eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

NAVAL NARRATIVES OF RE-ENACTMENT:
IN WHICH WE SERVE AND SEA OF FIRE

Abstract

This essay examines two narrative examples of the Royal Navy and naval combat on screen, exploring their resemblances in the reenactment of naval history and their portrayal of the past through consistent representational strategies. In Which We Serve (Noel Coward and David Lean, 1942) and Sea of Fire (Ian Duncan, 2007) use deliberate and self-conscious recreations of the past to authenticate their interpretations of British naval history, and evince comparably conservative stances towards the Royal Navy and perceptions of its traditions. The similarity of their narratives, which describe the events leading up to the loss of two Navy destroyers, helps to reveal and reinforce the tonal, structural and stylistic parallels in their depictions. The correspondence in their portrayal of naval combat and the institution of the Royal Navy illustrates the consistencies of representation which characterise the naval war film as a distinctive, definable narrative form. Above all, their commitment to the recreation and reenactment of identifiable historical events underpins their importance in the representation and commemoration of the national, naval past. It is this aspect of both productions which is significant in the exploration of the role of visual representations to construct, affirm and broadcast pervasive and persuasive versions of popular history.

Key Words: war film, documentary, Royal Navy, memory, reenactment

Film, Documentary and Re-enactment

This paper considers two film depictions of Royal Navy ships lost in action in different conflicts: In Which We Serve (Noel Coward and David Lean, 1942) and Sea of Fire (Ian Duncan, 2007). These films are separated by more than sixty years, arise from radically different circumstances of production (the former being a feature film made during World War II, the latter a television documentary-drama broadcast by the BBC), and assume markedly different perspectives upon their material. Coward's

and Lean's film is now considered to be one of the best examples of the British war-time propaganda feature, while Sea of Fire offers a compassionate but uncompromising portrait of the conditions and controversies of the Royal Navy's role in the Falklands conflict. However, the similarity of their narratives, which describe the events leading up to the loss of two Navy destroyers, helps to reveal and reinforce the tonal, structural and stylistic parallels in their depictions. Above all, their commitment to recreation and reenactment of identifiable historical events underpins their importance in the representation and commemoration of the national, naval past. It is this aspect of both productions which is significant in the role of visual representations to construct, affirm and broadcast pervasive and persuasive versions of popular history.

In Which We Serve follows the career of HMS Torrin, from her pre-war keel-laying to her destruction by German aircraft in May 1941 during the Battle for Crete. Her story fictionalizes the well-known war-time career of HMS Kelly, commanded by Louis Mountbatten. Sea of Fire traces the part played by HMS Coventry from joining the Falklands taskforce until her sinking by Argentinian bombers in May 1982. The coincidence in the films' subject matter (in portraying two ships sunk by air attack while supporting land forces on contested islands, in wars forty years apart) prompts their consideration in tandem, but further analysis reveals more points of comparison than contrast, despite the differences in techniques, settings and media. Their resemblance is strongest in their commitment to the detailed re-enactment of the circumstances of these ship losses. The correspondence in their portrayal of naval combat and the institution of the Royal Navy itself illustrates the consistencies of representation which define the naval war film.

Although a grounding in recognisable and accepted history is frequently apparent in war films, the principle of re-enactment, and the intention behind the recapitulation of aspects of the past, are central to naval war films, and to the way that this particular popular cultural form reaffirms key aspects of a consensual cultural history and a connected national identity. As a concept, re-enactment may be more closely associated with documentary filmmaking rather than fictional feature films. Definitions of the documentary film, in terms of both intention and effect, often acknowledge a tendency for re-enactment. In assessing the interconnection of historical records, human memories and the rhetoric of factual films, Paula

Rabinowitz describes the function and effect of documentary in this way:

> Documentary is usually a construction - a re-enactment of another time
> or place for a different audience - a graphing of history, in and through
> the cinematic image and sound, onto the present. (Rabinowitz 1993:
> 120)

Although this definition is perceptive and revealing, it is not without a degree of fertile ambiguity. For example 're-enactment' may mean either the replaying of contemporary, factual footage from a past event within a documentary, or it may mean the dramatisation and/or recreation of a past event, to accompany or replace authentic footage of the period. Both of these solutions to representing the past - using actual footage or re-enacting events for the camera - are familiar within polemical, journalistic and investigative television programmes which span the categories of drama-documentary and documentary-drama. The documentary-drama format uses 'an invented sequence of events and fictional protagonists to illustrate the salient features of real historical occurrences', whereas the drama-documentary simulates 'events from a real historical occurrence or situation and the identities of the protagonists to underpin a film script' (Paget 1998: 82-3). The drama-documentary recreates real people and events with actors, whereas documentary drama illustrates historical events or genuine social and political circumstances through fictional stories and characters. In placing fictional characters and events within the familiar context of historical conflicts, or in retelling real events and portraying identifiable personages, the war film can adopt either approach or use a combination of the two in order to engage and mobilise audience knowledge, recognition or memory.

Ambiguity also affects the role and positioning of the potential audience for filmic re-enactment in Rabinowitz' definition of the documentary. 'Re-enactment of another time or place for a different audience' might mean an audience close enough in time, space and cultural reference to have recent and intimate acquaintance with the events portrayed, or an audience different and distant enough in time to need to be taught the unknown, lost or hidden facts of the past. Certainly the television drama-documentary can assume the tone of the journalistic exposé, revealing the truth behind a former headline. How familiar or unfamiliar the audience might be with the

history being re-enacted is a variable quantity, depending on how much time passes before the events are committed to film, how well-known the events and their participants are, and how the film or programme is trailed and advertised to familiarise the audience with its subject matter.

The process or goal of documentary re-enactment which Rabinowitz describes as the 'graphing of history onto the present' is also worth scrutiny. It suggests an erosion of the gaps, losses or ignorance created by the passage of time, and a related insistence on the presence and relevance of the past within the present, an effective concretisation of memory for communal recognition and consideration, within a public milieu. Therefore, both the intention and method of re-enactment have implications for the audiences of feature and documentary films which base their narratives in factual history, and explore them through drama-documentary techniques. The encouragement to identify with stars encountered by the feature film audience, and the provocation to digest facts and interrogate assumptions experienced by the audience for documentary, can be merged within the viewing position of the drama-documentary audience because of its specific combination of representational conventions and its abiding focus on documentation, recollection and re-enactment:

> Dramadoc/docudrama has almost always set out to do one or more of
> the following:
> (a) to re-tell events from national or international histories, either in
> reviewing or celebrating these events;
> (b) to re-present the careers of significant national or international
> figures, for similar purposes as (a);
> (c) to portray issues of concern to national or international communities
> in order to provoke discussion about them. (Paget 1998: 61)

Clearly, documentaries and feature films which draw upon and re-enact specific events inhabit complex relationships with history, with their societies and audiences, and their media. Such texts function as 'agents, products and sources of history' (Ferro 1983: 358). That is, they articulate the reconsideration of history, they are themselves products of the reappraisal of history, and they can condense, accompany or supplant other more conventional or reputable records of history by virtue of their

accessibility and their compelling modes of address.

Re-enactment exists within naval war films, and serves to recapitulate events from naval history within its popular narrative form. In such films a known history is re-presented to an informed audience within a conventionalised format, where re-enactment can both speak to and reaffirm a consensual grasp of history and a related, communal, cultural identity. In this respect In Which We Serve exemplifies the factual basis, documentary aesthetic and tendency for re-enactment found within the naval war film, as a sub-set of and specific derivation from the wider war film genre, in its fictionalisation of the historical HMS Kelly. The similarity of approach found in Sea of Fire, given its provenance in another decade and a distinct media and its depiction of a very different conflict, underlines the pervasive consistency of naval filmic representation, and within it the centrality of re-enactment, in terms of historical basis, textual form and ideological function.

Characteristics of the Naval War Film

In Which We Serve stands out within war-time film production not simply on the basis of its portrayal of Britain and British-ness, but because of its equation of national principles and identity with and their articulation through the institution and history of the Royal Navy. It is not just an exemplary British film, or exemplary British war film, but the archetypal Royal Naval film. Analysis of films about war at sea reveals their conformity to or divergence from the established conventions of narrative, characterisation and ideology of the wider war film genre. The majority of war films, and consequently the majority of the studies of the genre, have concentrated on war on land. Naval war films might display similar features, modify or re-emphasise established conventions, or exhibit alternative, divergent or transgressive characteristics, in comparison with the land war film. Examination of films portraying naval matters, sea warfare and naval history reveals a range of consistencies which encapsulate the ways that the naval war film deviates from the pattern of the standard war film (Rayner 2007: 209). These consistencies can be reduced to nine narrative, thematic and stylistic continuities, which are discernible within examples of naval filmic representation from Britain, America and other

national cinemas. They are: an historical basis; a documentary drama format; an episodic narrative structure; characterisation of the naval family; the citation of naval tradition; portrayal of conflicts in command; occurrences of mutiny; the experience of defeat; and the loss or sinking of the ship.

Historical Basis

The narratives of naval war films frequently derive from recognisable events. For example They Were Expendable (John Ford, 1945) recounts the exploits of a squadron of motor torpedo boats in the Philippines after the attack on Pearl Harbour. The film is based on a book with the same title, which was published when the survivors returned to America, and their heroic, vain defense of the islands became well-known. British post-war examples such as The Battle of the River Plate (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger 1956) and Yangste Incident (Michael Anderson, 1957) recreate famous actions with filming aboard some of the actual vessels involved. This tendency towards historical accuracy is markedly different from the often undifferentiated geographical and temporal setting of generic war films. Admittedly, other war films such as The Longest Day (Andrew Marton, Ken Annakin, Berrnard Wicki, 1962), The Battle of Britain (Guy Hamilton, 1969), and A Bridge Too Far (Richard Attenborough, 1977) have essayed a similar historical authenticity but these lengthy feature films have more in common with contemporary star-studded epics and disaster movies than with realist war films of the 1940s and 1950s. By contrast, the naval war film embraces a recognisable, verifiable resemblance to a memorable historical incident.

Documentary drama format

Naval war films frequently exhibit the characteristics of documentary-drama (such as realist techniques of filming, the inclusion of documentary footage or explanatory titles), to validate the recreation of specific events. Above Us the Waves (Ralph Thomas, 1955) recreates the training for and execution of midget submarine attacks on the German battleship Tirpitz during World War II. The television movie Hostile Waters (David Drury, 1997) provides an investigative drama-documentary treatment

of the events surrounding the sinking of a Soviet submarine off Bermuda in 1986. K19: The Widow Maker (Kathryn Bigelow, 2002) depicts a nuclear accident aboard another Soviet submarine in 1961, drawing on survivors' testimonies (which only entered the public domain after the end of the Cold War) in order to contextualise and authenticate its revelatory narrative.

Episodic Narrative

The combination of a basis in historical events and a docudrama approach can result in a sequential rather than cumulative narrative effect. Naval war films trace and narrate a series of distinct and isolated incidents, and consequently often lack a climactic, unequivocal resolution. Contrasting stories of the Battle of the Atlantic, The Cruel Sea (Charles Frend, 1953) from the British side and Das Boot/The Boat (Wolfgang Petersen, 1982) from the German adopt this approach. Both are docudramas in approach, being based on the factual and fictional writings of authors who experienced the conflict at sea first hand. In both cases, the episodic structure is justified by the repetitive convoy duty of the British escort ship, and the three-month patrol of the German U-boat. This has implications not only for the gradual exploration of character, but also for audience expectation and satisfaction. Where a film narrative does not follow the anticipated (feature, fictional) arc towards positive and unambiguous resolution, recognition of and concurrence with the national history depicted provides an alternative pleasure. In lieu of the anticipation of a predictable, generic conclusion, the audience derives satisfaction from a different form of complicity with the text, through recognition of the re-enactment of a sequence of familiar, historical events.

The Naval Family

The delineation of family-type groups within the war film is generally based on the standard land war film's generic grouping of the emblematic platoon. This group is assembled from individuals of varied rank, regional or ethnic background, and encompasses heroic, cowardly, foolhardy, selfish or selfless characteristics. Typically, in American films the platoon will include representatives from differing

states, and varied immigrant communities (Basinger 1986: 51-60). In British war films, especially those made in World War II, groups include variations in class as well as regional background, and will often incorporate Commonwealth representatives. The group is assembled by accident or design for a special task or mission. The diverse origins of group members usually translate into equally individual fates, as the group is slowly disassembled by deaths in combat.

Although the portrayal of ships' crews in naval war films bears a strong resemblance to this model, the sense of family is exaggerated and complicated in naval examples by the patriarchal characterisation (with attendant positive and negative associations) of the ship's captain, and the extension of the crew-family analogy to include actual relatives. Crewmembers marry the sisters, daughters and cousins of shipmates in British films such as We Dive at Dawn (Anthony Asquith, 1943) and In Which We Serve, and in American films like Destroyer (William A. Seiter, 1943) and Corvette K225 (Robert Rosson, 1943). Consequently, the characterisation of a crew as a family encompasses both the sense of the ship as symbol of the nation, and the principle of naval tradition maintained and inherited within literal 'families' from which the community of the naval service is composed.

Citation of Tradition

References to naval history and tradition embody one of the most conspicuous features of both British and American naval war films. In films about the Royal Navy, this registers in widespread allusions to Nelson and Trafalgar. This is seen in In Which We Serve, The Cruel Sea, Ships With Wings (Sergei Nolbandov, 1941), Sailor of the King (Roy Boulting, 1953), and even Petticoat Pirates (David MacDonald, 1961). In American films, these allusions are mirrored by references to a figure of similar standing in US naval history: John Paul Jones. His examples of leadership and ships bearing his name appear in Stand By for Action and Destroyer, and his motto is commemorated in the title of the epic representation of the Pacific War, In Harm's Way (Otto Preminger, 1965). In all these cases, the citation of tradition serves to remind viewers of and include them in a national naval heritage. The assumption that the patriotic viewer will recognise and integrate the references to naval tradition in film narratives seeks a unity between films and audiences to reflect

the portrayal of the naval community on screen.

Command Conflict and Mutiny

Conflicts in command and shipboard mutinies can occur singly or together, with the first often precipitating the second. The most famous instances of mutiny, aboard the historical battleship Potemkin and the fictional USS Caine have both been depicted on film in Battleship Potemkin (Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1925) and The Caine Mutiny (Edward Dmytryk, 1954), but challenges to authority also take place in strident, serious examples such as Away All Boats! (Joseph Pevney, 1956) and in comic ones like Mister Roberts (John Ford, Mervyn LeRoy, 1955). Conflict within command occurs more frequently in films set aboard submarines, for example Run Silent Run Deep (Robert Wise, 1958) and Crimson Tide (Tony Scott, 1995). The frequent questioning of the captain's right and ability to command fits with the patriarchal depiction and potential for Oedipal conflict contained within the shipboard community. However, the abidingly conservative tone of war films generally and naval films in particular results in patriarchal authority being reaffirmed, in the figure of the undermined captain and/or the institution of the Navy itself.

Defeat and Loss of the Ship

As with conflict in command, and its eventual manifestation in mutiny, defeat and sinking of the ship often go together in the naval war film. Defeat embodied in the sinking of the ship would seem to prohibit the inclusion of such an event in a war film, especially one made in wartime for propaganda purposes, but this aura of loss is nonetheless palpable in definitive naval films, such as In Which We Serve (which depicts the life of HMS Torrin in flashback, after her sinking), They Were Expendable (which records the gradual attrition of the PT boat squadron), and Das Boot (in which the U-boat survives an arduous patrol only to be bombed on return to its French base). Although death is an inevitable and indicative consequence of conflict, which within the war film's narrative serves an instructive, moral purpose, the sinking of a warship might appear to be a dangerously pessimistic occurrence to portray. Yet its pervasiveness as a spectacle suggests that, not only is the portrayal and actuality of

loss accepted within the context of conflict, but that the nation (personified by the ship, exemplified by the Navy as an institution and embodied in the film audience) can endure, survive, and transcend such a symbolic threat to its cohesion and existence. Paradoxically, the endurance of the conservative infrastructure of national institutions and identity is proven and enhanced rather than undermined by the destruction of symbolic representatives.

In Which We Serve as Naval War Film

These consistent characteristics are clearly discernible in In Which We Serve. It conforms to the pattern of the World War II documentary feature film, combining the consensual, educational address of pre-war documentaries with the emblematic wartime narrative of national strength and endurance through familial, regional and class unity. As well as giving a realist treatment to recognisable, contemporary circumstances, wartime features exhibit their authenticity through the integration of factual footage. Documentary features also give assurance of their relevance and immediacy through the realistic portrayal of war's repercussions for representative British citizens. In In Which We Serve, the destroyer and her crew come to stand for the nation state and the British populace, with the life and death of the ship and the lives, deaths and new lives of her crew encapsulating the sacrifice and survival of the country at large.

The recognisable factual basis for In Which We Serve epitomises the naval film's heightened historical accuracy. The career of the fictional HMS Torrin is a thinly-veiled re-enactment of the life of HMS Kelly. As Louis Mountbatten's command and leader of his 5th Destroyer Flotilla, Kelly saw constant action, surviving severe damage in several encounters before being sunk off Crete. Her fame in the early part of the war was such that contemporary audiences would have easily recognised this re-rendering of her story. In Which We Serve dramatises the incidents of Kelly's career and in certain episodes replicates Mountbatten's perspective in word and image (Pattinson 1986: 108-9).

After the opening montage, the film flashes forward to May 1941 to show Torrin with her flotilla, harassing a night convoy carrying German troops, before succumbing to bombing attack the following morning. Subsequently, the ship's

previous exploits are seen in flashback, through the recollections of survivors. These include suffering damage in a surface action (during which an anonymous young sailor panics and leaves his post), being towed home after a torpedo hit, and assisting in the evacuation from Dunkirk. These incidents are predominantly faithful to Kelly's career: where they are clearly embellished (for example, she was not present at Dunkirk), they stand for the entirety of the Navy's effort in the war to date. To Mountbatten, Kelly's story was 'very ordinary' since she 'had been doing what all other destroyers were doing. "We've been mined, bombed, torpedoed, everything you can think of and we ended up by being sunk"' (Pattinson 1986: 131). Torrin's placement within a real, recent and recognisable history assumes that the wartime audience will have an acquaintance with the facts of Kelly's career and concur with the meaning they have assumed in wartime Britain. The re-enactment of Kelly's life (and Coward's incarnation of Mountbatten as 'Captain Kinross') were read then as universal exemplars of the Navy's present trials and long-standing principles, through and because of their equation with national ideals and character.

The film's inheritance from the pre-war documentary movement and its symbolic union of the ship and the state are contained within its opening montage, reminiscent of the pre-war documentary Shipyard (Paul Rotha, 1935), showing the destroyer's construction from keel laying to launching and acceptance trials. A voice-over tells us that 'this is the story of a ship' rather than portrait of her crew, but in essence the two become inseparable. Even after her loss the ship lives on, in the captain's exhortation to her survivors to 'remember the Torrin' the next time they are in action in other vessels (Pattinson 1986: 117). In addition to integrating documentary footage of vessels at sea (including images of the Kelly and her sisters), the film includes shots of naval ratings on parade and of other warships before the closing titles, as part of its message of the endurance of the Navy and nation despite defeat and loss.

Marital and emotional links between the sailors bridge the classes and ranks which make up the ship's crew, eroding any distinction between ship- and shore-based families. Both halves of the naval family suffer losses, when the ship is sunk and her home port is blitzed. The connection and unity of ship- and shore based communities is tested but reaffirmed by the danger and loss inherent in naval service. Able Seaman Blake (John Mills) marries Chief Petty Officer Hardy's (Bernard Miles)

niece Freda (Kay Walsh), who moves in with Hardy's wife and mother when the Torrin goes to sea. When their home is bombed, Freda survives and gives birth to a son, but both older women are killed. On hearing the news from Blake, Hardy's only response is to congratulate him on becoming a father. In a similarly selfless moment, the Captain's wife (Celia Johnson) proposes a toast to the ship, her 'permanent and undefeated rival' in her husband's affections, in a speech Kinross characterizes comically as 'mutiny.'

The film's assemblage from flash-backs from the perspectives of individual characters is a crucial factor in ideological as well as structural terms. The flash-forward from Torrin's commissioning to her sinking, and the subsequent flash-backs which illustrate her career, act as reinforcing reminders of her (Kelly's) story, while both underscoring and overcoming the knowledge of her loss. The possible limitation of subjectivity becomes a strength of objectivity, as the recollections of all ranks and classes amalgamate in a unified, communal memory, which also harmonises with and confirms the audience's knowledge of the ship and her story. The flash-backs are also responsible for the alinear, episodic narrative, which in forestalling its own climax may appear to produce a downbeat, defeatist effect. However, just as the narrative's separate voices cohere into a single, consensual and implicitly national vision of loss and endurance, so the film's temporal jumps conclude with scenes which unite past, present and future.

As the surviving crew members disperse, the voice-over tells us 'here ends the story of a ship; but there will always be other ships… and men to sail in them.' The voice-over continues over images of ratings training and parading, of ships at sea, and, as predicted, Kinross commanding another ship in action. At its conclusion, In Which We Serve insists upon the permanence of the Navy 'above all victories, beyond all loss', with future battles and the promise of eventual triumph linking the present conflict and honoured tradition, such as the recitation of the Naval Prayer (the origin of the film's title) during Torrin's first Christmas in commission, and the quoting of Charles II's Articles of War under the opening titles. Although the ship is sunk, the Navy survives as an institution via the recognition of history and maintenance of tradition (to which, ironically, the loss of the ship also contributes).

Far from being a problematic and unpatriotic element in the narrative, the film's inclusion of the ship's sinking confirms its conservative credentials, as a text

which does not challenge the naval status quo (in terms of rank and hierarchy) or the national one (in terms of class and patriarchy). The sinking of the Torrin is transcended, because the Navy as institution survives the loss of individual vessels, because the nation survives through the sacrifices of the ship and crew, and because the ship continues to live on in establishment history, public record, and personal memory. The congruent subjectivities of the flashbacks unite the individuals and branches of the naval family and, in relating the (factual) 'story of the ship', also help to elucidate the film's historical basis in its episodic and drama-documentary form. In this way, In Which We Serve effects re-enactment not only in espousing a factual source and documentary-drama attributes, but in the characterisation and narration of the naval family, and the recollection and portrayal of defeat and the loss. Re-enactment in In Which We Serve consecrates the experience of defeat and the occurrence of loss in order to exalt the endurance and fortitude of the Navy, for a contemporary audience fully conversant with its recent factual basis. Sea of Fire, made a quarter of a century after the events it portrays, uses comparable but varying techniques to recall and reexamine a similar but more problematic event.

Sea of Fire as Naval War Film

Sea of Fire is based on Four Weeks in May, written by HMS Coventry's captain (Hart-Dyke 2007). The specificity of the book's title and subtitles ('The Loss of HMS Coventry: A Captain's story') is outstripped by its scope, which covers David Hart-Dyke's pre-war career, includes the recollections of many other crew members, and extends beyond Coventry's loss to record her captain's recuperation and the commissioning of a new HMS Coventry. As a television drama-documentary, Sea of Fire employs several interconnecting techniques to confirm the factuality of the events it portrays. Like In Which We Serve, it integrates archive footage of Royal Navy ships, but also incorporates dramatisation of events using actors, and the testimonies of survivors in interview with special-effects sequences recreating the air attacks during the Falklands War. Archive shots show HMS Sheffield and Coventry before the war, and contemporary news footage and images of present-day Royal Navy warships are used to represent the Falklands campaign. Dramatized scenes were filmed aboard HMS Exeter, Coventry's sister and herself a Falklands veteran.

Cameras mounted on the chests of actors provide first-person sequences as crewmembers move around the ship in action, and blurred, ghosting images and slow-motion are used to convey the injuries and disorientation of individuals in the aftermath of the bombing. Coventry's sinking is shown through a montage of still photographs (reproduced in the book) taken at the time by survivors in life-rafts, and the taking of these photographs is itself re-enacted in the film.

The interviewees seen in the film represent the ranks of Coventry's crew of 1982, from Captain Hart-Dyke through officers Dick Lane and Russell Ellis, senior ratings Sam McFarlane and Chris Howe, down to the then-19-year-old helicopter mechanic Peter Bradford. As such they span the naval family aboard Coventry like the cast of In Which We Serve, but are also representative of the navy as an institution and the naval contribution to the conflict. This is exemplified by the crews of the Type 42 destroyers being described as a 'community', and Sam McFarlane, recently transferred to Coventry from sister ship HMS Sheffield, recalls his shock and grief at news of the latter's loss. Interviews with the veterans as 'talking heads' are interspersed with dramatized scenes on board the destroyer and the combinations of found and fabricated footage showing the conflict.

Several conspicuous stylistic features introduce distancing effects and suggest the film's interrogative stance toward the history it portrays. In both the interviews and the dramatisations, rapid zooms into the faces of the veterans and actors portraying them occur at crucial moments, for example when Chris Howe recalls overhearing the Captain's repeated, fruitless requests to Admiral Woodward for Coventry to be moved further from land for safety (McManners, 2007: 220-1). Where they are included, sequences of Falklands-era news footage are deliberately and peculiarly obscured, being seen in distorted 'windows' which occupy only part of the frame and often refracted or unnaturally coloured. Similarly, staged home-movie scenes of the captain's wife and daughters in Britain, which are included when he receives mail from home, appear dimmed and speeded up to suggest an even greater separation in time and space from the conflict in the South Atlantic in 1982 and its present dramatisation. The peculiarity and prominence of these techniques work to create or recognize distance - between the family and the captain at war, between 1982 and 2007, and between the audience's understanding of the war via the film as contemporary event and its subsequent recollection and revision via drama-

documentary re-enactment. Arguably, having actors portraying the veterans and their past experiences similarly exaggerates rather than eliminates the gap between 1982 and 2007. Additionally, interspersing the present-day interviews among the documentary and re-enacted footage creates the same episodic structure of the naval war film's voyage-narrative, making Coventry's history and the war itself more remote.

Sea of Fire's title gives the first indication of the film's interpretation of Coventry's loss as a horrific and tragic event. Publicity leading up to its broadcast stressed the hazardousness of her deployment on a 'suicide mission' and the inevitability of her loss (Rumley 2007). Conversely, the operation in which Coventry and Broadsword were engaged has been described as an offensive 'trap', executed with success until the fateful attack (Brown 1989: 218-24). Even if viewers lack intimate knowledge of the conflict and Coventry's loss, the film's imagery and structure generate anticipation of the disaster. The opening sequence works as a condensed preview: documentary footage (views of Coventry, ships under attack in San Carlos Water, and the sinking of HMS Antelope) is accompanied by excerpts of David Hart-Dyke in interview and scenes of the 're-enacted' captain expressing his misgivings about her mission, and ended with a flash-forward (a scene from the later sequence recreating the sinking). This sequence parallels the first part of In Which We Serve, in divulging the story's end before settling into flash-back, and as such also equates with the captain's summary of Coventry's last moments in 'Prologue: Apocalypse' (Hart-Dyke 2007: 14).

The apparent inevitability of Coventry's loss, within the filmed recollections of survivors and as suggested by the structure of Sea of Fire, creates an obvious parallel with the alinear narrative and well-known history of In Which We Serve. This awareness of loss also mirrors the naval war film's conservative, affirmative rendering of sinking and defeat, but Sea of Fire's credentials as a television documentary drama entail a dissimilar treatment. David Hart-Dyke in his retrospective interview, and the re-enactment captain in dramatised scenes and in voice-over, express their belief that despite her successes in the campaign, Coventry was/is doomed. By deliberately attracting attacks away from the landing beaches, both book and film agree that Coventry had drawn 'the shortest straw' and was likely to be 'sacrificed' (Hart-Dyke 2007: 124). Yet in describing the final day of

operations, in which Coventry was to rely on Broadsword for close-range protection, the re-enactment captain's private misgivings ('I'd prefer to be in control of my own destiny') contradict the real captain's stated confidence in his consort (Hart-Dyke 2007: 132-3) Similarly, where Sea of Fire presents an unsympathetic depiction of Admiral Woodward's visit to Coventry, Hart Dyke praises the task force commander's character and leadership (Hart-Dyke 2007: 34-6). The film's negative portrayal of Woodward is significant because it anticipates the later scene in which both Hart Dyke and Chris Howe recall the fruitless requests for the ship to be relocated. Thus Admiral Woodward is made directly responsible for Coventry's 'suicide' mission, and the theme of conflict in command and the ironic celebration of sinking and defeat of the naval war film are tempered with the television documentary's exposé of an avoidable and negatively portrayed error, or a 'secret' behind the known history. This significant divergence is suggestive of more fundamental differences between the cinematic naval film and the television drama-documentary, despite the numerous tonal and textual similarities and sympathies.

After the re-enactment of the sinking and the rescue of survivors, the elements of documentary drama form again come to the fore in a series of freeze frame portraits of the veterans, with titles describing their lives following the conflict. Archive footage of the return of the Falklands taskforce is included only briefly before the final credits. As such, the induction of Coventry's story into naval history and national memory is assumed rather than overstated in the film. Instead, the ship-based community's endurance and survival of trauma through shared identity, distant and different from the viewers' experience, is emphasised (Robinson 2012: 95). David Hart-Dyke's book, by contrast, emphasises the consciousness and relevance of tradition underpinning the story of his ship. The meeting of commanders of ships heading south to war mirrors Nelson's conference of captains before Trafalgar, which he recalls at a dinner aboard HMS Victory after the conflict (Hart-Dyke 2007: 33, 241). This event reintegrates the captain into the naval community and fixes his generation and its war within the same tradition. When a new HMS Coventry enters service in 1989, he hands on the battle ensign recovered from his ship by divers (Hart-Dyke 2007: 238-9). This continuity in naval tradition is also represented by his listing of the battle honours for all HMS Coventries as far back as the eighteenth century, including the immediate predecessor to his own ship which, alongside the

Kelly/Torrin, earned honours in the Battle for Crete, (Hart-Dyke 2007: xxv-xxvi, 143). Although the strength of tradition, as a key characteristic of the naval war film, is perhaps less apparent in Sea of Fire than in its source, the film's director (in interview with the author) has stated that, notwithstanding the images of Coventry's loss, the Navy saw Sea of Fire as a positive film (Duncan 2007). Representing the endurance and courage of her crew, their completion of a hazardous mission and the known conclusion of the conflict in victory contribute to the permanence of naval tradition, with these same elements performing the same function as in the story of the Kelly.

Conclusion: Re-enactment in the Naval Film

> It has become an axiom of the new documentary that films cannot reveal the truth of events, but only the ideologies and consciousness that construct competing truths - the fictional master narratives by which we make sense of events. Yet too often this way of thinking has led to a forgetting of the way in which these films still are…documentaries - films with a special interest in the relation to the real, the 'truths' which matter in people's lives. (Williams 1993: 13)

Collaboration between Hollywood and the American Navy continues to produce popular features (with markedly conservative institutional and national agendas) exploring the historical and present roles of the US Navy, such as Men of Honor (George Tillman Jr., 2000), Behind Enemy Lines (John Moore, 2001), and Battleship (Peter Berg, 2012). Successful co-operation in the fashioning of historical and contemporary representations has been the hallmark of Hollywood's relationship with the US Navy (Suid, 1996). By contrast, the era of the British naval war film came to an end with Sink the Bismarck! (Lewis Gilbert, 1960). (Despite its documentary feature characteristics and historical setting, even this example is problematic, being produced by Twentieth Century-Fox). However, the close resemblance in the circumstances of the losses of Kelly and Coventry makes Sea of Fire a convincing candidate for a latter-day British naval war film. Notwithstanding its television

documentary format and its more journalistic approach to occurrences in the past, crucial aspects of its form, tone and structure (its basis in an actual event, its tracing of the event's significance across all levels of the ship's company, its construction from personal testimony in flashbacks, archive footage and dramatic reconstruction, and its deliberate concentration on a known sinking and notional defeat from a victorious campaign) produce significant parallels with earlier naval war films. Some points of equivalence (the depiction of the Captain's family, the rating who loses his nerve in action and scenes in the life rafts after the sinking) serve to make Sea of Fire itself almost an unwitting re-enactment of In Which We Serve.

Sea of Fire was produced as part of a larger pattern of programming scheduled to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Falklands Conflict. In interview with the author Ian Duncan has reflected that without the impetus of the anniversary, the film would probably not have been made. Following the production, he tried unsuccessfully to pitch a film depiction of current naval operations (the Royal Navy's anti-drug patrols and international role in support of the current 'war on terror') to UK broadcasters (Duncan 2007). Such a documentary would have had parallels in recent television series such as Shipmates (BBC, 2006) and Warship (Channel 5, 2008). However, within the definition of the factually-based, drama-documentary approach of the naval war film, the downbeat documentary emphasis on disaster and loss of life in a controversial conflict of the past appears easier to pigeon-hole than a positive depiction of operations in the present.[1] In this respect, Sea of Fire must also be seen within the context of Windfall's other televisual drama-documentaries - D-Day As it Happens (2013), Attack of the Zeppelins (2013), and D-Day 360 (2014) - made for Channel 4. In these examples, the dramatic re-enactment serves an educational function for audiences unaware of the narrativised historical details, often inflected with tonally and structurally in terms of peril, and hidden or evaded responsibility for impending or inevitable disaster. Here re-enactment evidently serves a different verifying function, endowing historically distant narrative with visual credibility. The re-enactment of recent history in In Which We Serve and even The Battle of the River Plate addresses an audience knowledgeable of World War II, whereas that of Sea of Fire (twenty five years after the events it portrays) recreates a history, the facts of which its viewers may be ignorant. In this case, the negative aura surrounding Coventry's loss, the inference of command blunders and the remoteness of the war in

space and time from viewers and the 'performed' veterans themselves, transforms the Falklands War into a known quantity in televisual documentary terms. Distinct from the justified, communal commemorated war of In Which We Serve (and Four Weeks in May), Sea of Fire exposes a distant, tragic, private secret.

Nonetheless, re-enactment remains consistent and crucial to the form, intent and address of the naval war film, more so than in the case of the land war film, because of the treatment of nation and navy, and past and present conflicts as a familiar and consensually-read continuum of history and tradition:

> Documentary cinema is intimately tied to historical memory. Not only does it seek to reconstruct historical narrative, but often it functions as an historical document itself. Moreover, the connection between the rhetoric of documentary film and historical truth pushes the documentary into overtly political alignments which influence its audience. (Rabinowitz 1993: 119)

As Linda Williams' commentary on the documentary film's connection to the real suggests, the authenticity of the history which is represented is of secondary importance to the pervasive recognition and acceptance of this history as a communal truth: '"Collective memory" is not the same as national memory… Nations do not remember, groups of people do' (Winter 2001: 864). Problems with the idea of collective, communal memory, and the extension of the processes and psychology of individual memory, should not deter us from recognizing that communal perceptions of the past exist, and that they are created and propagated by the media and its vociferous images as much as they are inculcated by conservative establishment historiographical processes. The conservatism of naval history and tradition, as central planks within constructions of national identity and as key aspects of the naval war film, privilege the endurance and transcendence of loss 'above' the celebration of victory. On this basis, history 'should be more appropriately defined as a particular type of cultural memory' (Kansteiner 2002: 184)

Paradoxically, sunken ships are 'preserved' where ships surviving modern conflicts are, in the overwhelming majority of cases, irrevocably lost to scrapping. They vanish while the names and stories of sunken ships (which are also now

increasingly rediscovered, visited and recovered from the sea) live on in the memories of veterans (as evinced by the survivors of Torrin and Coventry), commemorations of conflicts and, connectedly, through film. Lost ships can be immortalised in national memory more often than actual ships are preserved 'for the nation': very few twentieth century Royal Navy ships have been saved from scrapping. In Which We Serve re-enacts the story of Kelly for the contemporary (1942) audience, and Sea of Fire recalls and re-appropriates the story of Coventry for the contemporary (2007) commemoration of the Falklands Conflict. Both films celebrate the Navy on the basis of re-enacted loss, depicting a past we are presumed to recognize, and using a consistent structural, thematic and imagistic form to reaffirm 'our' history.

Notes

1) Ironically, a positive film of the Royal Navy's contemporary operations already exists. Command Approved (Graham Moore, 2000) depicts a Royal Navy warship engaging arms dealers and terrorists in the South China Sea. The ship launches missiles, bombards an island base, and deploys Royal Marines by helicopter to rescue British hostages: 'The 25-minute film is a window on the navy in action. It packs the punch of a James Bond film, but this is the real world, not spy fiction. This is the navy facing real threats and dealing with them as they would on the high seas.' http://www.actionstations.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=36 (accessed 23 September 2008)
To date the film has not received a general release and can be viewed only in the 'Action Stations' exhibit at the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth.

References

Basinger, J. 1986. The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brown, D. 1989. The Royal Navy and the Falklands War. London: Arrow.

Duncan, I. 2007. Telephone interview with the author.

Ferro, M. 1983. Film as an Agent, Product and Source of History. In Journal of Contemporary History, 18 (3): 357-364.

Hart-Dyke, D. 2007. Four Weeks in May. London: Atlantic Books.

Kansteiner, W. 2002. Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies. In History and Theory 41 (2): 179-197.

McManners, H. 2007. Forgotten Voices of the Falklands. London: Ebury Press.

Paget, D. 1998. No other way to tell it: Dramadoc/docudrama on television. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Pattinson, W. 1986. Mountbatten and the Kelly. Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens.

Rabinowitz, P. 1993. Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory. In History and Theory, 32 (2) : 119-137.

Rayner, J. 2007. The Naval War Film: Genre, History, National Cinema. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Robinson, R. 2012. Explanations of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Falklands Memoirs: The fragmented self and the collective body. In Journal of War and Culture Studies, 5 (1): 91-104.

Rumley, L. 2007. Surviving a Falklands 'suicide' mission. BBC News [online] 1 June 2007: (Accessed 7 June 2007). Available at:
<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6705387.stm>

Suid, L. 1996. Sailing on the Silver Screen: Hollywood and the US Navy. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

Williams, L. 1993. Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary. In Film Quarterly 46 (3): 9-21.

Winter, J. 2001. Film and the Matrix of Memory. In The American Historical Review 106 (3): 857-864.