



Real War vs. Reel War: Veterans, Hollywood, and WWII (Film and History)

By Suzanne Broderick



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World War II has been the subject of hundreds, if not thousands, of films produced in the United States alone. From training camp scenes in *See Here, Private Hargrove* to images of brutal combat in *Saving Private Ryan*, filmmakers have been tasked with replicating pivotal moments in the war. But sometimes story lines and dramatic manipulations of audiences have led to less-than-faithful re-creations of what men *and* women have endured during times of conflict.

In *Real War vs. Reel War: Veterans, Hollywood, and World WarII*, Suzanne Broderick looks at how on-screen portrayals hold up against wartime experiences of actual combatants—soldiers, sailors, pilots, code talkers, and prisoners of war. In addition, two women—real-life “Rosie the Riveters”—compare depictions of the homefront with their experiences during the war. These members of the Greatest Generation share personal memories and offer commentary on the films that have sought to capture what it was really like. Among the films discussed in this book are such classics as *Battleground*, *Twelve O’Clock High*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *Since You Went Away*, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, and *The Great Escape*, as well as more contemporary films such as *Swing Shift* and *Windtalkers*.

By providing a “human” look at the military, the war effort, and how such people and events were depicted on screen, *Real War vs. Reel War* makes a unique contribution to the conversation about Hollywood’s role in shaping history. This book will appeal to historians, cultural critics, and anyone interested in war cinema.



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Editorial Review

Review

World War II films reflect a tension between the need for accuracy and realism and Hollywood's desire for action, backstories, and even a bit of romance. Hundreds of films about the era have been churned out over the years, including almost 300 during the war years alone, when many young men made the decision to enlist after viewing a gung-ho combat movie. This book describes World War II films as historical documents, using the memories of seven aging veterans (plus a few women who served on the home front), comparing their experiences to what was portrayed on the big screen. The soldiers' and sailors' backgrounds range from time on battleships, in the infantry, and in the air war, as well as those who were Navajo code talkers and prisoners of war. While reality could occasionally be glimpsed in these films, a more typical example is David O. Selznick's sudsy 1944 soap opera epic *Since You Went Away*. (*Library Journal*)

I found your book to be very fascinating. You had a great concept and nicely executed it. We've seen books on historical accuracy and film . . . but I like that you were able to find actual World War II veterans to give their perspective on the films. (*New Books Network*)

About the Author

Suzanne Broderick teaches history at Illinois State University, where she developed an interdisciplinary course entitled "Hollywood History," which combines Hollywood film and American history.

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