“I’ll see you on the beach!” Masculine performance in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Objective, Burma!* (1945).

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Abstract
A comparison of some specific components of the acting styles in Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and Raoul Walsh’s *Objective, Burma!* (1945) reveals that there are significant differences in the techniques employed by the masculine performers of these films from two different eras of production. Errol Flynn’s performance in *Objective, Burma!* is characterized by rigid, theatrical body postures and gestures whereas Tom Hanks’ acting in *Saving Private Ryan* exhibits a much more loose, relaxed physicality. There are also significant differences in vocal performance, in that Hanks typically uses a much greater range of voice loudness and register. Arguably, these observations are apparent in the evolution of the WW2 combat film genre more generally. These differences can be attributed to a number of factors: for instance, the influence of Stanislavski-inspired Method acting in post-1950s Hollywood, technological changes in location filming praxis, and the recent employment of civilian technical advisors for military films. This paper argues that these developments have resulted in contemporary performances being much more detailed and nuanced than the acting styles of the 1940s.

Keywords
Acting, performance, method acting, Stanislavski, naturalism, war film, WW2, film style, realism.
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Combat films, such as Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) quite obviously deal with themes and issues of masculinity as the genre predominantly involves narratives which focus on male characters. This is illustrated by Jeanine Basinger’s comments about the way *Operation Petticoat* (Blake Edwards, 1959) constructs its comedy through inversion of the male-dominated genre: “If war is a macho thing, requiring brave men to fight it away from the comforts of home and women, then a way to make it a comedy is to put the women back into it” (2003, p. 229). It is unsurprising then that the genre has been subjected to a number of critical discussions which use the semantic field of masculinity to drive their analysis. For instance, Geoff King argues that Ryan’s narrative functions to reconcile problems of domestic life in the way it deals with Captain Miller’s life back home and his life in battle (King 2000, pp. 140-141). In this paper, however I am concerned with one specific aspect of the style of combat films: the performance by male actors in leadership roles. Certainly there exists significant scholarship examining issues of spectatorship connected to conventional masculine screen performance and these comments could be applied to combat films (Neale 1983, pp. 2-16; Smith 2004, pp. 43-56). As Steve Neale argues, the masculine image on film is frequently linked with “silence.”

Theoretically this silence, this absence of language, can further be linked to narcissism and to the construction of an ideal ego. The acquisition of language is a process profoundly challenging to the narcissism of early childhood. It is productive of what has been called “symbolic castration” (Neale 1983, p. 7).

As I show later, the performances of Errol Flynn in Raoul Walsh’s *Objective, Burma!* (1945) and Tom Hanks in *Ryan* are, to different degrees, both marked by such silence and restraint. It would also be possible to identify sadomasochistic pleasures involved in seeing screen representations of the male body in combat films. Men are frequently mutilated in these films. Consider, for instance, Kenneth Spencer’s decapitation in Tay Garnett’s *Bataan* (1943), or the erotic disavowal inherent in the recurrent images of shirtless, disfigured corpses often found by soldiers on patrol (Rodowick, cited in Neale 1983, p. 8).
My objective here is to refocus critical analysis onto the specific techniques of performance employed by male actors in this genre. Acting rarely figures in critical accounts of film. Certainly there are exceptions, however as Pamela Robertson Wojcik suggests there seem to be two major reasons for the general “neglect of acting” in film studies. Firstly, popular discussions of films seem to focus on acting (or at least, actors), and secondly because “acting can seem transparent and resistant to description or analysis” (2004, p. 1).³ This ostensible transparency is, of course, the source of the title for Carole Zucker’s (1990) anthology on the topic: Making Visible the Invisible.

Broadly speaking, the style of acting by Ryan’s main players fits within the naturalistic tradition. By James Naremore’s account, this tradition can be defined as a style of acting which attempts to obscure those aspects of performance which appear deliberate, rehearsed or staged for the camera (Naremore 1988, pp. 34-45). For instance, actors in this tradition may “slop down food and talk with their mouths full [...] occasionally turn away from the camera, speak softly and rapidly, slur or throw away lines” (p. 44). This style, which is meant to suggest a character’s private/inner thoughts, is often associated with the influence of the Russian acting theorist Konstantin Stanislavski (1937). In terms of cinema, this should more properly be attributed to the version of Stanislavskian acting taught at Lee Strasberg’s Actors Studio in the 1950s. Approaches derived from Stanislavski privilege (in slightly different ways) preparation and performance that supposedly comes from the actor’s “life experience” in order to present a more truthful (realistic, natural) performance (Larue and Zucker 1990, pp. 300 – 302). However, it should be remembered that there were instances of naturalistic acting—or in Roberta Pearson’s terms, acting using the verisimilar code—from the early years of cinema (2004, pp. 62 – 65). For this reason naturalistic acting should not be regarded as necessarily synonymous with the Stanislavskian method or its various iterations. At the same time, I do not mean to suggest that some of the performances in The Crowd (King Vidor, 1928) or Diary of a Lost Girl (Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1929), both of which are cited by Naremore as instances of early naturalism, should be regarded as physically similar to the Method acting of Marlon Brando in Elia Kazan’s 1954 film On the Waterfront (Naremore 1988, pp. 39-40). As Virginia Wright Wexman argues, the Method is just another acting technique, and it should be remembered that “method performances in such popular films from the 1950s as [Elia Kazan’s] A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) and Baby Doll (1956) today seem as artificial as any other historically dated performance technique” (2004, p. 127).⁴
While the Method was not used by actors in the 1940s combat films, naturalism was of course the dominant mode of acting by the time of the early World War 2 films such as *Wake Island* (John Farrow, 1942). WW2 combat films have therefore been produced within an overall tradition of naturalistic performance, yet this does not mean that the style and techniques of acting in *Ryan* should be expected to resemble those of *Objective, Burma!* To guide this analysis, I propose two broad research questions:

1. What identifiable differences are there between the performances of military characters in the 1940s films and contemporary WW2 films such as *Saving Private Ryan*?
2. What factors (practical, aesthetic, theoretical) may have influenced the different styles of acting between the 1940s films and *Saving Private Ryan*?

In order to address these questions, I will compare specific performances from *Ryan* with the acting in similar scenes from *Objective, Burma!* The relevant scene from *Objective, Burma!* occurs as the Japanese have begun to assault the village in which Captain Nelson (played by Errol Flynn) and his men have established a temporary base camp. After giving the order to conduct a tactical withdrawal, Nelson supervises the movements of his troops out of the village as well as helping the rear-guard unit fight back against the attacking Japanese. I will compare this with a sequence from *Ryan* in which Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) gives orders to his unit while approaching Omaha Beach in the Higgins boat and then continues to issue orders while under fire as they make their way up the beach. Clips of these scenes are available online at the following links: *Objective, Burma!*: https://vimeo.com/48514270 and *Saving Private Ryan*: https://vimeo.com/48514269.

**Observable differences in performance style**

This analysis draws upon categories of performance as identified by both Richard Dyer and Barry King, who distinguish between four related qualities of performance: “the facial, the gestural, the corporeal (or postural) and the vocal” (Dyer 1998; King 1985; Higson 2004). I am not concerned here with what is expressed or communicated by particular aspects of performance, although at times I will speculate on possible expressive functions. Rather, I am interested in how the actors physically perform the scenes.
At the beginning of the sequence from *Objective, Burma!* Nelson starts to give orders after being informed that his men are outnumbered:

Nelson: Alright, go back to the Corporal. Tell him to pull the machine-gun out. He’s gotta cover us until we cross the swamp. Go ahead. [As the officer leaves, he gestures to Sgt. Treacy and gives him some dog-tags collected from dead soldiers] Treace, you better hold on to these. I’m going with him.

Treace: Yeah, but sir—

Nelson: Get going. When you get your men across [the swamp], set your machine-gun up and cover us. Go on.

Flynn’s vocal performance in this interaction is a fast staccato, abruptly punctuating each sentence. His pace slows, and the pitch drops slightly, when he says to Treacy, “You better hold on to these [dog tags]. I’m going with him,” which I take to indicate a moment of thoughtful reflection on the slim chance of survival for the men. However, Flynn quickly switches back to his original rapid pace when he interrupts Treace’s objections. Within the narrative context, the characters are presumably being quiet so as to remain hidden from the attacking enemy, however Flynn’s hushed tone is certainly much louder than a whisper. Later in the scene, giving orders under fire, Flynn speaks with a slightly quicker pace and raises the volume of his voice only slightly. The difference is actually quite minor, however it is still enough to suggest either frustration or an anxious excitement during the battle. What is significant, however, is that he says much less when they are under direct attack. Specifically, he runs up to the men who are covering the front of the village and after stopping, simply says: “Come on. On the double with that gun!” Most of the men move the machine-gun away,
while Flynn waits with the few remaining soldiers and returns fire. The 1940s vococentric convention, which Michel Chion has written about extensively, applies to this sequence in that the actor’s voice is never in competition with the sounds of battle (1982). When Flynn speaks, nobody shoots. In general then, Flynn’s vocal performance is characterised by minimalism and a simplistic directness.

Two comparable issuing-orders beats exist for Tom Hanks’ Cpt. Miller character during the Omaha Beach sequence of Ryan. The first occurs at the beginning of the scene in the Higgins boat where he lists a set of clear instructions regarding what to do once they land on the beach. There is a level of irony here, of course, in that many of the men in his Higgins craft are killed as soon as the ramp is lowered, and the next eight minutes of screen time are dedicated to men confusedly attempting to move through the chaos of the beach landing. Although it is not quite a masculine “pre-battle pep talk” of the sort that has become a convention of contemporary war films, MaryAn Batchellor (2006) argues that a scene much later in Ryan does function as such. The second takes place much later in the sequence where the troops are dug-in, pinned down by the machine-gun nest, and Miller must coordinate a Bangalore torpedo attack to breach the German lines. In the first instance, as they approach the beach, Hanks speaks rapidly and with a crisp directness. Sergeant Horvath (actor Tom Sizemore) also speaks to the men with a similar straightforwardness and abrupt tone. For both actors in this scene, while their tone is arguably similar to Flynn’s above, they speak much quicker and yell their dialogue. In this scene, Hanks and Sizemore yell just enough for their voices to have a harsh edge and flattened modulation:

Miller: Port side stick, starboard side stick, move fast and clear those murder holes.
Horvath: I want to see plenty of beach between men. Five men is a juicy opportunity. One man is a waste of ammo.
Miller: [Louder and slower than before] Keep the sand out of your weapons. Keep those actions clear. And I’ll see you on the beach.

Two things stand out in this interaction. Firstly, Miller’s dialogue contains a significant amount of infantry terminology which is detailed to an extent clearly absent from the Objective, Burma! example. It seems to me that the content of Flynn’s lines is intended primarily to serve the classical film function which David Bordwell regards as “the character’s transmission of fabula information” (Bordwell 1985, p. 162).
The clear sound recording of Flynn’s voice, as well as his delivery and the dialogue itself, cater for the viewer’s unambiguous reconstruction of the narrative at that point of the film. On the other hand, Miller’s dialogue in the Higgins craft seems to serve a different function. This is because it is simply not essential for audiences to process the denotative reference of terms such as “stick” or “murder-holes.” Rather, it is possible for a viewer without specialist military knowledge to infer that Miller is in charge of the men in the boat, Horvath is the next in command, and both of them are trying to focus the men for the coming assault.

Chion might call this an instance of “emanation speech,” which is “the type of dialogue which exists as a sort of secretion of the characters, an aspect of their way of being” (2009, p. 476). Partially this is a result of Hanks’ abrupt delivery. But it is also because the sound design is constructed in the contemporary combat film style of obscuring dialogue by burying it within a complicated mix of atmospheric sound effects. The orders delivered by Flynn in the scene from Objective, Burma! however, are not as specific in terms of military content, yet are actually much more specific in terms of constructing a clear fabula for the audience. Note the level of redundancy in Nelson’s dialogue, which is mostly a verbal explanation of the physical actions occurring in the shots. This is not surprising, given a comment by the director, Raoul Walsh, on his process of filmic construction: “There is only one way in which to shoot a scene, and that’s the way which shows the audience what’s happening next” (Walsh, cited in Bordwell 1985, p. 163).

This does not mean that Ryan is breaking classical norms of narration. Rather, there seems to be a significantly different kind of detail in both the choice of dialogue as well as the amount of it. The same holds true later in the sequence. Once the men get to the top of the beach, they are pinned down by machine-gun fire and cannot find many soldiers from their own squad. As Miller takes cover, he grabs a communications officer and begins yelling radio signals at him. He then rolls slightly to his other side as the camera pans with his movement, reframing to include a number of other men that have dug in at his position. The following interaction occurs in a single 60 second take, primarily alternating between the same two framings of the two-shot of Miller and the communications officer and the over-shoulder shot of Miller talking with the other men to his left. Note the level of military terminology, and also the sheer quantity of dialogue throughout which contrasts strongly with the scene from Objective, Burma!  

IM 8: Masculine/Feminine  “I’ll see you on the beach!” Stuart M Bender ©IM/NASS 2012. ISSN 1833-0533
Miller: Shore party. No armour has made it ashore. We got no DD tanks on the beach. Dog One is not open. [Turning to face the other men.] Who’s in command here?

Soldier #1: You are, sir!

Miller: Sergeant Horvath!

Horvath: Sir!

Miller: You recognise where we are?

Horvath: Right where we’re supposed to be, but no-one else is!

Soldier #2: [Off-screen] Nobody’s where they’re supposed to be!

Miller: [Grabbing the communications officer] Shore party. First wave, ineffective. We do not hold the beach. Say again, we do not hold the beach.

Soldier #3: We’re all mixed up, sir. We got the leftovers from Fox Company, Able Company and George Company. Plus we got some Navy demo guys and a beachmaster!

Miller: Shore party. Shore party. [Seeing the communications man’s face has been shot open, he grabs the radio.] CATF, CATF. CA—

Finally Miller realises the radio has also been destroyed and pushes it away. As with the earlier dialogue, it is unlikely that a non-specialist viewer would have more than a passing recognition of military designations such as “Dog One” or “Able Company,” and even less likely that they would recognise that the CTF acronym refers to “Commander, Amphibious Task Force.” However, this does not impede comprehension because the activity of passing on messages by phone is easily inferred, and so is the frustration apparent in Miller’s voice tone. Ultimately, this is another instance of emanation speech, which is also the case with Miller’s frequent words of encouragement to his troops during combat. For instance, he repeats “Come on… Come on… Come on…” to the men as they rush over the sand dune and...
up to the machine-gun next. By contrast, Flynn does not speak unless he is in a stationary position. Also significant in this scene is that Hanks’ delivers the lines with a sense of breathlessness. Although there are more extreme instances of this breathlessness in other scenes, in this scene Hanks’ performance shows a markedly different approach to Flynn’s steady voice throughout the combat sequences of *Objective, Burma!*

The aspects of facial performance by Flynn and Hanks in these scenes do not exhibit such obvious differences as the vocal performance. But close analysis reveals some noteworthy differences, as well as some interesting similarities. In the first example from *Objective, Burma!*, Flynn’s face is often shown in profile, which makes his facial expressions difficult to distinguish. In general, his face appears tense, his eyes narrowed and mostly staring into the distance even as he listens to and responds to his officers (see Figure 1). The movement of his head, when looking around, is of a moderate pace: it is neither casual or frantic. He makes a number of small facial gestures, for instance swallowing as he looks down at the dog-tags in his hand before calling Sgt. Treacy across to take them. Later in the scene, under Japanese fire, Flynn also looks around quite slowly (Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3* Flynn's movements under fire are typically slow and careful. Here, for instance, he slowly concentrates while taking aim with his carbine and fires back at the attacking Japanese.

Hanks’ performance in *Ryan* exhibits, by comparison, a greater range of facial expressions. Additionally, they are much more apparent to the viewer because during the combat scenes he is framed in close-up or mid-shot much frequently than Flynn in *Objective, Burma!* As such, it is possible to read greater nuance in his performance (Figure 4). For instance, in the first shot of Hanks in the Higgins boat he begins by looking down after drinking from his canteen, then slowly looks up and gazes off-screen.
After a very brief moment, his eyes wander to his right slowly, then quickly his head turns as well as if noticing something (or someone) and he gives a very small shake of his head before looking away.12

Figure 4 Medium Closeup framings in Saving Private Ryan accentuate the nuance in Hanks’ facial performance.

In the next shot, Hanks is shown giving the order to prepare for the beach landing, and here his face is in fact far more static than Flynn’s in either example from Objective, Burma! Hanks stares directly ahead, blinking only occasionally. The very slight movement of his head is due to the bobbing movements of the boat. Arguably this can be read either as Miller acting brave for the sake of the troops’ morale, or he has summoned his own inner strength for the landing. Later in the scene, when dug in on the beach, Hanks’ eye muscles show the same tension apparent in Flynn’s performance during the combat scenes. When Hanks discovers that the radio has been destroyed, his face slackens.13

The more general bodily performances of Flynn and Hanks also show some interesting overlaps as well as significant differences. For instance, Flynn typically has a rigid body throughout the whole film, only loosening when he stoops a little and slackens his shoulders upon seeing the dead bodies of his troops in the village. Hanks is also rigid in the Higgins boat, and in a few other scenes, but in general his body is much more loose than Flynn’s.14 This kind of stiff performance also characterizes most of Flynn’s (and the other actors’) movements as they run into position on the battlefield. Typically, the actors in Objective, Burma! run up precisely to the point they intend to stop and once in position remain exactly there. In this instance, precision should not be taken to refer to a highly trained elegance of movement, but rather an overly careful deliberateness. Hanks, on the other hand, runs in a way which seems “rough” by comparison (Figure 5).
Figure 5 Hanks—and the other actors—move with a characteristic roughness when under fire.

By “rough” I do not mean “sloppy” or “uncoordinated,” but simply that there is a looseness to his body which is generally absent from Flynn’s movements. Roughness of movement, as I use it here, should be taken as the best possible written description of physical movements that seem natural rather than pre-planned and artificial. This roughness is also evident in the way that Hanks digs-in to his positions of cover. While Flynn tends to run up to a precise spot, slowing down as he approaches and then stop on the mark, Hanks is more likely to throw his body to the ground and then roll from side to side settling into position. While under fire he is constantly bobbing up and down, scrambling back and forwards.

Also of interest here are the gestures and movements of men who share the screen with Flynn or Hanks. For instance, while Flynn receives intelligence and gives orders to set up machine-gun positions, an actor behind him simply gazes off-screen, occasionally moving his head very slightly as he breathes (Figure 1). By comparison, while Hanks attempts to understand the situation while dug-in on the beach, the other actors around him are busy undertaking small tasks. In the middle-ground, one man digs in the dirt, and another loads an M7 rifle grenade to the front of his weapon. Further in the background, other men are scrambling into different cover positions, removing their rifles from plastic waterproof wrapping. Another interesting point is that the enemy in Objective, Burma! move with an awkward clumsiness that stands out by comparison to the rigidity of the US soldiers (Figure 6). By contrast, the enemy in Ryan have the same kind of natural roughness to their movements as the US troops.
In general, the major difference between the acting styles in these two films is really one of detail. Firstly, there is an increased range and level of detail in the vocal performance of Tom Hanks by comparison with Errol Flynn. Specifically, Hanks delivers much more dialogue during combat, uses more technical vocabulary, speaks with a greater range of volume and pace, and has a tendency towards breathlessness which is entirely absent from Flynn’s performance. Secondly, there is a greater range and subtlety of facial performance in the contemporary film. Of course, this could be the result of an individual actor’s training, technique or skill and is not necessarily a stylistic norm. Thirdly, there is a significant tendency towards roughness in the gestural and postural performance of the actors in *Ryan*. This includes not just the main players but also the background performances, which are typically more detailed in *Ryan*.

Arguably then, in this context Neale’s comments on masculinity remain valid in terms of representations of masculinity. While Hanks and his contemporaries do exhibit greater detail in their performance(s) of military leadership (specifically in the quantity of speech), there still persists an “emotional reticence” in their narrative agency (Neale 1983, p. 7). After all, Hanks’ character hides his shaky nerves (literally, his shaking hand) from the men in his unit and downplays this evidence of war trauma as “I’m just keeping the rhythm” when Sergeant Horvath asks him if he is feeling alright. Additionally, he can only speak in emotional terms—briefly—when talking to Horvath after enough screen-time has elapsed to show that Miller has been through a number of battles, killed, and had men under his command killed in action. This calls to mind the sequence in *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988) in which John McClane confession “what I jerk I’ve been” to Sergeant Powell via two-
way radio. It is only after these masculine heroes have suffered and/or inflicted violence that the narrative enables them to speak of their emotions (Neale 1983, pp. 7-8).

While I do not propose to further examine Ryan or Objective, Burma! in these terms, I am confident a suitably motivated critic would find enough material to produce such an analysis. On the other hand, I think it is also quite clear that it would be valuable to analyse female performance according to the methodology I have taken above. While some theorists have sought to explain representations of femininity in terms of psychoanalytic categories of identification, it would prove significant to address the changes and continuities in performance techniques by female actors (Pribram 2004, pp. 146-165).

Practical explanations of performance style

Against this background, I now want to address how the contemporary “roughened” style of acting tallies with some other relevant accounts of acting style. While I agree with one group of researchers that we should not think that “any style of acting is or should be seen as the norm of evaluative standard of screen performance,” it is clear from the descriptions above that some form of roughening is employed by the actors in Ryan—and arguably this is also true of other contemporary WW2 combat films (Baron, Carson and Tomasulo 2004, p. 3). What I am calling a roughened style is really my way of describing the tendency of actors in WW2 combat scenes, from about the early 1950s onwards, to break up the clarity of dialogue and to introduce less rigid movements into their physicality. The effect of these trends is for the actors’ performances, in general, to become more detailed and nuanced. I take the effect of these changes to be one of producing a greater naturalism of performance, and as such it may seem a convincing argument to suggest that the major reason for this is the growing popularity of the Method acting style over this time. For instance, recall Naremore’s description of actors operating according to Method principles:

Actors in “ethnic” films like The Godfather [Francis Ford Coppola, 1972] or in middle-class domestic dramas like Heartburn [Mike Nichols, 1986] tend to slop down food and talk with their mouths full. Likewise, they occasionally turn away from the camera, speak softly and rapidly, repeat words, slur or throw away lines, sometimes as “Huh?” or let dialogue overlap […] Naturalistic actors also cultivate a halting, somewhat groping style of speech: instead of saying “I am very distressed,” the actor will say “I am dis- . . . very distressed.” (1988, p. 44).
Although Naremore is referring specifically to actors who might be directly associated with Strasberg and the Method, if his account is taken in general terms, it could be read as applying to the sort of roughened performance observed in Ryan (and other contemporary combat films). An extended list of Naremore’s examples, in terms of war films, might logically include the breathlessness that becomes common in the late 1970s, as well as the scrambling and imprecise movements which begin roughly with Audie Murphy in To Hell and Back (Jesse Hibbs, 1955) and become increasingly roughened by the time of Ryan. However, such an argument would ignore technical factors, such as the limitations of sound recording equipment in the 1940s, as well as practical considerations like changes in specific type of training given to actors for combat roles.

Alternatively then, it is more useful to consider the above observations of acting style in terms of the problem/solution paradigm posed by Bordwell in On the History of Film Style (Bordwell 1997, pp. 149-157). This allows for an examination of the historical influences on the way actors have approached the problem of performing as a soldier on screen. I propose that the changes in performance that are evident in the films studied here are the result of two contingent factors:

1. Technical/aesthetic limitations and advancements of the cinema; and
2. The changing discourse of realism in film acting.

The first of these factors seems to have had a strong influence on opportunities for physical movement by actors during dialogue scenes. An extreme example of how sound recording technology can affect performance is found in one anecdotal account from the 1930s by actress Louise Closser Hale. In an issue of Harper’s magazine, Hale explains her experience filming with sound as follows:

[he was the sound man and he wanted to see how I intended to play the scene. I strode around, speaking the lines, new and old.... “You see” he explained, “you can’t move around like that. The mike—the microphone—won’t take it”.

“Can’t I rage?”

“You can rage”—he measured the width of the desk—“about that far”.

Two and a half feet of raging! (Hale, quoted in Swender 2008, p. 3).
Although microphone technology had certainly improved by the 1940s combat films studied here, Hale’s example suggests that for at least some actors prior to the 1940s, the rigid, fixed position style of performance during dialogue scenes was a matter of practical necessity. By the time of *Wake Island* or *Objective, Burma!* microphones had become significantly more sensitive and enabled the actor to have a greater range of movement. However the microphone did, as today, need to be positioned in a close proximity to the actor to reduce interference and noise from other sound sources. Contemporary filmmakers have the opportunity to use radio-microphones which can be positioned on actors, or microphones slung on boom-poles of similar size and weight to a fishing pole. In the 1940s, however, the microphone would be positioned using large, heavy boom equipment. These booms were limited in the amount of movement (if any) possible during takes because of their weight. Consider the following 1944 report in the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* regarding developments at Warner Bros:

The latest production technique, which requires that motion picture sets simulate the structures that they are to represent with greater realism, has forced the Sound Department to construct a special microphone boom for small sets. The new boom is a little over 6 ft high, which is about half the usual size, and the boom arm may be extended to 14 ft. Its small size and *relatively light weight, which is about 140 lb*, save considerable production time when working in constricted spaces (1944, p. 69, emphasis mine).

As an example of how this affects performance in the combat films, the obvious restriction against moving a 140 pound (approximately 63.5kg) boom around quickly would mean that even if Flynn had wanted to deliver dialogue while running into position it would be very difficult (though not impossible) to move the microphone to follow him. By contrast, a contemporary actor can quickly turn their head from side to side while speaking and trust that their voice will be recorded clearly. Matt Damon does this in the Alamo battle of *Ryan*, yelling at Hanks while dug in using a bombed out ditch for cover. Additionally, the dialogue could be re-recorded on location as a “wild” sound to get the microphone in a position that would normally be seen by the camera, or of course re-recorded (dubbed) during post-production.

The postproduction technology available for mixing soundtracks also has an impact on the actors’ performances. While 1940s combat films typically obey classical cinema’s
vococentric practice of maintaining the human voice at the top of the sound hierarchy, the means of accomplishing this may vary according to the available technology (Chion 1982). For instance, in *Objective, Burma!* it is common for the battlefield atmosphere to be attenuated or for the density and quantity of background battlefield sounds to be limited in order for the actors’ voices to be heard clearly. With the development of Dolby sound technology in the late 1970s, as well as the gradually increasing range of reproducible sonic frequencies in the decades leading up to Dolby, it became possible to mix soundtracks so that the human voice would be clearly understandable within a dense mix of combat sounds (Chion 2009, pp. 117-145). According to Chion, “The large number of action films (especially Vietnam War films) that came out starting in the mid-1970s accustomed filmgoers to hearing soldiers yelling to each other over the noise of explosions, helicopters, and general panic, all of which highlighted the advantages of Dolby stereo” (p. 346). I would add that it also became possible for actors to be heard clearly over battlefield atmosphere even when not yelling, as shown by Robert Redford’s repeated muttering of “Hail Mary… Full of grace” which is clearly discernable over the artillery bombardment during Richard Attenborough’s *A Bridge Too Far* (1977). Significantly, it became possible to make the artistic choice between hearing the actor’s voice over the battlefield sounds, or not hearing it through the process.  

The changing practices of realism in film acting: 

Naturalism, the Method, and civilian technical advisors

Of course, the technological advancements in sound recording and mixing can be regarded as enabling (or producing) particular kinds of acting technique as well as revealing specific aspects of performance that may have always existed but had not been recorded.21 Another, perhaps more obvious, influence on the specific style of acting in these films is simply the changing practices of naturalistic acting since the 1940s. For instance, although the audio technology of 1943 may not have been able to record the sound of Flynn’s breathing, it is also unlikely that the discourse of naturalistic acting of Flynn’s time would have permitted the sort of breathlessness that punctuates John Cusack’s dialogue in the hill assault sequence of Terrance Malick’s 1998 combat film *The Thin Red Line* (Figure 7). That is, of course, the source of the ironic humour in the climax of Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) when the aging and forgotten silent-film star Norma Desmond (played by Gloria Swanson) walks down her staircase “performing” for Joe Gillis and Max Von Mayerling.
While Desmond’s acting style would be conventional for the silent era, its exaggerated gestures are laughably out of style for Joe Gillis, who takes pity on her.

**Figure 7** In a combat sequence from *The Thin Red Line*, Captain John Gaff (played by John Cusack) gasps: “Okay… We’re gonna continue on… up the hill to the right… Nobody fire… or throw their grenades… until I give the signal… Okay… Let’s do it!”

This is not to suggest that I think the situation is as simple as regarding the earlier actors as performing “badly” and the 2000s actors as somehow better performers. Director Edward Dmytryk has written of naturalistic acting:

> Acting styles change with the years. Every era has its “in” techniques […] Like any fad of the moment it [stylistic acting] doesn’t age well. In clothes, an extreme style from any particular period becomes, in later years, a laughing matter or an object of curiosity. The same is true for stylistic acting (1986, p. 401).

Although Dmytryk is in fact targeting the Method actors of the 1950s, which he regards as turning acting into “a display of eye twitching, nose picking, and fanny scratching,” his comments also apply to the observations made of the combat acting in the films studied (p. 401). After all, while Flynn’s acting in *Objective, Burma!* is certainly the performance of a professional, I think that many contemporary viewers may look upon his deliberate movements as unnatural. Such deliberateness may appear as an “unmotivated stiffness or awkwardness of movement” to viewers accustomed to the roughened form of contemporary acting.22

However, although the Method has had a significant impact on the style of acting in the contemporary combat films, this influence is actually quite indirect. Wexman suggests that many aspects of the Stanislavskian performance technique, originally conceived for theatre and which rely upon intense concentration, were easily adaptable to the film acting process.
“where individual scenes are shot separately and there is always ample time to prepare each one” (2004, p.129). It appears, however, that versions of this same technique had been in use for some time before the Method began to be adopted by American actors in the 1950s. Indeed, Naremore finds that during the 1920s Hollywood film acting had already begun to move towards not only a naturalistic style, but a particular brand of naturalism which placed an “emphasis” on “being instead of mimicking; the gestures of the actor were supposed to grow out of his or her feelings” (1988, p. 60). The process of remembering an emotional moment in the actor’s life is what Stanislavskian actors would refer to as an “affective memory,” and which Naremore describes as a technique in which memory “functioned rather like an onion concealed in a handkerchief, producing real rather than artificial tears” (p. 197).

Cynthia Baron explains that the difference between a Method actor developing an affective memory out of their own life experience and the earlier naturalistic style however, is that:

For experienced practitioners of the period [1930s and 1940s], moods that colour actions and lines of dialogue were established by actors making decisions about how a character would feel in a certain circumstance. Those decisions would become “scripted” into a series of mental pictures, which actors would then recall during performance. Because they were “synthetic memories” invented by actors during their study of the script, they could be activated by opening one’s “mental notebook”, and let go of immediately after the scene or take was over (2004, p. 92).

Additionally it should be pointed out that the development and preparation of a character is not undertaken with any kind of consistent approach even by Method actors. Consider, for instance, the approach of founding member of the Actors Studio Eli Wallach, who is often linked to the Method by his close association with director Elia Kazan. Wallach has described his own acting process as “imagining-what-it’s-like,” contrasting this approach with other Method actors “who, if they’re going to play a coal miner, have to go down a mine and spend 3 months in a mine and get dirty and know what the life is like” (Eli Wallach, quoted in Zucker 1955, p. 161).

Although the Method tradition represents an important development in the history of film acting, and many of its related phrases and concepts have circulated into popular culture, it is not the only type of acting employed by film performers (Baron, Carson and Tomasulo 2004, p. 2).
However, the rhetoric associated with the Method has become dominant in contemporary discourses of acting. One of the apparent markers of authenticity bequeathed to contemporary actors by the dominance of Method principles is the premium placed on the actor’s experience. In fact one of the key aspects of performance in today’s combat films is a particular form of actor rehearsal which emphasises an immersion in the military experience.

The key figure of this practice is Captain Dale Dye, a retired US Marine with Vietnam experience who in the mid-1980s established the company Warriors, Inc. in order to offer technical advice to Hollywood films about the military. Beginning with Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986), Warriors Inc. has taken actors prior to filming and trained them in a virtual “boot camp” which attends to particular aspects of their performance. The boot camp is an intense few days or, at most, a few weeks during which Dye and his colleagues treat a group of actors to a routine of exercises and instruction derived from military boot-camp practices. In the case of *Ryan* the bootcamp was five days. Although most of the employees of Warriors Inc. have a military background, the company operates as a group of civilian advisors and have no ties to the US Military. Warriors Inc. has worked on a significant number of contemporary combat films, including *Ryan, Band of Brothers* (DreamWorks SKG, 2001), and *The Pacific* (DreamWorks SKG, 2010), and their boot-camp is partially designed to address the physical aspects of soldiering such as weapons handling and body movement. However, in an interview on 8 February 2011, Dye explained that the main foci of the bootcamps are the psychological and emotional characteristics of “serving in a combat unit.” According to Dye, it is this mental dimension of the performance that is crucial to the work of Warriors Inc. He believes it comes from the relationships between the actors that develop due to the particular exercises through which they have been with each other. As Dye argues:

They bring that experience to every thing they do [on the film]. Every little thing they do, from weapons handling, to the way they stand, the way they run, the way they walk, the way they talk. The relationship between the characters now takes on a whole new shading, a whole new level, because they understand each other. They’ve lived in a situation where they’ve had to rely on each other. And that changes things. It’s not two actors now trying to up-stage each other. It’s two people really relying on each other, and understanding that relationship. What happens is, you get these magical performances (2011, personal communication, 8 February).
The correlation between this approach and the value placed on character interiority by the Method discourse is clear, even though Dye does not invoke the Strasbergian terminology. This approach is evident in the way a Warriors Inc. boot camp attempts to immerse the actors in an on-going simulation of their characters’ environment, for instance referring to each other by their character names and using context-specific slang. Edward Burns, who plays Pvt. Reiben in *Ryan*, reports that:

The one thing I tried to do when we were in boot-camp, was when I was feeling miserable—or when I was just having any experiences that were unfamiliar to me—just trying to hold onto them and remember them so that when I was doing the film I could, you know, go back to that and say: “Alright, that’s where my head was when I was feeling that way.” And try and just sort of muster that emotion back up (Burns 2010).

Of course, Burns is speaking in pure Method terms, and it is the mental experience of the boot-camp which is regarded by the actors as having a major impact on the nature of their film performances. As Hanks puts it, suggesting that their characters in *Ryan* are supposed to be exhausted:

We learned various combat techniques and what-not, but that’s not really as important, I think, as just experiencing this idea of—you’re up at five o’clock in the morning, and you’re carrying something very heavy on your back all day long, and you have a few moments in order to lay down on the grass and maybe go to sleep. But then you have to get up, and your day’s not over until two o’clock in the morning (Hanks 2010).

Since acting methods derived from Stanislavsky encourage performers to “live the part,” this boot-camp approach can be read as facilitating actors to “relate” to the material (Hornby 1983, p. 28). Dye regards being in actual combat as so vastly different to the experience of regular life that it is difficult for actors to connect to the material in a convincing way, and the training is intended to address this (D Dye 2011, personal communication, 8 February). The way the actor relates to the script and their character may vary depending on the conflict being represented. Dye suggests that in training actors for a Vietnam war film versus a WW2 film there are key differences in this regard.

Beyond the obvious disparities in uniforms, weapons, equipment and tactics, the main difference is in putting the performers in the appropriate state of mind for the period involved.
The motivation for a combat soldier who enlists as a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II, for instance, is vastly different from that of a man drafted for service in Vietnam. Those differences influence performances in major ways. It’s a matter of how a person [as the character] thinks about the risks he’s being asked to take (D Dye 2011, personal communication, 31 August).

But Ryan’s actors also speak of the significance of the physical aspects of their training with Warriors on their eventual performance in the film. For instance, they comment on the discomfort involved in eating minimal rations, frequent marching, and being yelled at (by Dye) for making mistakes in the training. The physical skills training in military procedures, tactics and weapons-handling are also significant. By undertaking explicit, direct instruction of how to assemble, carry, and fire weapons as well as to move in ways appropriate to military situations, the actors develop a comfort and familiarity with their actions and speech. For instance, the first line of dialogue from Hanks as the men in the Higgins Boat approach Omaha Beach is an instance of this. According to Dye, this dialogue was not in Robert Rodat’s screenplay and instead came out of the training the men had undertaken in landing on a beach in a Higgins boat (D Dye 2011, personal communication, 31 August).

Although Warriors Inc. is arguably the most high-profile company, since their establishment in the 1980s other civilian technical advisors have entered the market. Like Warriors Inc., these tend to be comprised of ex-military personnel. One of these is Harry Humphries, an ex-Navy SEAL who has acted as an advisor on Black Hawk Down (Ridley Scott, 2001), The Kingdom (Peter Berg, 2007) and Tears of the Sun (Antoine Fuqua, 2003). On working with the actors for Black Hawk Down, Humphries’ opinion differs from Dye’s in that he considers the physical aspect of the training is the most significant component. For Black Hawk Down, which had official Pentagon support, the actors went through adapted versions of military training at actual military training facilities, by military instructors (Suid 2002, p. 670). Although many comments in the behind-the-scenes documentary of Black Hawk Down do signal the importance of the psychological aspects of their training, the actors also place a lot of emphasis on the amount of PT (physical training) and weapons-handling sessions. As actor Ian Virgo says: “Basically, we did a lot of stuff on how to ‘look’ like a Ranger.”

IM 8: Masculine/Feminine  “I’ll see you on the beach!” Stuart M Bender ©IM/NASS 2012. ISSN 1833-0533
Of course, filmmakers have very often had technical advisors assigned by the Pentagon in the years before civilian advisors like Dye and Humphries. As Lawrence Suid (2002) has shown, the institutions of both Hollywood and the US military understood in the early years of cinema that there were advantages to developing a mutual relationship. Hollywood would benefit from access to equipment, personnel and dramatic story ideas that would entertain their audiences, whereas the military services “quickly realized that movies in which they appeared would aid their recruiting campaigns as well as their efforts to inform the public and Congress of their activities and procedures” (p. 12). By the time it supplied a tank, and demonstrations of its operations, to Columbia Pictures for the Humphrey Bogart film *Sahara* (Zoltan Korda, 1943), the Army had already supplied D.W. Griffith with tactical advice for *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and over 1,000 cavalrymen to stage his Revolutionary War battles for *America* (1924) (pp. 15-16; pp. 71-73). There were even occasions where the military provided training to actors, for instance some of the actors in William Wellman’s *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945) trained with the 150 soldiers provided to the filmmakers. Wellman, according to Suid, “insisted that they [the actors] go through regular training with the soldiers and live them. He wanted them to act and smell like soldiers” (p. 95).

For *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Allan Dwan, 1949), not only did the Marine Corps provide men and equipment for battle scenes, but the appointed technical advisor, Cpt. Leonard Fribourg conducted a boot-camp for the actors, noting that “They wanted to wear the uniform right, the emblems, wanted to know what the stripes meant, wanted to know Marine Corps lingo, and put the right words in the right places” (Leonard Fribourg, quoted in Suid 2002, p.120). Indeed, in these two films’ wide-shots the physical movements of the men certainly resemble the sort of contemporary performances in *Ryan*. However, in anything filmed in mid-shot or closer, and during lines of dialogue, the performances in both films much more closely resemble the *Objective, Burma!* style addressed earlier. This observation points to the crossover between the actor training and the technical limitations indicated earlier in this section. The practice of incorporating real-life soldiers (either actively serving or retired) has an obvious heritage in the Italian Neorealists’ ideal of casting non-actors who have experience in the relevant “world” or context of the characters (Hayward 2000, pp. 227-228; Bordwell and Thompson 2008, pp. 459-460). It has continued in many recent films, for instance *Ryan* used members of the Irish Army Reserves to stage the Omaha Beach sequence, and *Green Zone* (Paul Greengrass, 2010) used veterans of the Iraq conflict to act alongside Matt Damon. Perhaps the most famous of these is Lee Ermey, who was a military advisor on *The Boys in
Company C (Sidney Furie, 1978) and Apocalypse Now (Stanley Kubrick, 1979) and played small roles in each film. When Kubrick hired Ermey as advisor on Full Metal Jacket he was later convinced that the Marine should play the role of the Drill Instructor in the film (Suid 2002, pp. 524 – 527).

While the official advisors would offer technical instruction to actors, and conduct limited kinds of training, their primary duty was to assist with story and character details in order to satisfy both Hollywood’s dramatic purposes and the military’s purpose of promoting a positive image. Therefore, it seems appropriate to suggest that the attention to performance in these films fits within the broad tradition of naturalism. However by and large, the contemporary association of the Method with realism has lead to a scenario in which actors undertaking military roles in contemporary combat films tend to receive much more extensive training prior to filming. Indeed, some instances of the actors’ training on Ryan are in perfect keeping with the Method tradition, in that the training itself is meant to inform the performance beyond the specific skills and actions which have been trained/rehearsed. Dye believes that the result of this kind of training is the actors’ familiarity with their roles to an extent that would not be possible otherwise. He cites two specific instances from Ryan to illustrate this. First, early in the film Hanks delivers a report to his commanding officer which comprises a long string of military jargon and, according to Dye, this is spoken with a high degree of naturalism because Hanks “knew what he was talking about. He wasn’t parroting lines” (D Dye 2011, personal communication 8 February). The second example from Ryan is the degree of expertise with which Edward Burns handles his Browning Automatic Rifle throughout the film, which Dye regards comes from the amount of time the actor spent familiarizing himself with what is an “overly complex” weapon.

Increasingly detailed and nuanced

It appears that a legacy of Dye’s work is that the virtual boot camp experience has become one of the norms of production for contemporary films featuring any sort of military action. However, it is unlikely that the practice has by itself resulted in the observed changes in combat film performance outlined earlier in this section. Arguably, the dominance of Method acting inspired discourse—within the filmmaking community and within the public sphere of film promotion more generally—has produced a context in which the actor’s immersion in a role is valued as a marker of realism.
The production context of contemporary films has also encouraged the take-up of civilian advisors such as Dye. After all, the US Military in the 2000s has very little (if any) WW2 era equipment to provide filmmakers so there is limited appeal for the producers of these films to seek Pentagon assistance. As a result, the kinds of training offered by Warriors, Inc. and other advisors running boot camps is that the actors tend to have a greater range of behaviours and actions to bring to their performance. Additionally, the technology of filmmaking has evolved to enable (or encourage) particular acting techniques as well as to emphasise aspects that may already have been part of the 1940s style.

The net effect of these practices is that the contemporary acting style in WW2 films is characterized by an increased detail. This style of amplified nuance is evident in obvious aspects of performance style such as the contemporary actors speaking much more, and with much more vocal range than before. But it is also evident in their physical movements such as background actors conducting more detailed business, for example reloading weapons, communicating via field-radios, and looking around for the enemy with much more focus and attention than in the earlier films. In general, it seems that the more detailed the performance, the more convincing it will seem to audience. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that either the contemporary performances or films should be considered authentic and realistic. Rather, this analysis indicates the ways in which close critical attention to the techniques of actors’ performances can yield useful understandings of this apparently invisible art of telling stories.
while the actor moves so as to capture the actor’s movement might rub their clothing against the microphone. Alternatively, if the camera framing allows roughly the same position relative to the actor’s mouth, although the limitation with this technique is that the limitation with this technique is that

...the dialogue of Objective, Burma!

I am borrowing the term semantic field here from David Bordwell, who argues that critics map particular semantic fields (such as “masculinity/femininity” or “war/peace”) onto filmic cues in order to produce meaning through a process of “selective projection.” For more on this, see his Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema (1989).

Ibid., 8. See also the argument by Rodowick (1983).

The classic texts for studies of screen acting include Vsevolod Pudovkin, Film Technique and Film Acting (1958); James Naremore’s Acting in the Cinema (1988) and Richard Dyer’s Stars (1998).

Additionally, it should be remembered that Stanislavski did not refer to his teachings as the “Method.” This title refers to the modified version of Stanislavskian acting techniques taught at the Actors Studio.

I discuss a greater range of practical and aesthetic influences on performance, as well as a greater range of film examples, in Bender (2012).

Specifically, Batchelor suggests that Cpt. Miller’s explanation of “why the mission [to save Ryan] matters” which takes place after Medie Irwin Wade is killed bears strong similarities to William Shakespeare’s “Henry V” pre-battle speech “He that outlives this day, and comes safe home / will stand a tip-toe when the day is named.”

Arguably, this could have a defamiliarizing effect for the audience.

A “stick” is actually a paratrooper term, describing a variable number of troopers (ie., as opposed to a “squad” or “platoon” which refer to very specific numbers of men). The term “murder hole” refers to the opening at the front of the Higgins boat when the ramp is lowered. See “Saving Private Ryan Online Encyclopedia,” viewed 1 September, 2011 <http://www.sproe.com>.

Raoul Walsh, quoted in Bordwell (1985, p. 163). Although Walsh is talking directly about camera framing and composition, and to which the frame enlargements chosen certainly attest, the principle clearly applies to much of the dialogue of Objective, Burma!

I realise that the scenes are not perfectly comparable in terms of combat: Cpt. Nelson’s men in the scene from Objective, Burma! are of course not involved the same scale of battle as Cpt. Miller’s are on Omaha Beach.

It is also significant, in terms of characterization as well as narrative clarity, that Miller and Sgt. Horvath are the only characters which are typically heard saying this kind of dialogue. Additionally, this kind of emanation speech is certainly a contemporary convention in other genres, such as the action film, where a male action hero like John McClane in Die Hard 4 (Len Wiseman, 2007) will repeat “Stay low… Stay low…” to another character running with him during combat.

As the camera tracks backwards down the center of the Higgins boat, showing the other troops, it also reveals that Hanks had directed this small look to Sgt. Horvath standing immediately next to him. In terms of character expression, Hanks’ facial expression could be read as suggesting that Horvath had noticed his hand shaking (the shot in fact begins as a close-up of Hanks’ trembling hand holding his canteen). The small shaking movement of his head and his quick glance away from Horvath serve to set up some narrative threads later in the film: for instance Miller’s battle-weariness, frustration at the war, and perhaps even the later questioning of his tactical choices by Private Reiben.

It should be noted that Flynn does use a greater range of facial expressions in the rest Objective, Burma! however even those instances reflect similar differences between Flynn and Hanks’ performance styles.

A significant example is obviously the detail of Hanks’ hand shaking as a result of his traumatic experience through the war.

But not always. Interestingly, when Flynn runs up to tell the men to fall back he begins running much more naturally in the background but as he gets closer to the camera (and his “mark”) he slows down and jogs with the deliberate nature I have been describing.

Although it is also significant that Hanks’ acting in Forrest Gump (Robert Zemeckis, 1994) exhibits a very different style of performance to his role as Cpt. Miller.

For a thorough examination of how these same differences of performance are borne out in combat films produced between the 1940s and the post-Ryan 2000s, see Chapter 4 of Bender (2012).

In cases like these, the contemporary sound recordist can also use a radio-microphone which will stay in roughly the same position relative to the actor’s mouth, although the limitation with this technique is that the actor’s movement might rub their clothing against the microphone. Alternatively, if the camera framing allows for it, the contemporary boom-operator can physically get the microphone close enough and “swing” the boom while the actor moves so as to capture the sound consistently.

If the shot involves a lot of explosions or squib-hits for instance, the dialogue may need to be recorded in a post-production Automated Dialogue Replacement (ADR) session.
For more on this type of auditory masking, see Chion (2009, p. 480). The choice of not hearing character’s speech is well illustrated by one of the beach assault sequences of Sam Fuller’s *The Big Red One* (1981). With his unit pinned down by machine-gun fire, Lee Marvin’s character sends each man up the beach with a length of Bangalore torpedo tubing to clear the way for tanks. Unlike *Ryan*’s portrayal of the same event, in which actors yell loudly at each other but are frequently not heard, most of the actors in Fuller’s version of these events talk loudly but without shouting. Typically the volume of their voice competes with the battlefield atmosphere, however as the battle continues and Marvin begins to send the men with Bangalore he does begin to shout at them. He calls at them by number, sending them up one by one as each man is shot down by machine-gun fire. The sound mix makes his voice discernible as he calls each man’s number, however its volume is on the threshold of clarity as it competes with the sound of explosions and gunfire.

The tendency for soldiers in contemporary films to speak dialogue while moving quickly is an example of the former, and potentially the greater amount of breathing audible on the soundtracks of the contemporary combat scenes is likely to be an example of the latter.

I have taken this phrase from Naremore’s analysis of some of the “amateur” acting in the background of Martin Scorsese’s *The King of Comedy* (1983). See Naremore (1988, p. 273). Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the actors in the wartime productions were amateurs, but rather that the 1940s style has become so out of date by current standards that this may be an explanation as to why many of my students laugh at the performance in films such as *Objective, Burma!* or *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (Allan Dwan, 1949). Naremore offers an example from a 1921 book by Mae Marsh called *Screen Acting* in which the author recounts an experience acting in D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) in which she thought of the death of her own father while performing a scene. However, it should be noted that the Method itself was primarily intended to be a set of training exercises, and, according to Naremore, “Players who used the Method continued to work in their own emotional idiolect, but they learned to manipulate buried sensory recollections and the Stanislavskian ‘as if,’ thus appearing more natural and spontaneous. Technically, they were not ‘living the part,’ and they were warned against using emotional memories during performances (advice they did not always follow—hence the slightly abstracted look associated with some actors)” (1988, p. 197).

For instance, the website for The New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts offers the following advice on its “Industry Tips” page for dramatic acting: “A simple strategy for creating honest drama is through the use of mantras [...] For example, if you are playing in a scene that involves a fight, you may want to try reciting, ‘I hate you,’ in your head during the scene. This subtext mantra will subconsciously affect your performance, making it seem more natural.” See “Industry Tips,” viewed 13 March, 2012 <http://www.sft.edu/tips/acting-tips-emotional-scenes.html>. Elizabeth Smith, writing for eHow.com suggests that actors should “Collect similar experiences. Although it may be painful in the case of sad or angry emotional scenes, it is crucial that you be able to experience the same emotions as your character. The more genuine the feeling, the better your performance will be.” See Smith E, “Acting Tips for Emotional Scenes,” viewed 13 March, 2012 <http://www.ehow.com/how_4607884_acting-tips-emotional-scenes.html>.

This seems to be a highly extended version of a common actor rehearsal practice. Actors in introductory classes are sometimes told to carry on a conversation in a public place “in character,” for instance in a café. See *Two-Week Boot Camp Run By Captain Dale Dye, USMC (RET.): Actors Into Soldiers for “Band of Brothers,”* viewed 12 October, 2011 <http://wesclark.com/jw/dale_dye.html>.

Saving Private Ryan, Blu-Ray supplement “Boot Camp.” Although Warriors has advised on non-WW2 combat films, they seem to take on a much higher proportion of WW2 themed contracts than do their competitors.

Harry Humphries, in “Crash Course,” *Black Hawk Down,* 2007, Blu-Ray supplement (Sony Pictures).

Ian Virgo, in “Crash Course.” In the interview, he emphasises “look like” with visual air-quotes.

In *Green Zone* the movements and vocal performances of the characters generally resemble the style of those in *Ryan.* The degree to which an actor interacting with real military men encourages a performance according to the very general principles of Method is apparent in the following remark from Damon about his work in *Green Zone:* “I showed up to the experience feeling like, ‘how am I going to give orders to these guys?’ You know, these guys have actually been in a war. What am I going to say? I’m an actor, what am I going to say to these guys? But because they were so used to operating in a system in which they followed orders from their commanding officer, and because they decided, when they saw my rank and when they saw me playing the role, that I was there commanding officer. If I say something, as their commanding officer, if they roll their eyes, well the scene’s over. Right? But they never did.” See “Matt Damon: Ready for Action,” *Green Zone,* 2010, Blu-Ray supplement (Universal).

As Suid has noted, the primary difference between the military-appointed advisors and civilian advisors such as Dye is that the filmmakers are under no obligation to implement the advice of the civilian contractors. By contrast, if they choose not to follow the official advisors then the film runs the risk of losing official support,
which includes any troops, equipment or locations that may have been provided (2002, p. 689). Dye in fact suggests that there were two instances on *Ryan* where the filmmakers went against his advice for apparently cinematic reasons. First, he suggests that there were conflicting views on the “anecdotal evidence” of whether or not officers had their rank insignia painted on their helmets and thought that painting captain’s bars on Miller’s helmet would receive “some sniping [criticism] by veterans and film critics.” However, Spielberg made the decision to include this in the film because it would “allow audiences to identify the lead actor in a sea of helmets and the confusion of the opening sequence.” Second, Dye believes the way in which the German soldiers passes Cpl. Upham without killing him on the staircase in the Alamo sequence—after stabbing Pvt. Mellish—was “a false note.” Spielberg apparently had drama in mind, insisting on “a sort of ‘flag of individual truce’ in the midst of a brutal battle to demonstrate that soldiers maintain some semblance of humanity.” Dye suggests that “audiences seemed to enjoy the moment and I can’t argue much beyond that.” D Dye, personal communication, 8 February 8, 2011.

33 Arguably, the boot-camps offer an excellent opportunity for film promotion and marketing. Aside from the numerous behind-the-scenes type documentaries that are found on the DVD releases of the films, since *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986) it is common to read interviews with actors commenting on their boot-camp training. For just one example, see Sharbutt (1986).
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Filmography

_A Bridge Too Far_ (Richard Attenborough, 1977)
_A Streetcar Named Desire_ (Elia Kazan, 1951)
_America_ (D.W. Griffith, 1924)
_Baby Dolly_ (Elia Kazan, 1956)
_Band of Brothers_ (DreamWorks SKG, 2001)
_Bataan_ (Tay Garnett, 1943)
_Birth of a Nation_ (D.W. Griffith, 1915)
_Black Hawk Down_ (Ridley Scott, 2001)
_Diary of a Lost Girl_ (Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1929)
_Die Hard_ (John McTiernan, 1988)
_Die Hard 4_ (Len Wiseman, 2007)
_Forrest Gump_ (Robert Zemeckis, 1994)
_Full Metal Jacket_ (Stanley Kubrick, 1987)
_Green Zone_ (Paul Greengrass, 2010)
_Heartburn_ [Mike Nichols, 1986]
:Objective, Burma!_ (Raoul Walsh, 1945)
_On the Waterfront_ (Elia Kazan, 1954)
_Operation Petticoat_ (Blake Edwards, 1959)
_Platoon_ (Oliver Stone, 1986)
_Sahara_ (Zoltan Korda, 1943)
_Sands of Iwo Jima_ (Allan Dwan, 1949)
_Saving Private Ryan_ (Steven Spielberg, 1998)
_Sunset Boulevard_ (Billy Wilder, 1950)
_Tears of the Sun_ (Antoine Fuqua, 2003)
_The Big Red One_ (Sam Fuller, 1981)
_The Boys in Company C_ (Sidney Furie, 1978)
_The Crowd_ (King Vidor, 1928)
_The Godfather_ [Francis Ford Coppola, 1972]
_The King of Comedy_ (Martin Scorsese, 1983)
_The Kingdom_ (Peter Berg, 2007)
_The Pacific_ (DreamWorks SKG, 2010)
_The Story of G.I. Joe_ (William Wellman, 1945)
_The Thin Red Line_ (Terrance Malick, 1998)
_To Hell and Back_ (Jesse Hibbs, 1955)
_Wake Island_ (John Farrow, 1942)