Hollywood's Documentary Filmmaking During the Second World War

Hodak, Klara

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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1. Introduction

The Second World War was the defining event of the 1940s for both film industry and the whole nation. Hollywood's conversion to war production was highly successful. According to Schatz (1), „the war also ignited a five-year economic boom, pushing box-office revenues and film studio profits to record levels." The industry was successful by several criteria: by the quality of films, the enormous profit, the well-regulated distribution of diversion, propaganda, and information to stimulate civilian and military audiences (131). However, Hollywood had numerous battles on the domestic front; with the Justice Department, Congress, labour unions, theatre owners, censors over antitrust violations, 'un-American activities', control of the workforce, control of the film marketplace, subject matters of the films and many more. It turns out that the industry's success was a post-war phenomenon (1). The sociologist Leo Rosten deftly described the paradox of the industry in this era: „…the closer one looks at the film industry during the 1940s, the more evident it becomes that World War II marked an extended, dramatic, and most welcome interval in a decade long period of industry decline" (2).

This paper deals with five American film directors – Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, John Huston and George Stevens, and their experiences of capturing the world's events during the Second World War. The body of the work is divided into five sections, each portraying one film director by briefly putting him in the context before, during and after WW2. The main focus is on their creations during the war and this is achieved by analyzing in detail films they had made. When it comes to film analysis, it will try to depict its main characteristics, focusing on the distinctive style of each director. It will put in question the objectivity of the documentary, that is, analyze its propaganda and documentary elements and how they work together in painting the picture of the real events and society of that time. Furthermore, it will include public's reception of the films and commentary of their directors,

as well as other influential personas of the film industry of that time. With five sections division, the work is chronologically portraying important war-related events shown from different, unique perspectives of American directors and United States War Department to educate, recruit and make their citizens support the war.

2. Frank Capra

2.1. *Why We Fight* (1942-1945)

In 1940, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall recruited Capra to film the *Why We Fight* series of lectures for the Army Orientation Course, which would deal with the history and on-going world war (McBride *Frank Capra* 455). Between 1942 and 1945 seven *Why We Fight* films[1] were produced. Originally, there was no intention for screening the series to the general public, but the exceptions were made with *Prelude to War* and *The Battle of Russia*. Capra, as well as the President of that time, Franklin D. Roosevelt, thought the public should see these films as soon as possible (475).

Why We Fight started out as army's program to inspire new soldiers and give them a better understanding of the world military history between the two world wars, as well as to assert the principles of country's democracy (Harris ch. 6). According to Koppes and Black (67), democracy was a flexible term to give a thorough explanation of the entry into the war; it connected domestic and international politics, society and order. *War Comes to America* (1945) states that at that time 37% of soldiers did not even have a high school education, so that is why Capra believed obligatory viewing was necessary (McBride *Frank Capra* 469). The series also delivered a world geography lesson with a message that America is going to war, but cannot win alone. It is a great example of a commercial production that sugar-coated

[1] *Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike*, *Divide and Conquer*, *The Battle of Britain*, *The Battle of Russia*, *The Battle of China*, and *War Comes to America* (McBride *Frank Capra* 470).

propaganda to teach Americans not to worry and treat the rest of the world as a family (Bennett 264). The series challenged Americans to get a new perspective of the world, to leave their ignorance behind and become more cultured (119). When asked whether *Why We Fight* films are supposed to be 'hate' films, Capra replied: „I don't want people to hate. I wanted to knock off people that hated. I wanted to stop that hatred," yet on one occasion he admitted that during wartime is was difficult to avoid hate, since it naturally found its way into the dialogues (McBride *Frank Capra* 469).

Over the years, the series received harsh criticism because of its excessive fabrication. However, Capra denied these accusations, claiming that his unit had only fabricated the animation and graphics, and that the rest of the film footage was based on real historical events (McBride *Frank Capra* 479). Various shots from Capra's series were taken from fictional films. OWI demanded a preface that would be added to the films for public release to cover this practice and fakery: „Use has been made of certain motion pictures with historical backgrounds. When necessary for purposes of clarity, a few reenactments have been made under War Department Supervision" (480). Nonetheless, the most evident to the viewers are the scenes portraying historical events that happened before the development of motion pictures, for instance, the American Revolutionary War[2] or the French Revolution[3] (480). More subtle is the usage of fictional films[4] portraying contemporary history, especially in fabricating scenes to depict the enemy's activity. An even more prevalent feature of these war films is implicit dependence on staged "documentary" materials, also including enemy propaganda, which are displayed to the viewers as facts (480). In his study of the series, William Thomas Murphy points out that Capra was following the tradition of *March of the Time* established in 1930s, which made progressive use of recreations, often blurring the line

[2] Taken from *America* (1924) and *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939).
[3] Taken from *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935).
[4] *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *The Cross of Lorraine* (1943), *The Hitler Gang* (1944).

between reality and what was set up for the camera. In addition, Murphy notes: „This misunderstood tradition, in the context of war exigencies, made the use of staged footage a plausible alternative to no footage at all" (481).

Not only were the stylistic elements of the films criticized, but also the overall impact of the films. Biskupski (148) wrote: „*Why We Fight* is a conglomeration of patriotic exhortation, crackpot geopolitical theorizing, and historical mischief making." In a study conducted after the war, soldiers implied that Capra's method had serious disadvantages. The study discovered that the series had „marked effects on the men's knowledge of factual material concerning the events leading up to the war" (McBride *Frank Capra* 482). GIs also criticized the films for being biased and using staged material. The study confirmed that the films were not influential on soldiers' attitude toward the war and was not effective on their motivation to serve during the war, which was regarded the fundamental goal of the orientation program (482). Despite all the criticism, Capra's *Why We Fight* films remain the steady indicator, the most widely seen and influential of all war documentaries and possibly the most influential among all documentary series ever. It was the first in the history of U.S. that the entire inventory of motion picture was used for clear instructional and propaganda purposes (Schatz 406).

2.2. Case Study: *Prelude to War* (1942)

Prelude to War is the first out of seven *Why We Fight* films. The beginning of the film is straightforward in informing its viewers what it is trying to achieve, i.e. sharing factual information about the causes and events leading up to America's entry into the war. Their wish is to be recognized as a symbol of freedom and great power. As G.C. Marshall stated in the film, it is only possible after the absolute defeat of Germany and Japan.

So, what are the causes and events? The film cuts the narration with the images of explosions, bombings, and casualties from different countries around the world under the

attack of the oppressors. Right away, the two worlds are presented to the viewers – 'free' and 'slave.' The narrator continues to explain the difference; 'free' world was built by the men of vision who have believed that everyone is created equal, while the 'slave' world is based on killing freedom and repeating the cruel history once again. However, according to McBride (*Frank Capra* 468), this simplification using black-and white concept caused problems with America's allies and brought political embarrassment to Capra.[5] Capra wanted to make clear from the start that the U.S. is fighting for freedom and freedom only, or at least that was what he was trying to make everyone believe in after watching the film.

After a while, the audience gets to see the enemies and their leaders, followed by the quick history lesson of how those countries ended in a place they were back then. It all comes to one – poor people of Germany, Italy and Japan had a hard time and were desperate for a slight change, some even wanted revenge from the last war, whereas powerful industrials did not want to lose their power and wealth, so the leaders took care of them. Capra offers a skillful presentation of these countries, shifting back and forth from one to another in order to unite their ideology. It is interesting to see three different countries with the same poisonous ideology. However, the narrator points out, they are not so different after all – they are just carrying different names representing one doctrine – militaristic imperialism.

Furthermore, it continues to explain how this propaganda is carried out: free speech is forbidden, press and any cultural activity are controlled, labor unions are abolished, people are forced to work – in short, everything is run by the national-socialist party. Capra includes numerous articles silencing everyone who is against the new order, the images of ruined churches, and the removal of crosses, which are replaced by swastikas. He uses a lot of taken enemy footage, showing public propaganda speeches by Goebbels, Streicher, Dietrich,

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[5] Especially with films *The Battle of Russia* and *The Battle of China*. For example, Capra's pro-Soviet attitude and its simplification was criticized during the cold war for referring to Soviets as "free and united people" and stating that U.S.S.R. under Stalin represented "the cross of Christ over the Fascist swastika" (McBride *Frank Capra* 462).

Reinhard and many others. The best example of a well incorporated enemy film is Leni Riefenstahl's tribute to Hitler, *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Capra referred to the film as „the classic, powerhouse propaganda film of our times," using the enemies' own ideas against them and revealing moral outrage caused by the Nazi menace (Schatz 407). However, what is thought-provoking is that these quotes had given a ground for suspicion that Capra saw Riefenstahl's film as an example of what he wanted from his films; the desire to connect with an audience; to appeal to their emotions beyond rationality, and to make his audience accept ideas that are far greater than them (Scott 286). Afterwards, the dynamic presentation of shocking images is juxtaposed with slow-paced footage of enemy's school systems, children singing and marching on the streets to express the harmony of this immoral regime. What is particularly compelling about *Prelude to War* is its portrayal of the enemy's propaganda, while its own propaganda is being ignored and hidden. It shows what a powerful tool it can be in shaping the public's opinion, especially during the crisis such as war. One could say that here the propaganda goes both ways, it is just a matter of one's point of view.

The usage of animation plays an enormous role in the film. It makes it easier for the viewers to understand the complicated relationships among countries. Walt Disney Studio animated the maps, which illustrated the enemy's plan, that is why we can see German, Italian and Japanese paths on invasion throughout the years (Bennett 106). Perhaps the most horrifying example is when animation shows the enemy's biggest aim – to conquer the whole world, finishing with the U.S.

The narrator warns the public to remember the date of September 18th 1931. It was when it all started by Japan attacking Manchuria and Italy attacking Ethiopia later on. The League of Nations did not take necessary measurements to stop the aggression. The biggest problem was: How to convince people to go to the war because of the invasion of Manchuria? Capra interviewed Americans about the war. Most of them were not ready for another war,

especially happening far away. That is why *Prelude to War* seeks to inform and educate American public; if they do not act now, their freedom will be at stake, and they will lose their freedom of choice. Capra often uses rhetorical devices to contrast the American Dream with the ideology of the enemy. In the end of the film, the viewers can hear:

> „This isn't just a war. This is a common man's life-and-death struggle against those who would put him back into slavery. We lose it—and we lose everything. Our homes, the jobs we want to go back to, the books we read, the very food we eat, the hopes we have for our kids, the kids themselves—they won't be ours anymore. That's what's at stake. It's us or them. The chips are down. Two worlds stand against each other — one must die; one must live." (McBride *Frank Capra* 468)

3. John Ford

3.1. War Years

John Ford directed approximately a hundred films before his wartime service and his first documentary. Many of his following wartime documentaries[6] are curious, collaborative, or anonymous projects, but they represent a unique side of Ford, seek unconventional styles of cinema, make use of diverse dialectical relationships with the viewers and precede many numerous modernist techniques (Gallagher 254). Ford's attitude is more educational than in his fictional films, montage is linear and simple, and visual and aural elements are well combined, accumulated to evoke actuality. However, objectivity is not the goal; Ford's documentaries are propaganda films, and their stance is unambiguous juxtaposed to the fictional films. Ford wanted to utilize tensions between apparent reality and evident fabrication. It is interesting that at that point, the tension is most concise, and both oppositions are fully utilized, making both cinematic and objective reality the most effective (255).

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[6] Includes *Sex Hygiene* (1941), *The Battle of Midway* (1942), *December 7th* (1943) and various other projects.

In 1939, to record the upcoming war, Ford started to plan his most challenging documentary film project. Ford recruited and trained the „Naval Volunteer Photographic Unit," his own film division. The navy was distrustful of Ford's modernist ideas, but in the end they got accepted into the foreign intelligence agency. Ford became the head of the OSS's[7] Field Photographic Branch. His film unit produced a lot of films; some of them were projected in secret for government leaders (Gallagher 256).

3.2. Case Study: *The Battle of Midway* (1942)

The film starts by locating Midway Islands on the map. Ford shows a peaceful day on the islands; navy patrol planes reporting the current situation, the marines singing and marching. The camera cuts to gooney birds, followed by cheerful orchestral music, which gives off a feeling that the audience is watching a documentary. Despite the comical presentation, the birds seem nervous, and the narrator indicates that something big is about to happen. The first sequence finishes with warm red and yellow colors of a sunset, soldiers peacefully admiring the view, while one of them is playing a harmonica. In Matheson's (101) opinion, Ford's approach is subtle and sophisticated and he transforms Midway into an idiom of honor and power that shows the greatness of America. Despite that, Ford's final shot of light shining through red-coloured clouds indicates that the war is coming.

In the next shot, the audience can feel the excitement because enemy fleet is close. Ford wants the public to take a closer look and meet the soldiers. What is very captivating about Ford's documentary is that he introduces a female narrator who recognizes one of the soldiers – he is her neighbor's son. She sounds concerned about the young man flying. Next, the audience can meet the man's family. The narrator continues to explain that they are just another ordinary American family. Ford leaves the frame of a conventional war documentary with this segment. It plays with the viewers' feelings; due to the personal portrayal of the

[7] The Office of Strategic Services, later known as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

soldiers, the viewers can relate to them easily. They are aware that the soldiers are one of them, carrying the same values, and defending those values and their people. Gallagher (259) states that „there is a unique sort of "reality" here; there is a closer proximity to life than exists in Ford's fiction films. The confrontation is starker, more vivid, more richly encountered. And it is personal." On the other side, it is interesting that William T. Murphy, a documentary film historian, defined the film as „crude propaganda that substitutes moral and emotional feelings for information, offering no broad perspective of the battle" (Matheson 98). Dismissing W. T. Murphy, McBride expresses that Ford's motivation for making the film was not to publicize military strategy or reveal historical record. Instead he wanted to show soldiers' experience of the battle so that the American public could understand their sacrifices and take care of their own lives (*John Ford* 361).

When the battle had finally started, the tone changed too. The hand-held camera follows the planes taking off, offers close-ups of anti-aircraft guns and explosions. Perhaps the most significant moment of the film is when the soldiers are putting American flag in the air during the battle. Allied planes continue to follow the enemy fleet. The tone quickly changes again with peaceful orchestral music in the background. The battle is over. The narrator makes an announcement for all men and women of America, referring to the previous dialogue with a female narrator – their neighbors' sons are safely coming home from work. The camera engages with soldier's smiling faces after the successful battle. Even though the battle is over, there is still a lot of work to be done. Now, they have to focus on searching for the survivors. Ford wants to show that every man is important, giving the film some sort of a happy ending, despite the casualties. The female narrator from the beginning is worried again – this role of a motherly figure is constant throughout the film. Moreover, Matheson explained Ford's concept well; *The Battle of Midway* is more fictional than factual, persuading its viewers that it depicts real events, when in reality – it does not. The film has

emotional impact because the battle did happen in real life; however, a considerable amount of action shown in the film occurred before and after the battle. Ford's usage of synthesis is evident in the film; when the Ford's version is compared with the actual incident, it is difficult not to notice cautiously scripted, fictional elements and occurrences of advanced montage used to deliver the film's story (99).

The film slowly comes to an end and shows the aftermath of the battle. It is shocking to see divine services being held in a destroyed chapel, as well as the completely ruined hospital, which represents a symbol of mercy. The narrator reminds the viewers that the enemy did not have any respect for this symbol. After the service, soldiers are burying the dead and giving them honor, the choir is singing in the background, while the camera shifts to buildings that are still burning. The last images are the Liberty Bell and V sign, just like in *Prelude to War*. McBride (*John Ford* 364) points out that even though this film no longer has a significant impact on audiences, it still is an extraordinary evocative and sensitive meditation on war. It is a rare piece of propaganda, but at the same time it is a timeless work of art. „The *Battle of Midway* is a symphony in its succession of tones of light, of tones of emotion, of tones of movement," Gallagher concludes, „never was Ford to make a film more cinematically and formally perfect than *The Battle of Midway*" (260-261). What is even more important, the film was the first cinematic proof that the American army might win in the Pacific, and it won an Oscar for the best short documentary of 1942 (Davis 169).

4. William Wyler

4.1. War Years

Wyler had always been passionately anti-Nazi. He explained his politics this way: „My interest in any organizations of a political nature began during the Roosevelt Era here and the rise of Nazism abroad. . . . As a foreign-born American I was perhaps more alarmed from the

beginning by the threat of Nazism than the average American" (Miller 210). During the wartime, Wyler went on to produce three films; *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), *Memphis Belle* (1944), and *Thunderbol*t (1945). In 1941, the biggest studio in Hollywood, MGM, took Wyler to work with Sidney Franklin on *Mrs. Miniver*. The adaptation would be based on the book by Jan Struther published in 1939. It is a series of connected stories following an upper-class English family enjoying family and communal life to which their wealth entitles them. However, the stories gain some bitterness and drama from allusions to the imminent war, which endangers their way of life (Miller 209). The most important is that the whole Miniver saga was modified into a propaganda film to support America joining the European conflict. The OWI wanted Hollywood studios to produce films that highlighted America's connection to England and other allies. Although *Mrs. Miniver* was produced before the OWI attained influence in Hollywood, it honors the relationship between the two countries and the U.S government wanted to showcase that through the film industry (Miller 212). The film was a great financial success. It won six Oscars, as well as Best Director for Wyler. However, Wyler was already overseas, serving in the U.S. Air Force (219).

4.2. Case Study: *Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress* (1944)

Memphis Belle is one of the most praised American war documentaries, as well as the first film Wyler directed for the air force with a plan to boost their morale. The film starts very unusually by showing a peaceful village and voice-over explaining that this is the combat zone. The peace in this village is interrupted with planes and soldiers preparing the bombs for the mission. Right away, the audience gets to know the main target – Wilhelmshaven in Germany. The camera continues to follow the preparations. In the next shot, the crews are in a meeting, getting necessary information about the mission. The narration is straightforward – everyone is aware of the importance of the mission and there is no time to lose. The crew of *Memphis Belle* comes into the shot. This will be their 25th

mission, after which they will finally go home and be an example for all the future fighters. „Home is America," the narrator concludes.

The bombers are slowly taking off on the mission. The audience can admire authentic decorations of each bomber – the flying fortresses are not just objects, soldiers have special connection with them, and Wyler is aware of that. Harris (ch. 19) states that this air combat offered the audience to experience the war from a new perspective, and Wyler took every chance to present the sensations of it in his film. In this segment, it can be heard once again „This is a battlefront," followed by lyrical description of the sky. In the air, the narrator returns to friendly English soil, comparing it to dreamy classical novels. However, today the countryside is different. It has become an enormous bomber field. Wyler appointed Lester Koenig to write the script (Miller 228). Koenig's narration is very captivating; even though the film is a documentary, he moves away from factual and descriptive into a more conceptual, abstract language. One great example of his narration is when the bombers are flying towards their target:

> „You look out at the strange world beyond—
>
> Reflections in plexiglass.
>
> Like nothing you ever saw before.
>
> Outside of a dream.
>
> Higher and higher
>
> Into the lifeless stratosphere
>
> Until the exhaust of engines,
>
> Mixing with the cold thin air,
>
> Condenses and
>
> Streams the heavens with vapor trails." (Miller 229-230)

Maxwell Anderson also took part in writing the script. Anderson's narration is simple, flat and straight to the point. The difference between Anderson's and Koenig narration is remarkable:

„And this is the crew of the Memphis Belle.

324th Squadron, 91st Heavy Bombardment Group.

Just one plane and one crew

In one squadron.

In one group.

Of one wing.

Of one air force.

Out of fifteen United States Army Air Forces." (Miller 229)

While reaching their target, the crew of *Memphis Belle* is introduced once again. After their introduction, it is obvious that each man has a different background, yet they all ended in the same plane with only one mission on their minds – to destroy the enemy and return home. Just like Ford, Wyler is depicting a humane, personal relationship between the fighters and the camera. The beautiful view of the English coast is slowly disappearing as the bombers climb higher. While the bombers are slowly reaching their target, the animated map shows the technical part of the mission: six groups of planes are going in six directions, carefully planned to trick the enemy and hide their main target.

Finally, the enemy territory is in sight, but it looks just like any other with its houses, roads and fields. The narrator reminds one should not be deceived – those houses and fields belong to invaders and oppressors. This segment reaches its highest level of propaganda. It defines the whole country and its people as tyrants who started two wars in one generation and brought pain and suffering into American homes. As viewers over 70 years later, it is shocking to learn how biased war documentary were, how easily many of them crossed the line of documentary, and jumped straight into ignorant and propagandistic conclusions.

The following segment is the most dynamic part of the film. Enemy fighters are counterattacking, while one part of the crew must focus on dropping the bombs correctly. A few moments later, the land is filled with smoke, and only the sound of plane's engine can be heard. The narrator takes a step back and lets the crew lead the situation. Everyone seems calm and focused to finish the mission. The camera catches a falling B-17, men start jumping out with parachutes, as the *Memphis Belle* crew is waiting for everyone to safely get out. Unfortunately, this situation reveals the cruelest part of the battle - if something bad happens, you cannot help, but only watch and keep the formation. Wyler wrote an essay *Flying over Germany* in 1943, describing his experience:

> „There are many difficulties of aerial combat photography. There aren't many openings for a camera. You're cluttered up with a 'chute, oxygen equipment, a Mae West heavy flying suit, gloves, camera. You try to squeeze yourself into a small space under a machine gun. About that time the glass you are trying to see through gets fogged up or your camera freezes. Then when you're all set to shoot forward, the principal action takes place astern. You focus, your exposures vary from one side to another, into the sun and out of it. Hot cartridges are coming down your neck. You can't move around too much because you're on oxygen and you may pass out." (Miller 226)

Back home on the friendly English soil, ground crews are impatiently waiting. As the planes are returning one by one, everyone is counting them. Karel Reisz wrote: „full psychological tension is brought home with remarkable power" (Miller 232). He also observed that after the landing, one of the airmen kneeled and kissed the ground – Wyler accomplished a „spontaneous, unaffected realism which is to be found nowhere else in his work" (232). Some of the planes are missing, but the mission has been successful – bombers destroyed a German aircraft factory, railroads, docks and harbors. For all that, this mission is even greater because it could potentially help win future battles. *Memphis Belle* lands too. The

men can happily go home. It will be their 26th mission – to educate and support other. The film ends with a surprise visit from King and Queen of England to honor the brave soldiers.

Memphis Belle was a huge success. Wyler showed it to the President Roosevelt at the White House, who was very moved by the film, and said: „This has to be shown right away, everywhere" (Harris ch. 19). A few days later, Wyler screened the film countless times, showing it to other military personnel. Bosley Crowther wrote a review for the *New York Times*, which was published on the front page – it was the first time in the history of newspapers that a film review was considered worthy of such praise (Miller 232). In his memo to Wyler, Darryl Zanuck wrote that the film was well-accepted „because it is primary entertainment." Moreover, he said that if War Department continues to release films, *Memphis Belle* should be a constructive lesson since „documentaries will only be played by exhibitors and enjoyed by the public if they contain entertainment. You cannot ask the public to pay good money to receive a lecture no matter how vital the lecture happens to be" (232).

5. John Huston

5.1. War Years

When John Huston volunteered for the service in the war, he was still a young man. While directing his new movie, he did not notice a letter from U.S. Army ordering him when and where to report. He left the set in a hurry because the Army Signal Corps insisted that he reports to duty in Washington. Huston got his first assignment in April, 1942; he had to fly to the Aleutian Islands, Alaska, and film a documentary of the war in the far northwest (Brady ch. 11). The Japanese had landed their forces on the islands Kiska and Attu, from which they bombed the American base in the central Aleutians. The Americans were afraid that the islands might become the enemy's bridge to the mainland. While Huston was there, the islands were certainly not peaceful; Americans increased their bombing missions against the

Japanese bases – Huston's cameramen flew with them, filming the action. Huston also flew into battle, undergoing heavy antiaircraft fire, enemy attacks and crash landings. *Report from the Aleutians* (1943) shows the military value of the Aleutians mission and of the bombing attacks that kept enemy away from the islands. Many planes were severely damaged, their crews wounded or killed, but the documentary highlighted the crews' teamwork and responsibility while they flew to destroy enemy shipping, and wreck their installations (Meyers ch. 7.1.).

5.2. Case Study: *The Battle of San Pietro* (1945)

The film starts with a speech explaining why the battle in San Pietro even happened. The village was the key point to the Liri Valley. As the war is still going on, this film is dedicated to all living and dead and to those who continue to fight. After a brief introduction, the film focuses on geographical position and importance of the village and the valley. We quickly learn it is a quite unique situation; the valley is surrounded by the high mountains, and one narrow passage leads to San Pietro. The battle has been going on for a few months. As Huston continues to explain how the village was built by Italian peasants, he shows us villagers cleaning their bombed homes, until the camera reveals the dead girl's body. Later on, Huston returns to shots of children who survived after the battle that liberated the village from Nazi occupation. He hopes that they will be able to forget quickly, however according to Bronfen (153), it is the corpse of a girl that suggests all future deaths, and instructs the viewers on how to interpret what they are about to see. The film suggests that if one believes in the future, he does so only by remembering human suffering.

The next segment mainly focuses on the three battalions studying the terrain, patrolling and slowly progressing at defeating the enemy. The battalions were set back many times, but they never gave up. Huston's technique of documentary filmmaking is quite authentic; the camera is hand-held, out of focus and shaking because of numerous explosions

nearby, and most importantly – always offers close-ups of the soldiers' faces. Bronfen (154) believes it indicates that, in order to understand what happens during the war, one must waver between individual actions and the overall scheme of the war, even while accepting the routine of both. Later on, all forces are directed towards San Pietro. Sixteen tanks had been sent down the main road, but none reached the village. After countless difficulties, Allied forces finally succeeded in taking new positions and made enemy withdraw. Unfortunately, the battle of San Pietro was a costly one, and replacements were needed. Just like in the Ford's film, the audience can witness the burying ceremony. Perhaps the most horrifying moment of the film is when the narrator concludes that more San Pietros are to come and that many of the men we see in the film are now dead, and have joined those who gave their lives for San Pietro, while showing the images of soldiers resting after the battle.

A very emotional moment in the film is when we can see the villagers finally coming out their hiding places. Sadly, their town is still not safe, and everything is up to them to rebuild their living spaces. Men and women are crying, while the soldiers are helping them find their loved ones under the ruins. Children are, on the other hand, happily playing. Coming to an end, the narrator reminds us of the main aim – to defeat the enemy. The liberation of the village was accidental, but the villagers look at them as liberators. It may be a cruel reality, but Huston wants audience to understand that it is just a part of how the war functions and that the troops must continue to serve for their country. Bronfen (154) notices that the classic war film would portray the liberation of the village as a culminating moment of victory, whereas Huston foregrounds the ordinariness of it – soldiers are moving on to the next village, or burying the dead. The bad harvest from the beginning of the film is juxtaposed with a good harvest of the upcoming year, symbolizing one more victory in a row. The troops are leaving the town, as the villagers continue to pray for them. The V sign appears once again.

The Battle of San Pietro represents real soldiers as dramatic characters in a documentary film about sacrifice and restoration. When the film was released, one of the officers from the OSS complained that the film was „against war, against the war," so Huston replied, „Well, sir, whenever I make a picture that's for war—why, I hope you take me out and shoot me" (Bronfen 155). The War Department refused to show it in fear it would demoralize young draftees. However, when General G. Marshall saw the film, he reversed the ban. Marshall believed the intense realism was the film's virtue and that every American soldier in training should see the film. In the end, the film was shown to the new soldiers (Meyer ch. 7.2.).

5.3. Huston's Postwar Production

When Huston made *Let There Be Light* (1946), he said it was to „to reassure industry that the men who were released from the army on a section eight [a psychological discharge] were reliable, that they were not lunatics" (Meyer ch. 7.3.). He shot the film at Mason General Hospital, Brentwood during three months in 1945.

Report from the Aleutians and *The Battle of San Pietro* depicted the war; *Let There Be Light* portrayed its traumatic consequences on the soldier's mind and spirit. The film shows that everyone has a breaking point. Before the treatment, the patients „have in common unceasing fear and apprehension, a sense of impending disaster, a feeling of hopelessness and utter isolation" (Meyer ch. 7.3.). They still mourn the death of their companions, fear their own death, and they came home as ruined victims, not as triumphant heroes. Next, the film puts the emphasis on cures, and it gives a simplified explanation of psychological processes, as well as the usage of sodium amytal for hypnosis. The doctors are more rough than gentle when treating the patients and it is heart-breaking to see the patients' harrowing physical symptoms. The cures seem too effortless and too quick to be convincing, as if they are some sort of miracle. *Let There Be Light* was called „the most impressive piece of psychiatric

propaganda ever made" by the doctors (ch. 7.3.). This documentary was even more striking than *The Battle of San Pietro* – it was banned by the army and not shown to the public for thirty-five years. Finally, Vice President Walter Mondale intervened in 1980 (ch. 7.3.).

6. George Stevens

6.1. War Years

Stevens left the United States in February 1943 to serve in U.S. Army Signal Corps. The unit's job was to photograph Allied activity. He first started with the North Africa campaign. Later on, he photographed some strategic operations of the war, including the D-Day, the liberation of Paris, the Ardennes counteroffensive, and, lastly, the liberation of concentration camps (Moss 101). Stevens stayed in Europe until 1945. The war changed his perspective on human nature, and had a great impact on his future filmmaking. Before, Stevens was known for his extraordinary talent for creating light-hearted movies; he knew how to combine the economic crash of the Depression and modern life as a context for neat comedies that pleased moviegoers (Harris *Prologue*).

6.2. Case Study: *Nazi Concentration Camps* (1945)

Nazi Concentration Camps is perhaps the most horrifying documentary film produced during the war. The film was shown on the Nuremberg trial on 29th November 1945 and it was „the [American] prosecution's most dramatic evidence of the Nazis malignancy" (Jordan 19). The viewers can see the footage from twelve different concentration and prison camps in Europe. It starts with an animated map showing countless locations of the camps across Europe.

The first footage comes from Leipzig Concentration Camp. The narrator explains that two hundred prisoners were burned to death before Allied army arrived. He continues to explain the process of killing in the prisons, while the camera shows dead bodies that were

electrocuted by the electric fence. The footage finishes with liberated Russian women observing the scattered corpses around the camp. The next is Penig Concentration Camp. The camera follows American doctors helping the victims. Many of them are seriously wounded and suffer from various diseases. The army continues to remove people from their appalling living spaces. Nazi doctors and nurses are forced to take care of the patients. The last shots shows liberated female prisoners lying on stretchers and smiling for the camera. Douglas (469) states that those images do not capture current atrocities, but focus on the wounds left behind. Therefore, they suggest lateness: the liberators have come, but it is too late. One could say "lateness" plays an important role in defining the film's overall motive; it is a historical film because it shows the aftermath of the war – there is no sense of the actual battle. Even though the liberators have come too late, their actions matter as they are helping the victims and keeping the memory alive. "Lateness" suggests that everyone should learn from their mistakes and make sure the history will not repeat itself.

The following camps show more or less the same shocking situation. For example, in Ohrdruf, the survivors show different torture devices and how Nazis used them to punish the prisoners, as well as the crematorium made of railroad tracks. In the next segment, locals and Nazi members are forced to tour the camp. The camera follows two slave labors bosses. At first, they are unwilling to enter the woodshed filled with naked dead bodies. Most of the members of the Nazi party left the camp without any evident emotion and denied their knowledge of the killings. In Hadamar, the viewers can see a Nazi institution that served as an insane asylum. Beside the asylum, there is a graveyard. The most dreadful scene is when the army is digging out the bodies for an autopsy. The narrator explains that many patients were killed with a morphine overdose. However, all these scenes are left without a concrete explanation – the viewers can see the atrocities, but what is the reason behind them? After a while, one realizes that the film is not trying to explain any of the scenes, but instead it relies

on the images speaking for themselves. Visual elements serve as an educational tool unlike other films.

Other big camps include Mauthausen, Buchenwald and Dachau. In Mauthausen, Jack H. Taylor, U.S. Navy officer, explains how he got captured and that two other American officers were killed in the camp, as he shows their patches and dog tags as the evidence. The man also states that this is his first time on film. Douglas (471) notices the irrational logic of his ironic celebration of his debut on film. In Buchenwald, locals are also forced to tour the camp. The camera follows hundreds of German residents walking down the road, smiling for the camera. Many of them look well-dressed. The narrator explains that many of them thought the tour was staged, however, a few minutes later, one can see how their facial expressions change when they see piles of dead bodies. Especially disturbing is the display with a lamp and canvases made of human skin. The last camp is in Belsen. The ending of the film is at its peak of atrocities. The following shots show a big graveyard. Nazi guards, both male and female, are forced to bury the bodies. The film ends with a bulldozer pushing piles of corpses into the grave. „By providing a visual register of atrocity," Lawrence Douglas has written, „*Nazi Concentration Camps* crossed a threshold of representation from which there was no turning back" (Jordan 20).

Nazi Concentration Camps is different than the rest of the films. While other directors combine propaganda and documentary elements to tell a story for their benefit, Stevens is very straightforward and objective in his presentation of the camps. The film leaves the Hollywood's conventional entertainment frame in order to deliver an honest story about the consequences of the war. All the segments are carefully planned and show a great pain and suffering the victims had to go through. The camera often offers close-ups of the corpses, as well as the faces of liberated victims. Stevens wants to portray the victims as individuals – they are not just a number and they deserve honor and respect. That being said, the film leaves

the viewers overwhelmed with the actual numbers of dead people and is not afraid to show the real horrors of the war.

7. Conclusion

This paper covers the period of the Second World War and presents the most prominent American film directors and their detailed activity during wartime. The first of them is Frank Capra with his *Why We Fight* documentary series, which includes *Prelude to War* – the film that depicts the events which led to United States' entry into the war. Next is John Ford with the focus on his film *The Battle of Midway,* which explores Midway Islands and American military base and their relations with the Japanese. The third is William Wyler and his film *The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress,* showing heavy bombers B-17 attacking the enemy zone. Following Wyler, the next is John Huston's film *The Battle of San Pietro* presenting Italian campaign, liberating San Pietro and surrounding area. Finally, it ends with George Stevens and his film *Nazi Concentration Camps*, which reveals settings of liberated concentration camps across France and Germany with shocking, uncensored footage of the victims and conditions under they had suffered.

All these films play an important role in keeping the memory alive about the most horrendous time in human history. Their influence on Hollywood and the film industry during and after the war is enormous. The paper tried to portray how some of those films went out of the conventional frames of documentary filmmaking and became effective propaganda films. Today, the films are not effective with their propagandistic elements, but they still paint the successful picture of the wartime documentary filmmaking and how it shaped the minds of the public and the army.

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HOLLYWOOD'S DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR: Summary and Key Words

This work deals with five American film directors – Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, John Huston and George Stevens, and their experiences of capturing the world's events during the Second World War. The body of the work is divided into five sections, each portraying one film director by briefly putting him in the context of the war. The main focus is on their creations during the war and this is achieved by analyzing in detail films they had made.

Key words: Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, John Huston, George Stevens, *Why We Fight*, *Prelude to War*, *The Battle of Midway*, *Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress*, *The Battle of San Pietro*, *Nazi Concentration Camps*, the Second World War.

HOLLYWOODSKI DOKUMENTARNI FILMOVI U DRUGOM SVJETSKOM RATU: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Ovaj se rad bavi s pet američkih filmskih redatelja – Frankom Caprom, Johnom Fordom, Williamom Wylerom, Johnom Hustonom, Georgeom Stevensom, i njihovim iskustvima u snimanju svjetskih događaja tijekom Drugog svjetskog rada. Razrada je podijeljena na pet dijelova. Svaki se dio bavi jednim filmskim redateljem tako što ga stavlja u kontekst rata. Naglasak je stavljen na njihove filmove, što je postignuto detaljnom analizom istih.

Ključne riječi: Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, John Huston, George Stevens, *Zašto se borimo*, *Uvod u rat*, *Bitka za Midway*, *Memphis Belle: Priča o letećoj tvrđavi*, *Bitka za San Pietro*, *Nacistički koncentracijski logori*, Drugi svjetski rat.