine.

While those in Hollywood chafed at such blatant direction (as evidenced by Wanger’s article), some professionals who were involved indirectly in the world of Hollywood, like noted New York Times film critic Bosley Crowther, felt that Hollywood needed more guidance from Washington, not less (Koppes & Black, 1987). The letter written by Mellett, which drew such a heated response from Walter Wanger, also faced criticism from within OWI. The head of the domestic branch of OWI, Gardner Cowles Jr., felt the letter could be considered an attempt to censor motion pictures (Koppes & Black). As Cowles utilized his own lines of communication to Hollywood, he was told by another Hollywood insider, Look correspondent Jean C. Herrick, that important producers in Hollywood would never cooperate with Mellett and Poynter because they believed Mellett and Poynter were not competent to advise about script changes (Koppes & Black). These conflicts eventually ended up being tossed around on Capitol Hill during the budget hearings in the spring of 1943, the result of which was a dramatic cut in funding for the bureau, from the $1.3 million it had requested to a mere $50,000, barely enough to keep the office of the chief running (Larson, 1948). This despite the belief of
some that “perhaps no phase of the work of the Office of War Information is of greater significance than its work in the realm of motion pictures” (Larson, 434).

Despite the conflicts, Hollywood was clearly on board and a willing ally in the efforts to boost morale at home and abroad (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996). Writers, producers, and directors noticeably supported, at least generally, the aims of the OWI, even if they didn’t approve of its methods. One way the industry demonstrated its dedication to the cause was in the organization of the War Activities Committee, an industry group that “coordinated the offering of shorts” (Koppes & Black, 1987, 123-124). Particularly when Congress drastically reduced funding for the Bureau of Motion Pictures, Hollywood discovered that many of the restrictions imposed by the BMP were no longer such a constraint, and, as Larson (1948) describes it, Hollywood was “free to handle propaganda on the silver screen unhampered by officialdom in Washington” (443). Overall, it is generally agreed that films that relied on war-related themes and sought to boost morale, encourage those on the home front, and portray the military in a positive light did so effectively. Hollywood succeeded despite the constraints of the era, and the difficulty of working with members of a government agency who had no Hollywood experience.

Despite the tremendous number of organizations that attempted to exert control over Hollywood productions, Hollywood still answered the call of the president to join the war effort and did its best to boost the morale of the country during one of the most difficult times the country had faced, and capitalized on the country’s love affair with the cinema to do so (Fyne, 1994). Hollywood was a critical force on the home front, and people at all levels in the industry got involved in the war effort. Stars went on publicity
tours and encouraged the public to buy war bonds. Producers and directors contributed
time and talents to government agencies that needed films for training, morale or
educational purposes. Hollywood moguls worked with officials in the OWI and War
Department to ensure that Hollywood was doing everything in its power to support the
total war effort. Directors traveled to battlegrounds to document the heroics of American
soldiers and sailors. Stars traveled to troop areas and provided entertainment to the
troops through USO productions and occasionally laid their lives on the line with the
troops, as did Carole Lombard, wife of Clark Gable, who was killed when her plane went
down while she was entertaining the troops (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996). Others joined up
and served in the military. Big-band musician Glenn Miller served as a captain in the
Army Air Force and in December 1944 was lost over the English Channel when the
transport on which he was flying to Paris disappeared.

With this dedication on the part of Hollywood to participate in war activities and
support the war effort, the question becomes: Are the traits seen in individuals in
Hollywood evident in the films created by these same individuals? The edict from the
Office of War Information was clearly outlined in the Government Information Manual
for the Motion Picture Industry, and, with few exceptions, the relationship between
Hollywood and Washington was clearly friendly.

The Selective Service, the Draft, and Military Recruiting

The events that took place on the European and Asian continents during the late
1930s led Americans on a divided path. Propaganda came at them from all sides, and
major organizations in favor of isolationism, or in favor of intervention, inundated the
public with messages attempting to persuade “Joe Smith, American” to their point of
view. While many of these messages originated from American organizations, others came from the belligerent nations themselves, seeking American support for their aims. Germany and Great Britain had representatives in the United States seeking support, as did France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Finland, and other countries. Americans were involved in groups that sought aid for Nazi-controlled countries in Eastern Europe, that gathered supplies for Finland, that worked to increase American aid to England, that urged Germans to overthrow Hitler (Lavine & Wechsler, 1940). When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, defeated France in 1940, and conducted major raids on Britain, also in 1940, the question of America’s neutrality came to greater debate.

The presidential election campaign of 1940 saw both parties in support of aid to the allied forces, especially Britain, but in opposition to entry in the war. Roosevelt promised in his campaign that “American boys would not be asked to fight in foreign wars” (Flynn, 1985, 67). In the spring of 1941, shortly after his third inauguration, Roosevelt successfully pushed the Lend-Lease Act through Congress, despite “bitter isolationist opposition” (Lyons, 2004, 147). This act rescued Britain from the near dire straits in which it found itself, by authorizing Roosevelt to lend or lease war materiel to Britain and other nations while deferring payment until after the war.

As early as 1940, the country was preparing for the possibility of war. The outbreak of war in Europe, and particularly the fall of France in the spring of that year, initiated a move to put a draft in place (Chambers, 1987). In June 1940, a meeting was held in the Chiefs of Staff office in which Gen. Marshall inquired about how long it would take to procure 750,000 men, if the Congress were to pass a Selective Service act (Watson, 1950). He was told it would take 45 days. Long before this meeting was held
in June, Army planners had recognized that to be able to raise an army larger than the 
Protective Mobilization Plan force strength of 1 to 1.25 million men, a draft would be 
necessary (Watson). Therefore, “The Staff did its methodical planning for selective 
service legislation…but always on the assumption that, as in 1917, the plans would 
become operative only when the nation was actually at war” (Watson, 183). Two 
methods of meeting manpower demands had been under consideration by the Army — 
the draft, which the power to use was not within the purview of the Army, and what was 
called a “Civilian Volunteer Effort” (Watson). The CVE expected the 48 states to “assist 
in a volunteer recruiting campaign” through enlistments in either the regular Army or the 
National Guard (Watson, 184), and was considered an adequate means for raising enough 
men to meet the Protective Mobilization Plan.

As plans were being made by the Army to request far larger appropriations, its 
leaders were understandably hesitant to approach Congress with a request to increase 
troop strength via a draft act (Watson, 1950). Strong isolationist movements were still in 
place around the country, and with congressional and presidential elections in November 
of that year, everyone was aware that peacetime draft legislation was traditionally 
unpopular (Watson). But the concerns of the Army were not simply fiscal or political. 
Practical considerations were highly influential in the Army’s decision to hold back on 
instituting the draft; there were a small number of officers and men available to train new 
recruits or draftees (Watson). These men could be drawn from three principal sources: 
the regular Army, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve. Each of these sources 
faced difficulties of their own.
The Army was still working to recover from its emaciated state of 1939, and was preparing to ask for 120,000 new men, which would stretch the force to its training limit (Watson). In 1939, the total number of men in uniform was less than 350,000, but by 1942, when the country had been at war for a short time, that number would rise to nearly 4 million (Bliven, 1976). The National Guard faced the complicating fact that most of its men were new recruits themselves and of those who were not, many would be discharged, for a variety of reasons, soon after being mobilized (Watson). More than 100,000 officers were serving in the Army Reserve, but again, these were generally men who were recent college graduates of ROTC programs and had little field training (Watson).

The civilians involved with moving the Selective Service and Training Bill through Congress also believed that Congress would at least mount a call for volunteers before considering the drastic alternative of conscription (Flynn, 1985). On May 22, 1940, Grenville Clark, an attorney and chief of the Military Training Camps Association, invited nearly 100 other leaders of the association to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first camp. These camps had provided voluntary military training for civilians during World War I. Clark felt that “the best observance of the anniversary would be a vigorous civilian campaign for 1940 preparedness against an emergency” that was already threatening, just as it had been in 1915 (Watson, 1950, 189). The result of the meeting was a consensus to urge the war department to call for draft legislation. Because Henry Stimson, who was nominated as secretary of war in June 1940 and confirmed in July, was in attendance, as were others who would be influential in the push for the draft, work immediately began to get the legislative process moving (Watson).
Roosevelt was hesitant to advocate such a move, but Gen. Marshall sent three members of the Joint Army and Navy Selective Service Committee to meet with the Training Camps’ executive committee (Watson). The bill was debated during July and August, with debate over a variety of elements in the bill. Some were in support of requiring all men between the ages of 18 and 65 to register, and Clark, who had been active in promoting conscription during World War I and was a personal friend of the president, led the fight to make the draft the major method of meeting manpower mobilization needs (Flynn, 1985). Eventually, it was decided to require men aged 21 to 36 to register (Harris, Mitchell & Schechter, 1984), and to require “only one year of training for a maximum of 900,000 draftees” (Flynn, 1985, 71).

The bill “gained appreciable support” upon its introduction in Congress on June 20, where it was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Edward Burke of Nevada, and in the House of Representatives by Rep. James Wadsworth of New York (Watson, 1950). Despite the support the bill gained in Congress and by a number of influential newspapers, it faced some challenges in passage, not the least of which was the lack of support on the part of the president, who was loath to offer his support until it was evident that the measure would pass (Watson). Gen. Marshall, however, addressed the Senate committee in favor of the draft legislation, joining Stimson in actively working to save the draft bill (Watson). The fact that the draft bill received such strong support upon its introduction, and the spectacular successes of Germany’s aggression on the continent, led to the belief that the United States might need to send troops to the south to protect the hemisphere (Watson). In addition, it had become evident through strength studies conducted by the Army, that to meet troop training requirements, the National Guard
would have to be called up to duty for a full year. Watson stated that it was these circumstances that led Gen. Marshall to argue so effectively for the activation of the guard and passage of the draft legislation.

In September, the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940 was passed; however, the act limited draftees to serving in the United States or its territories (Shapiro, 2001). This was the first peacetime draft in the history of the United States, and the act did not originate from the White House, because it would have been difficult for Roosevelt to campaign on noninvolvement in the war and still support Selective Service legislation in that would lead to a draft in peacetime (Flynn, 1985). However, the passage of the Selective Service Act gave the Army nearly a full year of preparation and training, and allowed it to begin the process of materiel procurement.

It was an advantage to start nearly a year in advance of the declaration of war on December 8, 1941, “contrary to historic precedent and official expectation” (Watson, 1950, 197). With passage of the act on September 16, the first drawings of selectees took place October 16, and with a 30-day leave authorized before they were required to report, the first draftees did not arrive for training until mid-November, slowing the planned build-up (Watson). Regardless, the passage of the act allowed the Army to begin preparing for the eventuality of war in a way that would not have been possible without a peacetime draft in place.

About the time the legislation was passed, the Army realized there were stipulations in the bill that would have significant impact on manpower requirements for the Army Air Corps. The draft legislation required only a one-year service commitment, and the Air Corps needed three-year men. Just a week after the draft legislation passed, a
supplemental fiscal appropriations act for 1941 made it evident that the only limit that would be placed on the size of the Army would be that imposed by cash limitations (Watson).

While passage of the act allowed for the buildup of the military to begin, the nation was still unprepared for war. As thousands of young men were removed from the civilian economy and placed in military status, the government was trying to establish a working plan for war production, but was meeting with little success (Flynn, 1979).

Roosevelt created the Office of Emergency Management in 1939, and the National Defense Advisory Committee in 1940 (Flynn, 1979). Calls were made to increase production of planes and tanks, but authority and responsibilities were divided. In January 1941, the Office of Production Management was created and also struggled to meet its goals. It was not until January 1942, a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, that the War Production Board was created (Flynn, 1979).

President Roosevelt encountered challenges in the intervening year, from the time the first draftees arrived for training until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The calls for intervention were increasing, and members of the cabinet were trying to determine what manpower needs would be on both the civilian and military fronts. When the Selective Service Act was passed in 1940, the act was to be effective only for one year (Selective Service, 2005). The battle to renew the bill in 1941 was deeply divided between those who were for intervention and those who held isolationist views. The bill passed, and following Pearl Harbor was amended to retain draftees until six months after the war ended (Selective Service, 2005; Shapiro, 2001).
Not only did the government concern itself with meeting the need for a national defense force sizable enough to meet potential threats from Europe, or Asia, or both, but it also had to be concerned about the civilian labor force’s ability to meet the needs of war production. This led to conflicts in the administration, and these conflicts became more pronounced with the advent of the attack on Pearl Harbor. In April 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9139 that created the War Manpower Commission and named Paul McNutt chairman (Flynn, 1979).

The commission comprised several departments, some of which were military, others concerned with civilian affairs. The departments with representatives serving on the commission included War, Navy, Agriculture, Labor, Selective Service, Civil Service, and the War Production Board (Flynn, 1979). Selective Service was placed completely under the control of the WMC by Executive Order 9409 on December 23, 1943, but McNutt anticipated this action by the president more than a year in advance and claimed control over the entire system, including control over local draft boards, at a speech given April 20, 1942 (Flynn, 1979). The commission was formed with the intent that it would help the chairman “establish requirements of manpower for industry and to review the needs of the military and agricultural sectors” (Flynn, 1979, 16).

Some sectors of civilian labor were considered deferrable — meaning that if a man received a draft notice, and he worked in a job considered crucial to war production needs at home, he could receive a deferment of his draft number. McNutt created manning tables and replacement schedules for industry that were intended to ensure the proper utilization of manpower and draft priority of individuals (Flynn, 1979). He originally intended for the manning tables to be used by the Selective Service to
determine draft status. Gen. Lewis Hershey, head of the Selective Service, agreed that the tables could prove valuable in the prevention of drafting vital workers, but when McNutt tried to use the tables as a tool for determining occupational deferments, the War Department resisted (Flynn, 1979).

In the meantime, enlistment rates were still high following Pearl Harbor. Draft rates were also still high, and this created difficulty for the War Manpower Commission in keeping training effective and timely. Within several days of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hershey urged Congress to pass a bill sponsored by the administration to lower the draft registration age from 21 to 20 (Flynn, 1985). On December 20, 1941, the act was passed by Congress and signed into law by the president (Flynn, 1985). By the end of May, the president recognized the need to expand registration to those aged 18 to 20, and from that point on, draft numbers were called by birth date rather than lottery (Flynn, 1985).

By the summer of 1942, the War Manpower Commission began to see that the civilian sector would not be able to stabilize employment at plants that were in war production if the armed services were allowed to continue actively recruiting (Flynn, 1985). Hershey had attempted to convince the president earlier that military growth could be handled most precipitously if all military inductions were handled by Selective Service, as the “enthusiasm was making a shambles of orderly manpower management” (Flynn, 1985, 95). In December 1942, the president recognized the truth in the arguments of Hershey, McNutt, and Donald Nelson (director of the War Production Board) that enlistments were causing difficulty in manpower control, and Roosevelt agreed to end all voluntary enlistments for the army (Flynn, 1985). Additionally, President Roosevelt
favored the Navy and Marines over the Army because he had served as secretary of the Navy during World War I. He held an “us” versus “them” mentality when it came to the Navy and the Army.

The executive order, however, allowed the continued recruitment and enlistment of young men under the age of 18, since the military was hesitant to rely solely on conscription to meet its manpower needs (Flynn, 1985). With the support of Roosevelt, the Navy insisted on the freedom to recruit and Hershey granted draft boards the right to provide lists of men who were classified 1-A to recruiting agencies (Flynn, 1985). With the limitations placed on active recruiting, popular culture portrayals of the benefits of serving in the military became more important. Before recruitment was halted, the military saw a significant jump in voluntary enlistments for several weeks after the release of Warner Brothers’ *Sergeant York* in 1941, as noted by the War Department (May, 2000).

Even later in the war, when home front manpower requirements were more difficult to meet, McNutt pressed to maintain draft deferments for large groups of young men of draft age who were working in vital war production industries (Flynn, 1979). Hershey found himself in the position of arguing with McNutt about the deferments; manpower needs had reached critical levels by 1943 (Flynn, 1985). Hershey also reached the point where he had to consider drafting married men, while single men identified as working in vital production capacities were being deferred, and the War Department was “taking young men and assigning them to enlisted reserve duty back in their old communities” (Flynn, 1985, 99). These young men were placed in jobs in nonferrous metal production, or continued their schooling (Flynn, 1985). The Navy adopted similar
strategies, enlisting young men and allowing them to stay in school or work in shipyards (Flynn, 1985). This created high levels of tension between McNutt, Hershey, and others involved in manning the military, while keeping materiel production levels at home high enough to meet the needs of not just the United States military, but the Allied forces as well.

Public support for Gen. Marshall was exceptionally high at this time, and military leaders like Secretary of War Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox felt that anything Marshall needed to fight the war should be made available if at all possible (Flynn, 1979). Despite the efforts on the part of Stimson, Knox, and others, the military still struggled to meet manpower requirements. President Roosevelt stated that by the end of 1943, the military would need a total of 11 million men in uniform (Flynn, 1979). Upon this pronouncement, a White House committee investigated the problems with manpower and found that if better recruitment and utilization methods were used, the nation could support a military of that size (Flynn, 1979). Manpower requirements were a concern until the end of the war.

Unfortunately, the literature on the draft and the impact of Roosevelt’s executive order halting voluntary enlistments on military volunteer numbers is exceptionally limited, as is literature on recruiting messages in all forms. And after more than a year’s research on active recruiting messages, especially those found in traditional advertising outlets such as posters and magazine ads, there was never a mention of Executive Order 9279 that put a stop to voluntary enlistments, and the mentions of any limitation on recruiting for voluntary enlistments during World War II were unclear. The major studies on recruiting I was able to locate included only studies of posters created to
recruit volunteers, or studies of the advertising campaigns undertaken by the armed forces since the advent of an all-volunteer force in 1973. Other studies have been done on the influence of other posters created during the war, generally discussing the posters created to encourage participation by those on the home front in programs such as recycling fats for explosives, planting victory gardens, or doing their part in industry.

The actions of the Japanese in 1941 affected nearly all civilian industry, and the motion picture industry was no exception. Aside from willingly working to promote the war effort on film, scores of actors, actresses, and producers joined the military, advocated sales of war bonds, performed in USO shows, or created films that documented the war, trained recruits, or educated the public. Gen. Hershey stated that the motion picture industry was an industry essential to the well-being of the nation in 1942, but not deferrable (Doherty, 1993). The War Activities Committee final report stated that approximately 7,000 Hollywood studio employees joined the military during the war, a number that represents about one-third of the men who were normally employed by the industry (Doherty, 1993). A key way Hollywood showed its support for the government and the war effort was through the production of Victory shorts, as evidenced by 20th Century Fox head Spyros Skouras, who declared that it did not matter if the studio lost a portion of revenue by showing them, because nothing would matter if the war was lost (Doherty).

Frank Capra, as a new major in the Army, filmed the *Why We Fight* series as training films for the Army, at the request of Gen. George C. Marshall (Doherty; Rollins, 1996). Capra took this assignment on with the same vigor and enthusiasm with which he had approached his work at the Columbia Pictures studios, and worked under the
conviction that it was essential to capture the interest of the soldiers before attempting to teach them the “bewildering curriculum of geopolitics, military strategy, political ideology, and world history” (Doherty, 72).

With an active-duty commission as a lieutenant colonel, director Darryl F. Zanuck of Fox studios directed a number of films for the Army Signal Corps (Doherty, 1993). He came under fire for not leaving his position at the studio, but was staunchly defended by Col. Kirke B. Lawton, chief of the Army Pictorial Section, for providing the Army with training pictures that were more professional than those the Army could produce on its own, and for doing so at a financial loss to the studio (Doherty).

The Disney studios were also involved in production of animated shorts featuring Donald Duck, Goofy, and Pluto that encouraged payment of taxes (Shale, 1982), the sale of defense bonds (Shull & Wilt, 2004), and collection of materials required for the United States to win the war (Shale). In addition to the shorts, film critic Leonard Maltin said the studios created one feature-length film, *Victory Through Air Power* (1943), because Walt Disney “believed in the theories of Maj. Alexander de Seversky, and thought they should be exposed to the widest possible audience” (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, no date).

It is clear that the government was faced with tremendous difficulty in gathering the immense number of soldiers needed to wage battle against the Axis successfully. It seems that the tremendous outpouring of patriotism on the heels of Pearl Harbor may have created more problems for the government than it appears to have solved, but with the draft already in place, thanks to the efforts of a small group of concerned and influential civilians, the transition from a peacetime status to a force of war was eased.
CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF GUADALCANAL DIARY

The motion–picture industry is performing wartime service by producing films which document or dramatize military activity and other war-related subjects. The armed forces have supplied material for films such as...Guadalcanal Diary, which presents a day-by-day factual account of the Solomons battle.
—Office of War Information, American Handbook, 468

No other period can match it in Hollywood’s engagement in “documenting, and making, American history” (Doherty, 1993, 4). In fact, the great number of films released by Hollywood from 1942 to 1944, more than 1,300 of them (Jones, 1945), is evidence of the fact that Hollywood maintained its reputation as being first an entertainment industry. But how did Hollywood accept the charge assigned by the government through the Office of War Information to “inform the American people, via the screen, of the many problems attendant to the war program” (Government Information Manual, 173)? Was the information contained in Hollywood feature films during the war era provided simply as an escape for those on the home front? Or was there some “greater purpose” in these films? An examination of a combat film representative of others of the era can provide us with some ideas as to how the industry lived up to its charge to inform American audiences and boost morale while extolling the work of the U.S. military.

The government sought to develop a national unity under which to face the joint threats of Nazism and fascism, and many of the men who wielded great influence in the Roosevelt Administration had been influenced by the Americanism movement, especially as it related to the exhibition of patriotism. Secretary of War Henry Stimson served as secretary of war under William Howard Taft prior to World War I and completed a brief
enlistment during the war (*Hoover & Truman*, no date), while Roosevelt served as secretary of the Navy under President Woodrow Wilson. Because both men were politically active between the wars, it stands to reason that the intentions and ideologies of Americanism would hold some influence in their decisions relating to the development of national unity, and patriotic thought and action.

In order to provide a thorough understanding of the analysis of the film, I begin with a brief synopsis, followed by a discussion of *Guadalcanal Diary* as it relates to the four recruiting themes identified by Padilla and Laner (2001) described in Chapter 1.

**Synopsis**

*Guadalcanal Diary* is based on the book by the same name, written in 1942 by war correspondent Richard Tregaskis upon his return from the battle for the Solomon Islands. It focuses on a Marine unit that is assigned to take Guadalcanal Island during the battle for the Solomon Islands in 1942. The film opens with a shot of hundreds of men on the deck of a troop transport ship, somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It is a Sunday, and the troops are singing hymns, led by Father Donnelly, a Catholic priest. The film is narrated throughout by a war correspondent (never named in the film, but understood to be Tregaskis) who accompanies the Marines on this mission. Several scenes follow that show the troops’ life on a ship as they steam to an unknown destination. As the men on the ship get closer to learning their assigned mission, there is good-natured teasing and comfortable conversation. The men run above deck one day to find the ocean around them teeming with other war ships, and they receive orders to land.

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* See Appendix for a complete listing of the cast of characters in *Guadalcanal Diary.*
on Guadalcanal Island, where the Japanese have nearly completed an airstrip. Their mission is to take the airstrip and liberate the island.

When they land, they face virtually no opposition from the enemy, find the airstrip abandoned, and dig in. While they work to make the airstrip functional for Allied forces, they face several sniper attacks, and end up with a prisoner who tells them the enemy troops are in a village a few miles away, ready to surrender. The colonel sends a patrol to the village, Matanikau, and upon landing, the patrol finds itself pinned on the beach. Eventually everyone in the patrol, except one soldier, is killed — illustrating Japanese treachery. That soldier escapes, returns to camp and reports to the colonel what befell the patrol. The colonel puts together another group of men and takes them back to Matanikau, where they successfully defeat the Japanese.

After the Marines have been on the island for about two and a half months, reinforcements and supplies trickled in. As the Marines tenaciously hold their ground, the Japanese attack the island regularly from both air and sea. As hope is waning, a large formation of planes flies over the island and the men think it is the Japanese mounting yet another attack, but it is the Allies, arriving in force. Soon the forces will be prepared to launch a full attack. The film ends with the forces — Army, Navy, Marine, and Army Air Force — working together to drive the Japanese from the island, and the Marines depart for home on December 10, ten months after landing on the island, much more savvy and serious from the experience than when they arrived.

**Gain in Status in Return for Enlistment**

The first theme identified by Padilla and Laner (2001) is that of an increase in social status because of military duty. During the World War II era, when the military
was held in higher regard by society than it is today in a post-Vietnam world, the uniform and its special insignia contributed to a rise in status. In addition, the World War II soldier’s willingness to sacrifice his life for the sake of his country also led to a gain in status. American servicemen exhibited the characteristics that were admired by those on the home front, and this, too, led to a gain in status.

There are several points in the movie where this theme is embedded in the narrative. One occurs right near the beginning of the film, when the narrator introduces the chaplain, who is leading the service on the deck. He says, “Father Donnelly, Notre Dame 1917, all-American fullback for two years, now simply Chaplain Donnelly.” This is a latent tribute to the father, who plays a major role on the island, and indicates that his status as chaplain exceeds his previous status as a “big man on campus” at one of America’s premier universities. It is important to know that he was an exceptional football player at a prestigious university, but his role as chaplain affords him a gain in status, because he has left home and comfort to join the Marines.

The role of religious observance is another American cultural icon strongly represented in the movie. The film begins on a Sunday, and we see the Biblical entreaty to “take a day of rest” in action on the deck of the ship. Services are being held with the men singing a Protestant song led by a Catholic priest, also being sung by a Jew whose father “was a cantor in the synagogue.” Thus is represented the multi-religious strength of our nation. This emphasized the fact that even those who were marginalized members of society (such as minorities) could see improvement in their social status as a result of their military service. America was not the Godless Soviet Union, nor was it a singular religion country; rather, as it has since its founding, the country represented opportunities
for people to worship as they wish. These symbols represented unity and authority, religion and patriotism (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996). These are also symbols associated with beliefs, values, and acts that were familiar to the nation, and contributed to the creation of a national consensus through “repetitive presentation” (Shull & Wilt, 1996, 139). Those who partook of the symbols, especially while serving the nation, received a gain in status.

Some might argue, and have, that these techniques constituted manipulation at best, and brainwashing at worst. But knowing the process of, and understanding the purpose of a ritual view of communication, these reinforcing ideas work to stabilize our culture, and change is implemented in a way that creates stability. Carey (1989) goes on to say that if communication acts did not fill this role, we would experience a breakdown in reality. Therefore, it is necessary to repair our reality, because it “consistently breaks down” (30).

Occasionally, we have to leave aside one reality and replace it with another reality because some experiments fail. This is very much what happened with the American isolationism experiment. Guadalcanal Diary demonstrates, in a scene in a foxhole when the camp is under heavy bombardment, that new realities are sometimes necessary, even when uncomfortable. The character known as Taxi reminds viewers of several important cultural values in one important monologue during the bombardment:

I’m no hero. I’m just a guy. I come out here because somebody had to come. I don’t want no medals. I just wanna get this thing over with and go back home. I’m just like everybody else and I’m telling you I don’t like it. Except maybe I guess there’s nothin’ I can do about it. I can’t tell them bombs to hit somewhere else. Like I said before, it’s up to somebody bigger than me, bigger than anybody. What I mean is I — I guess it’s up to God, and I’m not kidding when I say I sure hope he knows how I feel. I’m not gonna say I’m sorry for everything I’ve done. Maybe I am and maybe I’m not. When you’re scared like
this, the first thing you do is start trying to square things. If I get out of this alive, I’ll probably go out and do the same things all over again. So what’s the use of kidding myself? The only thing I know is I — I didn’t ask to get in this spot. If we get it — it sure looks that way now — well, then I only hope He figures we’ve done the best we could and lets it go at that.

These declarations emphasize that Taxi did not ask to be in the position he was (potentially a statement to those whose draft numbers were called). However, by serving when and where he was called, he experienced a gain in social status, and also enjoyed the role of mentor to the youngest Marine in the unit, Johnny “Chicken” Anderson.

First, Taxi emphasizes that the nation did not ask for involvement in the war, but it ended up there anyway. Lest anyone in the audience forget, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor without a declaration of war. Sometimes, events are seemingly out of our control, as Taxi points out regarding the bombs. He does not want to be where they are falling, but it is going to take a power bigger than him to make things change. This leads to the second major idea in the monologue, that of the country’s entitlement to divine guidance. From the earliest days of settlement in what would eventually become the United States, there has been a belief that God led us here, and still has His hand over us.

As Taxi invoked divine providence in saying that what happens “is up to God,” the audience was reminded that those who serve in the military held socially acceptable values. This helped eliminate the perception that soldiers belonged on a lower social rung. Third, he admits without shame the desire to “square things” when the going gets especially difficult and his mortality is emphasized. This harks back to principles of fair play and settling differences before it is too late to do so. Finally, in voicing his hope that God will understand they had done their best, as Americans we fervently hope that this is how others will view our actions.
Johnny “Chicken” Anderson also experiences a gain in status through his enlistment. His physical appearance makes it obvious he is very young, and some of the men tease him good-naturedly about his one whisker when he asks if he can borrow a razor, indicating their awareness of his coming of age. When he is shot (not fatally) during the second raid on Matanikau, the sergeant risks his own life in a heavy firefight to get Chicken back to an ambulance, and a series of scenes makes it evident that through his involvement and experiences in the war, Chicken “becomes a man.” This speaks to the high regard in which he was held by the experienced sergeant, which, in turn, suggests a latent meaning that can be drawn here: If the sergeant regards him that highly, then the folks at home cannot help but see an increased status due to his enlistment and actions. The men who fought in these campaigns were indeed very young and represented well by Richard Jaekel, who played Chicken, thus reinforcing cultural beliefs in manhood and the goodness of the American in general. These scenes also reassured mothers and family members at home that their boys would be taken care of by the sergeants while at war.

Another scene takes place while the men are on board the ship and preparing for the landing at Guadalcanal; two officers are below deck, cleaning their weapons. Capt. Cross and Lt. Thurmond knew each other before the war, when Thurmond was a student in Cross’s philosophy class at university, where he listened to him “propound on the philosophies of the world.” They both volunteered. As they were in the officer ranks, there must have been some value for them to do so. One of the results of their voluntarism is a gain in status at home. They found more prestige in the military, seeking to eliminate the menace of fascism, than they did in the world of academia. Cross’s death
in the first attack on Matanikau seals his status as a hero, while reminding viewers at home of the seriousness of battle, and the mission of the military. These were men who were sacrificing everything, and they deserved to be held in high regard. Americans engage in thought sharing; we know who Americans are because we share the same national identity (Ricento, 2003). Indeed, Americans knew who Captain Cross was and could understand his thought processes because they shared similar thought processes.

Recognition for Patriotic Behavior

Recognition for patriotic behavior is the second of the recruiting themes. National unity came out of the attack on Pearl Harbor, but the recognition of patriotic behavior was especially important in calls to serve the country, because of the deep divisions the country experienced prior to entering the war. Patriotism refers to the love or devotion one has for his or her country, and the fact that military members were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country indicated a dedication to patriotic ideals. The reflection of cultural characteristics and qualities in the characters in the film indicates a move to national unity in ideals, or, patriotism.

In *Guadalcanal Diary* this theme applied not just to the individual characters in the film, but the chaplain corps as a whole. Father Donnelly helped viewers at home recognize the contribution to the war effort that chaplains were making; they left their flocks to take care of the men who were in harm’s way. This theme, too, occurs in the scene in the film that takes place during a heavy Japanese bombardment. There is a brief shot of the field hospital and some Navy doctors working through the danger to save the life of a Marine. Father Donnelly was at the side of the boy throughout the surgery. He later joins the group in the shelter and compliments the dedication of the “Navy docs” to
save the boy’s life. What is left unsaid is that Father Donnelly was in as much danger as the doctors. This is patriotic behavior at its very depth. At the same time, the role of Father Donnelly exalts the American spirit, as well as its military training and facilities.

In May 1943, when *Guadalcanal Diary* was released, the outcome of the war was still uncertain. The Navy had suffered serious setbacks in the Pacific, and Hitler still dominated the European continent, handing the Allies considerable losses. On the home front, people were eager to hear good news, and patriotic behavior was readily recognized. Families with members in the service posted service flags in their front windows, identifying the number of members of the family in service by the number of stars on the flag. Recognition for patriotic behavior came from both military and civilian communities.

As discussed above, a ritual view of communication is one that does not limit itself to the discussion of transmission and reception of messages (Carey, 1989). Rather, it “creates a…symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation” and to “represent an underlying order of things” (19). Films that came out of the war era, especially those that addressed the war in some way, were particularly well suited to accomplish this task. The 1930s were a period in which the country was deeply divided about the war in Europe, had suffered greatly from the effects of the Great Depression, and was a singularly individualistic decade. Overnight, it seemed, Americans were asked to set aside ingrained traditions and beliefs, and adopt a new mantle of national unity (but without abandoning that gritty individuality that has been a hallmark of American culture since the Revolution), support the entrance of the country into the war, and set aside the difficulties of Depression. The transition from isolationism to interventionism was
heavily dependent on communal feelings of patriotism. The motion picture industry was prepared and willing to work to make the transition to this “new” way of life smoother and portray patriotic behavior in the characters it put on the big screen.

*Guadalcanal Diary* effectively represents the new role of the motion picture industry as a stabilizer of the culture that was so fragile after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The industry also emphasized the waves of patriotism that rolled over the nation. While the nation was united with feelings of patriotism against the terror of that single attack, the ideas of personal sacrifice for the greater good of the nation and a focus on the role of the individual as a member of the community were not yet saturated through society (Doherty, 1993). However, a significant number of films worked to this end, seeking to reshape American culture and political ideology (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996), and this film contains elements that exhibit this idea of constructing, reinforcing, and maintaining an ordered world wherein society can act. *Guadalcanal Diary* was a communication act that represented shared beliefs, and especially a belief in patriotic behavior.

In the film, once the marines landed on Guadalcanal and reached the airstrip, Col. Grayson asks Taxi and Chicken to run a U.S. flag up the pole, replacing the Japanese flag that is flying over the airstrip. The flag he gives them belongs to Lt. Snell, who carried it through campaigns in China and the Philippines, but he has suffered a heart attack and is being sent to the rear. In recognition of Snell’s service in those earlier campaigns, the tiny flag is chosen to be the first flag flown over this captured enemy territory, as Lt. Snell had desired. Snell’s carrying of the flag through battles was indicative of the patriotism of the soldiers, and the act of flying it over territory captured from the enemy paid tribute to that patriotism. During World War I Americans believed that “the spirit of
America…cannot be beaten in battle” (Americanization, 32-33). This scene exemplifies that American spirit.

Later, the scene is of a normal day in camp following the capture of many enemy soldiers at Matanikau. As Taxi and another soldier walk through camp, a Jeep drives past and the soldier on the back announces mail call. Everyone in camp receives mail or packages, except one soldier named Sammy. He is distressed by this fact but hesitant to admit it to his comrades. While this scene may not explicitly exhibit signs of recognition for patriotic behavior, it would serve as a reminder to those on the home front that their soldiers needed recognition for their service. The soldiers were meeting the needs of the country in fighting fascism and Nazism; therefore, the sacrifices they made, as those made by soldiers since the Revolutionary War, were recognized as patriotic behavior.

At the end of the film, just prior to the final battle for the island, there is a montage of scenes where several of the Marines are writing letters home, describing what life is like and how they are doing (“really good, no kidding,” writes Chicken to his mother). The scenes begin in Col. Grayson’s tent where he is writing about the men with whom he has served and his voiceover says, “These boys are perfectly wonderful. It makes me proud to serve with them. All I can say is that if the other millions they’re training at home are anything like these, then we have nothing to worry about.” This is an exceptional tribute from a man who has been shown throughout the film to be strong and courageous, and is clear recognition of the patriotic behavior of his troops. Not only does he recognize the behavior, but also readily points it out to (presumably) those on the home front.


**Adventure and Challenge**

Adventure and challenge is the third theme common to recruiting appeals, and in this movie about Marines, there is no shortage of references to the challenges of the mission, or the adventure that waits on a tropical island. Adventure is found in each part of the journey, seeing places that have never been seen before, eating foods never before tasted, people who look different. The mission was a challenge, to defeat the enemy and thus push back the threat of fascism.

Many of the boys who signed on, especially immediately following Pearl Harbor, had never traveled a significant distance from their hometowns (Harris, Mitchell & Schechter, 1984). This film makes clear references to the mission as an adventure, but also addresses the issue of facing challenges. Col. Grayson is speaking to Father Donnelly on the deck of the ship as they are waiting to arrive at Guadalcanal, looks out across the water at the countless ships of the U.S. Navy, and says, “It’s a very cheerful thought, Father, to be going into this adventure — whatever it is — with all this power and force behind us.” This scene also visually shows the might of the armed forces. Not more than a few minutes later in the movie, Sgt. Hook is reading the letter outlining the mission to the troops, which says, “We are meeting a tough and wily opponent, but he is not sufficiently tough or wily to overcome us because we are Marines.” Both references make it clear that adventure and challenge are inherent in being a Marine.

Some of the challenges faced by the troops in the picture are portrayed in a lighthearted way. For instance, when a squad returns from the second attack on Matanikau and is gathered around the shortwave listening for a World Series score the signal fades in and out. After a thorough description of the action of the game, the signal
goes out just as the score is about to be announced, then comes back in just in time for the men to hear, “and that’s the way the game ended.” Game and team analogies are drawn on extensively in combat films of the era (Shull & Wilt, 1996), and lend to a sense of teamwork while maintaining individuality. Other challenges are painful, as evidenced by the scene that follows a long air and sea assault on the Marines’ position. The men are in an open area on the island and as the camera pulls out to a wider angle, there are rows of crosses standing over freshly dug graves. The men have lost a large number of their force, but know they must continue, despite the adversity they face.

Doherty expresses the work of the Hollywood genre as reconciling the tensions between sides, and in the process “make the body of American culture whole” (1993, 86). He goes on to say that Hollywood’s work from 1941 to 1945 was built on a foundation that was related to the national myths, or the cultural base that was already in place. The “myth” of American ingenuity finds voice in *Diary* when the men are facing the challenge of the Japanese who have holed up in the caves in the mountainside. The patrol is sent out by Col. Grayson with the order to clear them out. The narrator describes the tenaciousness of the enemy, saying, “They won’t surrender, and, chained to their guns, will die at their posts.” Taxi and Hook are sent up the ridge to see if grenades will do the job, and don’t have much luck until another soldier comes up the hill with an “idea” from Capt. Davis. Taxi says, “This gasoline and TNT ought to do the trick.” And it does.

**Traditions and Honors Associated with Military Service**

Uniforms and military insignia, working together with a diverse group of men from distant parts of the country, a family away from home, men who would give their
lives to protect each other. These are just some of the traditions and honor associated with service in the military. Mail call, letters from home, movie star pin-ups, and rations. These are also a significant part of the everyday life of an American soldier serving during World War II. The literal definition of tradition involves the transmission of beliefs, values, or customs by word of mouth or by practice; hence, the difficulty civilians have in understanding the depth of military tradition.

One of the predominant themes throughout combat films made in World War II is the idea of a diverse group of people coming together and creating one homogenous unit that is stronger as a whole than the individual parts. This is also one of the strong traditions in the military; units work together as a cohesive group, in spite of the differences in background, education, and experience of the individual members. The success of the group depends on this unity. Even today, soldiers, sailors, and airmen depend on this tradition of military service. Members of military units come from around the country and diverse backgrounds. The only way the group can succeed in its mission is for the individuals to come together as a cohesive unit. Military members and their families share common goals and interests, and the unit often becomes a “second family” because most of its individual members’ families are far away.

Sgt. Hook and Col. Grayson are experienced soldiers who understand the tradition and honor associated with service, especially as Marines. The scene in which the flag is raised over the airfield, referenced above, reinforces this theme of tradition and honor as well. In fact, even the war correspondent recognizes the importance of tradition associated with military service during the narration of the film. Following the successful second raid on Matanikau, he says, “Men, boys, going into battle for the first time in their
lives, untried, new to the jungle; high school athletes, grocers, clerks, taxi drivers, men with memories of friends ambushed, tricked, slaughtered.” While this may not appear on the surface to constitute a speech about tradition, looking below the words to their latent meaning, we see these are references to experiences that are unique to military life and therefore clearly related to the tradition of military service. Men who have fought together, and faced death together, create bonds greater than those who have not shared the experience can understand.

This theme is well developed in Guadalcanal Diary. When we meet the marines on the deck of the transport, we quickly see that we have a boy from Brooklyn, a Latino from Laredo, a blond youngster from somewhere in the central part of the country, and a Jew, whose father was a cantor at the synagogue. The priest is Irish Catholic and a Notre Dame graduate. This group is kindly disposed to one another and during the nearly two weeks from the time we meet them until they land, we see them visiting, reading letters, singing popular songs of the day. The narrator even reminds us that one of their favorite pastimes is “sharing scuttlebutt.” Here were young men from around the country, representing all faiths, owning a variety of talents and interests (Fyne, 1994).

The evening before the landing on Guadalcanal, they partake in an evening of dancing the hula, and when Father Donnelly checks on them to calm their pre-battle nerves, he joins them in an Irish jig. These are images viewers of the film could clearly relate to, images that invoked the idea that individuals, as American citizens, had more in common than not. Each of the men has left loved ones behind, and even Chicken, who makes so many references to a “certain party,” does not take much ribbing about that certain party, who is actually his mother. Family is important to these men, and it is to
those on the home front as well. Here we see the circular form of communication that is
the ritual view. The film is not seeking to change attitudes or beliefs, but reinforces and
courages those that already make up our cultural norms, as well as military tradition.

The fighting tactics used by the marines, and Father Donnelly himself, are two
more examples of references to tradition and honor. At many points in the movie, the
“sneaky” or treacherous tactics of the Japanese are pointed out, such as when Sgt. Hook
is warning the men about keeping an eye out for snipers, and to watch out for booby
traps, while the men are sitting on the deck and preparing weapons and ammunition for
the landing. Later, when they are fighting the second battle at Matanikau, he reminds
Chicken again about the possibility of the Japanese playing tricks on the Americans. The
Japanese in the film are shown hiding in the trees, shooting and stabbing dead American
bodies on the beach, and shooting Americans in the back. Service in the Marine Corps is
built on honor and tradition, as discussed above.

Father Donnelly himself serves as a reference to the tradition and honor of
service. When they have reached Guadalcanal, Col. Grayson recommends that Father
Donnelly not go ashore with the first wave. Donnelly reminds the colonel that that is just
the time he will be needed the most. Just the night before, he had joined the men below
deck in an Irish jig to assist in easing the invasion-day jitters some of the troops were
suffering. Again, the tradition of personal sacrifice (Padilla & Laner, 2001) rises to view,
exhibiting the strength of tradition in the corps. This tradition is mirrored in the ideology
of Americanism as well, which “implies…a psychological attitude of willingness to serve
the nation rather than the self” (Berkson, 1969).
Guadalcanal Diary as a General Recruiting Tool

All the recruiting messages identified by Padilla and Laner (2001) are evident in some measure in this motion picture, usually in manifest content, and often in latent content as well. But even without identifying these specific themes, Guadalcanal Diary contains elements that indicate its potential value as a general recruiting tool. Blum (1976) points out that because of the manner in which Hollywood depicted battles against the Japanese, “any schoolboy … could dream of enlisting someday to fight alongside John Wayne” to annihilate the enemy (47). This idea of working as a team to defeat the enemy was one of the main themes in combat films of the era as they sought to pay tribute to the components of the armed forces, from the Army Air Force (Air Force, 1943) to the Navy (Destination Tokyo, 1943) and the Marines (Marine Raiders, 1944) (Doherty, 1993). Guadalcanal Diary also depends on this line of thought in its storyline.

If films truly did act as “the conscience of our people,” as director John Huston suggested (Erenberg & Hirsch, 1996, 75), films such as this surely contained messages that would cause them to do so. Fyne (1994) suggests that the use of actual footage, giving the movie a “semidocumentary flair,” added to the propaganda value of the film and its reality. The use of a war correspondent as a narrator lent the film an air of authenticity and the feel of a firsthand account of events. The motion picture was filmed at Camp Pendleton, along the California coast. In addition to giving the studio permission to use the location, the Marine Corps provided real Marines as extras on the set. This added to the realistic look of the film.

Films also acted as a conscience for the American people when they indicated that the country’s diversity was a source of strength (Roeder, 1993). This idea that American
boys and men could come together from all areas of the country, from all backgrounds, with different colors of skin, and work together as a cohesive unit, must have encouraged those who would serve. It surely made clear that every member of the unit had a part to play, and that if they did not each play their parts, bad things would happen. When they worked together, everyone was taken care of.

Looking back on the motion pictures made during the war, it is easy to be critical of the “obvious propaganda” they contained. Jacobs (1967) said Hollywood’s “attempts to dramatize the war in clear and serious terms had all the authenticity of a recruiting poster” (13). Many war films neglected to make clear the agony and the effort required of war (Jacobs), but critics and the OWI seemed to agree that Guadalcanal Diary was one of the few films that accomplished those purposes (Fyne, 1994; Koppes & Black, 1987).
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The chief question that OWI and the government wanted filmmakers to ask was, “Will this picture help win the war?” The answer could be found in such considerations as how far a film contributed “something new to our understanding of the world conflict” and did not “harm the war effort by creating a false picture of America, her allies, or the world we live in.”

—John W. Jeffries, Wartime America: The World War II Home Front, 180

This analysis of Guadalcanal Diary shows that the motion picture industry did, indeed, in this instance, construct a movie that communicated traditional themes of military recruiting messages. Guadalcanal Diary provides an excellent opportunity to look at the intersection of a ritual view of communication and major themes found in recruiting messages. As seen from the discussions above, this film has explicit elements of both messages with recruiting value, and meets the definition of a communication act that operates in a way that fills ritual needs. On the surface one could argue that this film simply tells the viewing audience the story (generally) of what happened when the Marines faced the Japanese forces on the Solomon Islands in 1942. But like all communication, film embodies latent themes and values that are not as obvious, but are present nonetheless.

Roosevelt struggled to maintain, and build up, the armed forces to a desired strength. By drawing on the power of the motion picture, the medium with “the most powerful impact and lasting consequences” (Doherty, 1993, 228), the recruiting themes within Diary reached a large audience. The strong patriotic themes that emerged, the indication that God was still in control of the fortunes of the United States, as He has been from the earliest days, the strong traditions of unity and sacrifice in the face of
international crises (whether as a nation or a military unit), and the willingness to experience adventure and challenges, even when the end result is not always what one would hope, simultaneously intersected with the national culture and recruitment and enlistment needs of the military.

By the time *Guadalcanal Diary* was released in 1943, President Roosevelt had halted recruitment and voluntary enlistments for the Army, and placed severe limitations on the amount of recruiting and enlisting that could take place in the other services. But some branches of the military still faced shortages and some recruitment was thus needed. Additionally, Roosevelt faced internal squabbles between departments. One tool he had at his disposal, that reached millions upon millions of people on a weekly basis, was the motion picture industry. It had shown its propensity to cooperate in disseminating war messages, and was an effective means of reaching large audiences.

Motion pictures reinforced cultural beliefs and values, built support for new ideas that were essential to the success of the military in its fight against fascism, all while entertaining. The power of the screen to reach those who might be hard to reach otherwise was recognized within the industry (May, 2000), and President Roosevelt also felt strongly about power of the medium to reach audiences with messages of support for the war (Doherty, 1993). The films that came out of Hollywood truly pulled together an important communication process, while developing clear themes of support for the armed services, even messages that could be construed as having recruiting value. After all, *Guadalcanal Diary*, as did other Hollywood productions, “reflected American policy, and indeed America itself” (Winkler, 1978, 157).
The positive images of the military found in this film had the potential to act as recruiting messages and give strength to those eligible for the draft. Many concerns of the war were exhibited in the movie, and considering the constrictions of the censorship organizations, the movie portrayed a fairly realistic view of what was happening in battle. When examined as a communication act that plays a ritual role, rather than as propaganda or as a vehicle for the transmission of a message, the film stands out as a fine example of what Hollywood and the Office of War Information hoped to achieve.

Bosley Crowther, film critic for The New York Times, said in a review published shortly after the release of Diary that the film effectively demonstrated what the war entailed because “Twentieth Century-Fox has crammed it with heroic action of the grimmest sort” (Crowther, Nov. 18, 1943). In another article published just three days later, he stated that while Diary is “too deliberately theatrical,” he also stated that casts of the newer war films like Diary and Sahara (1943) that include newcomers to Hollywood lend an air of actuality to the films (Crowther, Nov. 21, 1943). This film also incorporated actual battlefield footage into the storyline, thereby adding to the credibility of the recruiting themes it presented.

Regardless of the incorporation of the recruitment themes identified by Padilla and Laner (2001), there was still a recognition by audiences of the time that what was portrayed on the screen was Hollywood’s interpretation of events. In 1944, Time magazine published a letter from an enlisted man that blasted the Hollywood war films that were shown at his base overseas (Fyne, 1994). The nameless GI was frustrated at the movie hero who annihilated hundreds of the enemy by himself, thus single-handedly saving an entire squad or platoon from destruction. Included in the list of the soldier’s
complaints was the fact “that some troops stormed out of the theater before the movies were over” in disgust (Fyne, 149). With the graphic portrayals of war that are released by Hollywood today, films made during World War II do appear to be anesthetized versions of battle. No blood, no guts, no cursing, no arguments among the troops, everyone got along fine. Death was sanitary. But American culture of the time had its own standards of decency. Does that mean that those who watched these motion pictures on the home front thought Hollywood’s depictions were what the war was actually like?

The depictions of battles in war films were physically unrealistic, but we fail to give adequate credit to the audiences of the war era if we suggest that they were so removed from the war that they did not accept the psychological and emotional realism of the films (Basinger, 1998). Hollywood knew its business, and knew how best to create powerful effects despite censorship limitations. In fact, Basinger points out that it would not have been good business to create films that were intentionally unrealistic:

Instead, working within the limitations of censorship, wartime materiel restrictions, “good taste,” and propaganda, they accepted their task as one in which they were to entertain the audience, but also gain acceptance by coming close to the experiences they were living through outside the theater (2). And lest audiences be fooled into thinking that motion pictures were supposed to act as virtual re-enactments of battles, the movie critics of the day reminded them of the differences between reality in war and film (Basinger, 1998). Movies were not the only visual representations of the war to which those on the home front were exposed; they were also exposed to photos in newspapers and magazines, as well as newsreels and short documentary films (Basinger, 1998).

This example of Hollywood’s business acumen reinforces the view of ritual communication embodied by these films as well. It was the motion picture that brought
the war home most effectively, despite the plethora of books, magazine articles, radio 
broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow, and news stories from the likes of Ernie Pyle and 
others (Doherty, 1993). OWI reviewers called Guadalcanal Diary the most realistic of 
the films they had seen; some critics agreed, praising the fact that the film did not glorify 
war (Koppes & Black, 1987). The Hollywood motion picture industry provided much-
needed encouragement to sustain morale on the home front, particularly during the darker 
days of 1942 and 1943, when the outcome of the war was not yet certain (Fyne, 1994).

Carey (1989) explains that while material forms of communication — such as 
motion pictures — are artificial, they create a “real symbolic order that operates not to 
provide information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds, but to 
represent an underlying order of things” (19, emphasis mine). The themes embedded in 
feature films, while providing confirmation of cultural values, can serve more than one 
function. This film contains recruiting themes that I considered directed at those who 
would serve in the military. However, these themes could also be identified as messages 
directed at the families at home. Many scenes in the film helped those at home 
understand the mission of the Marines, the protection they received from chaplains, 
sergeants and officers, the first-rate equipment the military used, and themes that have 
not been specifically identified.

While this study answers many questions, it prompts others. Studies of recruiting 
messages and other messages that relate to service in the military during a draft period 
are severely lacking in the literature. Studies such as this one indicate a need to evaluate 
other mediums of communication, and especially to examine the content of these media 
in light of their value in maintaining and reflecting cultural values. Motion pictures,
radio, newspapers, magazines, and other communication media were vital contributors to the war effort, but are often studied only in their role as transmitters of messages, as they are in propaganda studies. While these studies provide insights into the content of the messages themselves, it is only through a ritual view of communication that we can begin to understand how culture shapes and is shaped by such media messages.

In addition, it is important that we seek to understand how media content helped construct messages about the military. The military manpower circumstances of World War II are clearly understudied, as are recruiting messages in general. Other opportunities to better understand what military support themes were contained in World War II media could be studied in the popular magazines of the day, as well as through the examination of newsreel content. And, of course, other films made during the war, especially those I have identified as “home front” films, could be studied to determine if they carry themes similar to those found in battlefield films.

These are just some suggestions of ways to examine this small part of the greater whole of communication efforts during World War II. Susman (1984) reminds us that while we may examine a particular medium or a look for a special theme, we must remember that each part is related to other parts that share in a greater whole, so that we may begin to recognize the relationships that exist between culture and media.

In the words of Larry Mantrell, one of the millions of young men who served his country during World War II, “It would have been totally socially unacceptable not to be in the service” (Harris, Mitchell & Schechter, 1984, 54). Guadalcanal Diary was successful in presenting themes that reinforced the idea that one received traditional rewards for military service.
LIST OF REFERENCES
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CAST OF CHARACTERS IN GUADALCANAL DIARY*

Directed by.................................. Lewis Seiler
Writing credits............................... Richard Tregaskis (book)
............................................. Lamar Trotti and Jerome Cady (script)

Cast (in credits order)
Preston Foster............................... Father Donnelly
Lloyd Nolan ............................... Gunnery Sgt. Hook Malone
William Bendix............................. Cpl. Aloysius T. 'Taxi' Potts
Richard Conte ................................ Capt. Don Davis
Anthony Quinn ............................ Pvt. Jesus 'Soose' Alvarez
Richard Jaeckel ............................ Pvt. Johnny 'Chicken' Anderson
Roy Roberts ............................... Capt. James Cross
Minor Watson ............................. Col. Wallace E. Grayson
Ralph Byrd .................................. Ned Rowman
Lionel Stander ............................. Sgt. Butch
Reed Hadley ............................... War correspondent/Narrator
John Archer ............................... Lt. Thurmond

Rest of cast listed alphabetically:
Marion Carl ................................. Marine pilot
Eddie Acuff ................................. Pvt. Tex Mcllvoy (uncredited)
Warren Ashe ............................... Col. Morton (uncredited)
Martin Black ............................... Marine (uncredited)
Harry Carter ............................... Dispatch officer (uncredited)
Tom Dawson ............................... Captain (uncredited)
Walter Fenner ............................... Col. Roper (uncredited)
Robert Ford ................................. Marine (uncredited)
Paul Fung ................................. Japanese prisoner (uncredited)
Fred Graham ............................... Marine listening to game on radio (uncredited)
Louis Hart ................................. Lieutenant (uncredited)
George Holmes ............................ Marine (uncredited)
Russell Hoyt ............................... Marine (uncredited)
Selmer Jackson ............................ Col. Thompson (uncredited)
Allen Jung ................................. Japanese officer (uncredited)
Charles Lang ............................... Marine (uncredited)
Jack Luden ................................. Major (uncredited)
Miles Mander ............................... Weatherby (plantation supervisor) (uncredited)
David Peters ............................... Marine (uncredited)
Bob Rose ................................. Sammy Kline (uncredited)
Larry Thompson ............................ Chaplain (uncredited)

*From www.imdb.com