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Television's "True Stories": Paratexts and the Promotion of HBO's *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*

Debra Ramsay

- ¹ In 1998, and in the wake of the commercial success of *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg approached the American cable television network HBO with a proposed adaptation of Stephen Ambrose's 1992 book *Band of Brothers*. Constructed primarily from interviews with surviving veterans and published with their endorsement, Ambrose's book charts the history of the members of an American paratrooper company, Company E, known as 'Easy', in World War II. Despite the extraordinary budget demanded by Spielberg and Hanks' vision for the series, HBO had no hesitation in agreeing to back the project at a cost of \$125m, making it the most expensive television series of its time. *Band of Brothers* was broadcast by HBO in 2001, with the first episode airing just before September 11th. Perhaps because of the historical and emotional resonance of that day in America, viewing figures tapered off as the series progressed. However, *Band of Brothers* has since become not only HBO's best-selling DVD, but also the highest grossing TV-to-DVD release to date.¹ The success of the series in the sell-through market helps explain why, just under a decade later, HBO once again agreed, in Spielberg's words, to '[make] room on their schedule' and in their budget, this time at a cost of \$250m, for a similar ten-part miniseries, *The Pacific*.² In contrast to its predecessor, however, *The Pacific* concentrates on the experiences of just three individuals – Eugene Sledge, Robert Leckie and John Basilone – rather than an entire company, and shifts attention away from the war in Europe. *The Pacific* is based on memoirs written by Sledge and Leckie, and on public and historical accounts of Basilone's life.
- ² The two series conform to Tom Hoffer and Richard Nelson's description of docudrama as 'informative yet entertaining in a way [that is] impossible for the traditional documentary.'³ Drawn from the memories and memoirs of American soldiers who fought in World War II, both series prominently feature interviews with surviving

veterans at the beginning of each episode; *The Pacific* augments these interviews with archival footage of the war, as well as graphics and historical information supplied by Hanks' voice-over—conventions common to war documentaries on television since *The World at War* (Thames Television, 1973). The high-profile involvement of Hanks and Spielberg, the extravagant budgets, and the production of hypermediated, spectacular battle sequences (unusual not only for television but also for film), combine to set the two series apart from what Hoffer and Nelson refer to as 'traditional documentary'.⁴ Spielberg identifies *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as 'semi-documentaries' and suggests that as such, they are not bound by the 'rules' of 'mainstream' televisual drama (nor, implicitly, by those governing documentary), but by the 'rules' imposed by the memories of the veterans themselves.⁵ In order to tell the story of Easy Company, for example, *Band of Brothers* departs from 'mainstream' television by featuring a cast of largely unknown actors in multiple storylines and the lack a central character, while *The Pacific* 'break[s] every narrative rule', as Hanks puts it, because it concentrates on battles that proved unimportant in the larger framework of the war.⁶ Both series are further distinguished from 'commercial' television, according to Spielberg, because they are intended as 'honor roll[s] of valor and sacrifice' to the veterans.⁷

- 3 Despite Spielberg's claims to the contrary, HBO nevertheless has commercial imperatives in investing in two such expensive mini-series. The idea that the two series are outside of 'mainstream' television is itself an important one for HBO, as it conforms to the subscription network's carefully constructed brand identity as a purveyor of distinctive and culturally significant original programming of such 'quality' that it is 'not TV. It's HBO.'⁸ However, even within HBO's usual discourses of distinction, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* were marketed as extraordinary. Although the series themselves negotiate the interstices between documentary and drama, the paratextual network constructed by HBO's marketing strategies at the time of their original broadcast, and into their subsequent release on DVD and Blu-Ray, does not so much blur the boundaries between documentary and drama as eradicate them completely. As Jonathan Gray points out, paratexts 'create texts, they manage them and they fill them with many of the meanings we associate with them.' Consequently, as Gray goes on to explain, the welter of material that accumulates around and within any mediated text should be considered as 'anything but peripheral'.⁹ Focussing solely on the content within a television series or film thus runs the risk of constructing an incomplete picture of how that text functions and is understood. In this article, therefore, I suggest that the category of 'docudrama' is inadequate for a full understanding of the position that HBO has carved out for *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* within the framework of historical representations of World War II. Instead, I want to consider how the paratextual network of both series identifies them as definitive, authoritative historical accounts that organize and interpret memories and experiences of World War II not only for Americans, but for the world. Drawing on the idea of metanarrative as defined by John Stephens and Robyn McCallum as a 'global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience', I suggest that *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are presented through their paratextual network as metadocumentaries - totalizing narratives of World War II that provide primary mechanisms through which to understand the war.¹⁰

- 4 While my intention is to focus on strands of the paratextual network that surrounds *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, I begin with a brief examination of the two series themselves before moving on to the preliminary marketing drives that preceded their

initial broadcast dates. Taking into account Gray's point that 'intangible entities' also function as paratexts, I concentrate on the premiers of both series in order to establish how these events endorse the series by imbricating them within official ceremonies of commemoration and to identify what the premiers imply for HBO.¹¹ Next, I move on to explore how the 'bonus' features available on the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of the two series - specifically the 'Making of' and 'Timeline' features - not only extend HBO's initial marketing strategies, but also situate the series within an intricate textual frame that works to position *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as more than either documentary or drama or a combination of the two, but as unmediated windows into the past. Ultimately, I seek to explore the following question: how do televisual strategies of promotion and representation inflect our understanding of the relationship between television, history, and documentary?

'Real, True Stories.' *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*

'The true story of Easy Company.' Intertitle from
Band of Brothers Trailer

'We had all given up that the story would ever be
told. The real, true story.'¹² Richard Greer, 1st
Marine Division, Pacific veteran

- 5 Before moving on to a discussion of the paratextual network that surrounds the two series, it is important to understand the 'creative symbiosis,' as Thomas Schatz refers to it, between past and present, drama and documentary, at work in *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*.¹³ In attempting to tell the 'real, true' story of Easy Company and the Marines in the Pacific, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* construct what Tom Hanks refers to as an 'under the helmet' perspective of World War II.¹⁴ In both series, the war is filtered through the memories and experiences of American soldiers who saw active combat. *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are indicative of the significance of the memories of veterans in determining what should be remembered and commemorated from World War II in America. The privileging of the memories of soldiers above all other recollections of the war is perhaps unsurprising given that the majority of the American wartime generation experienced the war indirectly, as the U.S. was one of the few nations to emerge from the war relatively unscathed in terms of damage to home ground. However, it is in the deference to the veteran's memory that the tension between history and memory frequently becomes apparent. The so-called 'Enola Gay controversy' of 1995, which involved the removal of material documenting the impact of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the Japanese from an exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute following several veterans' organisations' vehement protests, provides one example of what Pierre Nora identifies as the 'oppositional' relationship between memory and history.¹⁵ As the Enola Gay incident demonstrates, privileging the memory of the soldier as the quintessential narrative of World War II may overwrite the memories and experiences of others. By selecting the 'under the helmet' perspective of the war, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* impose a broader conception of World War II historicity that suggests that any historical accounts can and should be refracted through the memories of the ordinary soldier. In both series, a supposed more encompassing vision of war is offered through a series of battles fought in spaces inhabited primarily by soldiers and rendered extraordinary through the awe-inspiring spectacle of industrialised warfare. The battlefields of both Europe and the

Pacific are translated here through what Geoff King refers to as a 'spectacular-authentic' aesthetic – a combination of the look of period combat footage with contemporary techniques of filmmaking such as computer generated imagery.¹⁶

- 6 The Marine landing on the island of Peleliu in the Pacific (*The Pacific*, 5:10) is particularly useful as an example of the 'under the helmet' perspective that Hanks describes and also illustrates King's 'spectacular-authentic' aesthetic. While the sequence resembles the faded imagery of films such as *The Battle for Midway* (John Ford, 1943) and *With the Marines at Tarawa* (U.S.M.C, 1944) in its colour palette and style, it also utilizes computer-generated imagery—for example, in recreating the numerous Higgins boats used in the landing. The construction of this sequence is closely reminiscent of the landing sequence in Normandy as portrayed in *Saving Private Ryan* and deploys similar techniques to mimic combat photography: unstable camerawork replicates the look of hand-held footage and moments when the lens is spattered with mud or debris creates a sense of hypermediated immediacy.
- 7 However, no combat cameraman of the time would have focussed on individual soldiers the way that the camera does in this sequence. The sequence alternates between long shots of the shelling of the beach, the other landing boats, and close-ups of the Marines, with a specific focus on Eugene Sledge (played here by Joseph Mazello). A moment of concentrated auditory and visual identification with Sledge is designed to mimic the emotional shock and sensory impact of a mortar blast on the beach and ensures that the scene is not only viewed through Sledge's eyes, but also experienced via his somatic reactions.¹⁷ The aesthetic construction of combat in the landing sequence locates Sledge as the vulnerable human figure at the centre of the carnage and chaos of the battlefield and generates empathy for him by allowing the spectator to experience this moment of combat vicariously through his senses. The spaces of war are thus rendered extraordinary by a combination of the somatic impact of the spectacle of modern warfare, recreated through a 'spectacular-authentic' aesthetic, and the display of powerful emotions by the male soldier.¹⁸
- 8 Visceral battle sequences, such as the one above, are focal points of both series, and they contrast sharply with the sombre tone of the documentary-style interviews with the veterans that precede each episode. That the impact of these moments of combat is still alive in the present is illustrated by the observable psychological scars evident in the sometimes emotional testimony of the veterans. The emotional affect, enacted by the confluence of the present for the veterans and the past as it plays out in the dramatized recreations, is intensely persuasive. Contrary to usual documentary conventions, the veterans are not identified until the final episode of each series, and at first viewing it is difficult, if not at times impossible, to match them with the actors playing their younger incarnations in the dramatic recreations of their past. With nothing to identify them as individuals, the veterans become defined through the notion of generation – these are old men talking about the past in general terms, in contrast to the individual experiences of the young men who are living it. The choice to keep the identities of the veterans obscured until the final episode of each series means that their individuality becomes blurred in the present and absorbed into their identity as members of the so-called 'Greatest Generation,' with their individual testimony folded into that of their contemporaries. The interviews thus create the impression that this is a 'generation' telling its story, with individual memories reconstituted as an agreed, negotiated version of the past. The 'real, true' story of the wartime generation

that both series relate is consequently one in which white, male voices dominate, and the cost of the war appears to rest almost entirely on their shoulders. Soldiers—or, more specifically, white, male, American soldiers—emerge as the primary victims of World War II. Together, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are thus not so much a depiction of the American experience of World War II, but more a depiction of World War II as an American experience.

- 9 The 'under the helmet perspective' of the two series, with its focus on the battlefields of World War II, makes fighting between soldiers the defining experience of the war. However, in reality, the experience of combat was relatively rare, with only 25% of the U.S. Army (which in turn comprised less than 10% of the total U.S. armed forces) coming under enemy fire throughout the entire war.¹⁹ The reduction of a total war to exclusive, liminal moments of masculine relationships, sacrifice, and endeavour in both series not only inadvertently perpetuates war's appeal, but also obviates the necessity of questioning the morality or suitability of a military response to a given situation. Neither series questions the necessity of war. "Why We Fight" (9:10 of *Band of Brothers*) rearticulates the cultural memory of the American soldier as represented in Frank Capra's film of the same title (1945) as liberator of the oppressed and defender of democracy, as it depicts Easy Company's liberation of a concentration camp. While the reasons behind America's involvement in World War II are never quite as clearly defined in *The Pacific*, there can be no doubt that the soldiers' 'cause is just,' as Sledge's captain tells him in "Peleliu Airfield" (6:10). There is of course no question that World War II was a necessary war waged against totalitarian and aggressive regimes, but the overall reduction of war to fighting between soldiers preserves the idea that war can be waged 'justly' in that the terrible impact of war on civilians never registers in any compelling way in either series, despite the fact that civilian casualties outweighed military casualties on all sides in World War II.²⁰ *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* thus draw on and perpetuate a pre-existing national narrative of World War II as America's 'Good War' – a war in which America altruistically came to the defence of 'democracy' and 'freedom' and rescued the world from oppression.
- 10 The combination of veteran testimony, spectacular, hypermediated battle sequences, and affecting performances blends documentary conventions and the dramatic techniques of filmmaking to create a convincing and compelling framework for the series' particular perspective of the conflict. Older ideologies associated with the war are thus repackaged for a contemporary audience, and memory is re-presented as history. Given the repurposing of older ideologies, the interaction between memory and history, and the balance of the individual soldiers' memories and histories with the experiences and history of the 'Greatest Generation', the two series align with Pierre Nora's criteria for what he calls '*lieux de mémoire*.' In particular, they comply with Nora's definition of *lieux de mémoire* as 'hybrids' composed of 'endless rounds of the collective and the individual, the prosaic and the sacred, the immutable and the fleeting.'²¹ Like Nora's *lieux*, they operate on three levels – 'material, symbolic and functional.'²² They exist as material objects in the form of DVDs and Blu-Ray discs, but they are also symbolic in that they characterise the identity of a generation through the experiences of a few. The 'under the helmet' perspective of conflict is shaded with nostalgia for the perceived moral certainties of World War II and for the 'Greatest Generation,' which is defined here primarily through its soldiers. For Nora, the 'will to remember' precedes the existence of *lieux de mémoire*.²³ It is precisely the 'will to remember' that allows *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* to be folded easily into moments

of commemoration. As a result, the two series facilitate a level of promotion for HBO's brand identity that is not possible through any other series, a point that will become apparent in the next section. Nora acknowledges that *lieux* exist within complex networks of sites and texts and suggests that it is 'up to us' to acknowledge and analyse the ramifications of such interactions.²⁴ With this in mind, in the following section I want to explore how a network of texts generated by HBO endorses the two series as 'real, true stories' and continues the process of contorting nostalgia and memory into history. From the outset, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* were marketed as event-status programmes and highlighted as special even within HBO's usual discourses of distinction.

'Big, Important, Powerful' Premieres and Pre-Release Promotion

- 11 The value of event-status programmes, as John Caldwell points out, lies not only in their ability to attract viewers, but in their capacity to function as 'high-profile banner carriers' of a channel's brand identity.²⁵ For a cable network reliant on subscription fees rather than advertising for revenue, HBO's considerable investment into two miniseries with limited potential for generating long-term interest and attendant subscribers, should be understood through the specific opportunities afforded by their subject matter to enhance and extend the HBO brand. As Chris Albrecht, Chief Executive of HBO at the time the *Band of Brothers* deal was brokered, points out, the series presented the opportunity to 'have the audience see the kinds of projects that HBO stands for.'²⁶ Designed to 'honor' the veterans and by extension, America's role in the war, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* enable HBO to reach far beyond its subscriber pool and to align its brand with the values inherent in social acts of commemoration. As an indication of the significance of the two miniseries for HBO, the promotional budget of between \$10 and \$15 million allocated to *Band of Brothers* and later to *The Pacific* amounted to more than that devoted to promoting immensely popular and long-running series such as *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) and *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004).²⁷ Eric Kessler, Chief of Marketing for HBO when *Band of Brothers* was broadcast, sums up the preliminary marketing strategy for the series thus: 'We want people to say, "That looks big, important, powerful, and I need to see that."'²⁸
- 12 Carefully crafted links between both series and commemorative events are crucial to establishing them as 'big, important, powerful' television. In the case of *Band of Brothers*, HBO spent over a year arranging for the premiere of the series to be held as part of the celebrations for the fifty-seventh anniversary of D-Day in Normandy at Utah Beach in 2001. Forty-seven of the surviving members of Easy Company and their families were flown out for a special screening of one of the first episodes of the series. Invitations to the event were extended to various heads of state as well as to the descendants of Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Similarly, for the premiere of *The Pacific*, HBO flew 250 veterans to Washington DC for a special wreath-laying ceremony held at the World War II Veteran's memorial. The Veteran's memorial itself is, in turn, connected to *Band of Brothers*. Hanks was the national spokesman during the campaign for its creation and announcements advocating support for its construction accompanied the initial advertising for *Band of Brothers* in the U.S. Furthermore, HBO is listed on the memorial's website as one of the donors. The wreath

laying was followed by a screening of an episode of *The Pacific* at the White House, attended not only by President Obama, but also by members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The two premiers were widely covered in news media, allowing HBO to align itself with notions of public service and to develop its brand identity on both a national and international stage.

- 13 While the premieres of both series imbricate them within official acts of commemoration, the marketing surrounding the build-up of their initial broadcast uses the scale of the productions to distinguish them from previous representations of war in film and television. Mary Ann Doane identifies the 'activation of special effects and spectacle in the documentary format' as a way for television to counter 'its own tendency toward the levelling of signification.'²⁹ In the case of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, the high production values required for the spectacular recreation of industrialised warfare are utilised within the promotional material of the series to set them apart not only from 'ordinary' televisual documentaries and dramas, but also from cinematic dramatizations of World War II.³⁰ The widely-publicised 'quest', as Hanks calls it, for 'authenticity' in the production process is what allows other aspects of the paratextual to suggest that the series achieve an unprecedented level of immediacy by allowing viewers direct access to the past itself.³¹ The official HBO website for *Band of Brothers* informs users that they can 'experience the war' through the series; *The Pacific's* webpage goes further by implying that viewing the series equates to bearing 'witness [to] the conflict'.³² To a certain extent, the promotion of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* can be considered typical for a cable channel whose entire marketing strategy revolves around identifying all of its original programming as special or distinct in order to maintain its edge in a crowded and fiercely competitive industry. However, it is important to look beyond the marketing hyperbole to consider how the two series are identified within the textual milieu and generated through the premieres, websites, and promotions.
- 14 The links between the series and commemorative events function as official endorsements of the version of World War II history put forward by *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*. The presence of the veterans at each memorial ceremony, and in the previews of each episode, acts as a 'site of truth', to adopt a phrase from Marita Sturken, and adds cultural weight.³³ The veterans' general validation of the series as 'not Hollywood' but 'real,' carries an inviolable authority by virtue of their status as survivors and enhances the notion disseminated by the websites that *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* offer direct access to the past.³⁴ The two series emerge from this paratextual surround not as dramatized recreations of the memories of individuals, but as windows into World War II. By inextricably entangling the two series within officially endorsed and internationally significant moments of memorialisation, and emphasising their ability to allow viewers to 'witness' or 'experience' the past through superior production values, the paratextual network surrounding *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* allocates them a place in the history of World War II as sanctioned, definitive accounts – metadocumentaries that are bigger, more important and more powerful than 'mainstream' television or film. This fits within HBO's brand identity of delivering original programming that is 'not TV', and also extends the life of the series into syndication and the lucrative sell-through market.

More Than 'Just Making a Movie' DVD and Blu-Ray

- 15 Due to the proliferation of television channels facilitating the sales of series into syndication, the development of online viewing practices and streaming video platforms, and ubiquitous DVD and Blu-Ray products, restricting the analysis of a television series purely to the moment of its broadcast risks a limited understanding of the ongoing 'construction, evaluation and preservation' of that programme's cultural significance or potential 'historical worth.'³⁵ *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* have done well in syndication, with their connection to dates of commemoration guaranteeing annual repeats. The sale of *Band of Brothers* to the History Channel (which predominantly features documentaries) in 2003 further enhanced its status as an historically significant account of World War II; and *The Pacific* was aired in the U.K. in 2010 on BskyB, a channel normally reserved exclusively for film, which speaks to the series' high production values. However, in this section I want to focus particularly on the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of the two series. Like the pre-broadcast material surrounding *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*, the box sets locate them within a network of texts through which viewers are invited to interpret their content and assess their status. The process of maintaining the connections between the two series and the memorialisation of World War II begins even before the box sets have been opened or the discs viewed.
- 16 The release dates of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* can be considered as further examples of 'intangible' paratexts. First released early in November 2002 in both the U.S. and U.K. markets, the box set of *Band of Brothers* was packaged as a 'Commemorative Gift Set' to coincide with Remembrance Day (U.K.) or Veterans' Day (as it is referred to in the U.S.) on 11th November. All subsequent releases of *Band of Brothers* (and also of *The Pacific*) in the sell-through market have been timed for release on or near this date. The DVD and Blu-Ray sets of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are thus positioned as mementos of larger processes of memorialization after their inscription into commemorative events through the series' premiers. The commercial success of the two series, particularly *Band of Brothers*, is directly attributable to their connection to memorialization according to Hanks, 'because people keep buying [the box sets] every Veterans' Day, every Christmas, every D-Day.'³⁶ The release of the box sets in November not only allows HBO to take advantage of the free publicity generated by the groundswell of remembrance that occurs around Veterans' Day, but also marks the series as representative of the cultural heritage associated with the memorialisation of World War II.
- 17 The packaging of the box sets in turn works as a paratext that informs the consumer of their cultural value as mnemonic objects. Special limited editions of the sets in both DVD and Blu-Ray formats (the *Band of Brothers* version was released in November 2007, *The Pacific*'s in November 2010) take the form of burnished tin boxes, replicating the look and feel of objects that might be manufactured for military purposes. But whether available in the limited edition or in the more regular packaging, the sets reconfigure scenes from the series to resemble faded photographs from World War II, recalling and repurposing the monochromatic, grainy images of war photographers such as Frank Capra, and locating the series within the same iconic lexicon. As Jonathan Gray notes, it is of course standard practice for the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of television series, which are usually more expensive than those of films, to be aestheticized in ways that

make them attractive as collectibles, but the packaging of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* additionally encodes them as historical artefacts. This encoding gives the series a cultural significance that distinguishes them from others that might be purely fictional, and their status as mementos of commemorative events infuses them with an emotional gravitas that separates them from documentaries.³⁷

- 18 The 'extra features' available on the box sets themselves constitute a network of texts that not only surrounds, but also penetrates the series. Now a standard feature of most DVD or Blu-Ray box sets, such 'bonus' material is usually considered in terms of industrial synergy as a means to extend promotional strategies beyond the broadcast date of a television series or the release date of a film.³⁸ There is no denying that the extra features available on the *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* box sets perform a promotional function, but they also promise to promote a 'deeper historical understanding' of the events around which the series are structured, as the menu for *The Pacific* Blu-Ray Extra Feature disc asserts. As such, they contribute to the understanding and evaluation of the two series, and can provide insight into the relationship between *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* and television, history, and documentary.
- 19 To begin with, the 'Making of' documentaries for the two series, 'Making of *Band of Brothers*' (HBO, 2001) and 'Making *The Pacific*' (HBO, 2010), extend HBO's pre-broadcast strategies by repeated references to the size and scale of the 'epic' productions. However, they also continue to connect the two series with memorialisation. The concentration camp set for "Why We Fight" (*Band of Brothers*, 9:10), is described by director David Frankel in the 'Making of' as a 'monument to people who died in camps rather than a movie set', and actor Richard Speight (who plays Sgt. Warren 'Skip' Muck) urges those who watch the series to commit to memory the actions of the men of Easy Company. Similarly, in 'Making *The Pacific*', actor John Seda (Basilone), remarks that the series is more significant than 'just making a movie' because it is about 'honouring' the veterans 'the way they should be honoured'. Such observations identify the two series as 'monumental' in the true sense of the word as structures (or indeed, *lieux de mémoire*) or artefacts that serve as reminders of the past. As a consequence, the act of watching them is consecrated with the same sense of veneration that accompanies public rituals of commemoration. The *Band of Brothers* box set contains a segment on the series premier in Normandy, which includes interviews not only with the veterans and filmmakers, but also with Susan Eisenhower, Winston S. Churchill, and Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, who all endorse the series as 'powerful' television and ensure the status of the series as a commemorative object. Evidence of how the box sets have indeed become adopted within individual practices of commemoration can be found online, where viewers attest to watching them annually as part of private rituals on Veterans' Day and other days of remembrance.³⁹
- 20 However, the 'Making of' features do more than simply invite viewers to consider the two series as memorials to World War II. They also legitimize the production process itself as a means of generating historical knowledge. In a familiar trope within the promotional surround of many war films, the 'Making of' documentaries equate the production process with waging war.⁴⁰ 'We became soldiers', asserts actor Ross McCall (Joe Liebgott in *Band of Brothers*), while Dale Dye, military advisor for both series, notes in 'Making *The Pacific*', 'we never say the word movie, we never say the word "actor". We refer to the "mission."' Research combines with the production process to enable

the cast and crew of both series to 'get at the truth' and tell the story 'the way it was', in the words of Tony To and Gary Goetzman, two of *The Pacific*'s producers ('Making *The Pacific*'). As a result, the 'Making of' segments invite the viewer to consider *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* not as dramatic reconstructions of historical events, but as if the cast and crew 'were actually back in the 1940s [. . .] actually shooting stuff for real,' as Ken Daly, Visual Effects Supervisor suggests in 'The Making of *Band of Brothers*'. These kinds of exaggerated statements are not unusual in the promotional material of war films and the degree to which viewers accept them is, of course, open to debate. What is at stake here, however, is how they re-negotiate the always uncertain boundaries between fictional and factual representations of the past, and in the case of these two series, shift them out of dramatic recreation and into the realm of 'stuff' shot 'for real' – into the realm, in other words, of war documentary.

- 21 The idea that *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are not creative interpretations of memories of World War II, but somehow offer direct access to the past is further enhanced by features available only in the Blu-Ray format of both series – the 'Timeline' in *Band of Brothers* and the 'Enhanced Viewing' feature in *The Pacific*. Both are interactive features that allow the viewer to 'click' on icons supplying maps, information on various battles, details on the capabilities and uses of various weapons and vehicles, and information regarding the individual soldiers in the series. A 'picture-in-picture' feature in the form of a pop-out window allows for ongoing commentary from veterans and historians as well as archive footage to run alongside events in the series. Documentary filmmaker Leslie Woodhead once expressed the wish for a 'kind of "television footnotes"' to signpost the differences between imaginative reconstructions of material and concrete historical sources.⁴¹ It could be suggested that these features have some of the functions of footnotes, as they allow for the insertion of concrete historical information into the series themselves. However, the penetration of the series by historical material in the case of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* does not so much signpost the differences between the series and historical accounts of World War II as smooth over them. The structural composition of the 'picture-in-picture' and timeline features foregrounds the commentary, while the series run in the background, creating the peculiar sense that the series form the bedrock upon which historical narratives of the past are constructed, *and not the other way around*. The Timeline and Enhanced Viewing features thus situate *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as metadocumentaries by implying that the two series provide the values and perspectives through which World War II should be understood.
- 22 The paratextual network generated by and through the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* not only extends the pre-broadcast marketing of the series, but also combines with those paratexts to form an intricate array of material that infuses the two series with a sense of historical and cultural value. Central to the discourse evident throughout the paratextual array is the idea of the series not as 'semi-documentaries' or 'docudramas', but as metadocumentaries capable of not only defining and organising the experiences and memories of World War II into authoritative narratives, but also able to offer direct access to the past. By situating *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* as definitive, officially endorsed versions of the past, the paratextual network that surrounds them effectively fills in the spaces between dramatic recreation and documentary, creating a closed version of the past that shuts out the possibility of that sense of 'partial knowledge and suspended closure, the sense

of incompleteness and the need for retrospection' that Bill Nichols identifies as essential to an understanding of history.⁴²

- 23 *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are elegiac paeans to the American soldiers who fought in World War II. They possess what Peter Rollins calls a 'dangerous beauty' identifiable within the 'drama of commemoration' that diverts attention from the causes of war and the complexities of soldiers' relationship to combat.⁴³ The series offer compelling narrative structures, explore moments of physical and emotional extremes through hypermediated representations of combat, and interlink the individual memories of soldiers to broader conceptualisations of cultural heritage. But in doing so, they encourage their own kind of forgetfulness for the members of the 'Greatest Generation' excluded from the 'brotherhood' of soldiers: the members of other races and nations who fought in the war, the women who did the same, and most importantly, the civilians who ultimately bore the brunt of the war's impact.
- 24 Despite all claims to the contrary, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are products of television. As such, they are part of 'televisual rituals of historical exhibitionism' used by networks such as HBO to legitimate their status as purveyors of meaningful, distinctive, and valuable cultural commodities.⁴⁴ The extravagant budgets allocated to marketing the two series indicates their significance to HBO, but HBO's strategies of promotion and representation also produce an array of texts that intertwine with the series themselves and realign their relationship to history and memory. The carefully crafted links between the series and international memorials function as intangible paratexts that powerfully affirm the 'drama of commemoration' as presented through the narratives of the two series as official history. Moreover, the attendance of veterans, historians, politicians, and dignitaries at the premiers of the two series not only endorses HBO's brand, but also implies a belief in the ability of television in general to produce 'big, important and powerful' cultural texts. While the two series reflect and reconfigure the cultural values and assumptions connected with the notion of World War II as America's 'Good War', pervasive claims in the series' paratext—such as articles, interviews with the filmmakers, and the official websites that allow viewers to witness the past from 'under the helmet' of the soldiers who experienced it—downplay the ideological implications inherent in such a perspective. The idea that the two series offer direct access to the past is further enhanced by the numerous texts and intertexts of the DVD and Blu-Ray box sets. Some extra features knit history and memory into the fabric of the series themselves by integrating reminiscences from the veterans and commentary from historians with moments from each episode. Others equate the production process with waging war, and suggest that erasing temporal distance is simply a question of combining research with costly and innovative techniques of filmmaking and emotive performances.
- 25 The commercial success of *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* in the Blu-Ray and DVD markets, according to Tom Hanks, illustrates that 'great television can be something that lives on people's library shelves, much like classic literature.'⁴⁵ Whether or not the two series can be equated with 'classic literature,' Hanks' comment reveals a changing perception of the role and purpose of television. Framed by their paratextual network as both 'must-see' and 'must-have' television, *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* establish a claim to being memorable and iconic in their own right. Understanding the two series purely as docudramas consequently limits the understanding of their ongoing significance in the intertextual network that makes up the history of World War II.

Alternatively, approaching the series as *lieux de mémoire* situated within an intricate network of paratexts that emphasise their importance as definitive histories helps to shed light on the processes by which television, a medium usually associated with a relentless focus on the present, generates cultural products that assume the mantle of authoritative and persuasive accounts of the past.

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'The Making of *Band of Brothers*.' Writer/Producer, Joan Finn, 2001.

'Premiere at Normandy.' (Entertainment News, 2001)

Band of Brothers Blu-Ray Box Set, HBO, Warner Home Video, 2008

The Pacific (HBO, DreamWorks SKG, DreamWorks Television, Playtone, 2010):

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NOTES

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2. Sara Wayland, "Steven Spielberg Interview HBO's *The Pacific*," *Collider*, February 4, 2010, accessed October 13, 2011, <http://collider.com/steven-spielberg-interview-hbo-the-pacific/15813/>.
3. Tom Hoffer and Richard Nelson, "Docudrama on American Television" in *Why Docudrama? Fact-fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 64.
4. Hoffer and Nelson, "Docudrama on American Television," 64.
5. Spielberg uses HBO's flagship series *The Sopranos* as an example of 'mainstream TV', suggesting that *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific* are distinctive even within HBO's production of 'quality' television. David Gritten, "In Good Company," *Radio Times*, (September 29 – October 5, 2001): 46.
6. Stephen Armstrong, "*The Pacific*," *Radio Times*, (April 3-9, 2010): 26.
7. "Interview with Steven Spielberg", *TV NZ*, no posting date, accessed October 8, 2011, <http://tvnz.co.nz/the-pacific/interview-steven-spielberg-3403539>.
8. A great deal has been written on the creation of HBO's brand identity as a purveyor of programmes that are different from mainstream television. For comprehensive collections, see Gary Edgerton and Jeffrey Jones, eds, *The Essential HBO Reader* (Kentucky: The University Press of

- Kentucky, 2008) and Marc Leverett, Brian Ott and Cara Louise Buckley, eds. *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).
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 11. Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 6.
 12. Greer in "Making *The Pacific*" (HBO, 2010).
 13. Thomas Schatz, "Band of Brothers" in Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones, eds, *The Essential HBO Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 133.
 14. Stephen Armstrong, "The Mother of all Wars," *The Sunday Times: Culture*, March 14, 2010, 4-5.
 15. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Vol: Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-98), 3.
 16. Geoff King, "Seriously Spectacular," in *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader*, ed. David Slocum, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 292.
 17. A very similar moment occurs in *Saving Private Ryan*'s landing sequence.
 18. The analysis of this scene is taken from a conference paper, "Spectacle in the First Person Shooter – 'Something to See'", Debra Ramsay, Film and Media Conference, University of London, June, 1013.
 19. James F. Dunnegan, *How to Make War: A Comprehensive Guide to Modern Warfare* (New York: Quill, 1983), 215, quoted in Frank J. Wetta, and Stephen J. Curley, eds, *Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 44.
 20. While exact figures are difficult to obtain, civilians are believed to account for over half the mortality rates of World War II. Marianna Torgovnick, *The War Complex: World War II in our Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 41.
 21. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 15.
 22. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 14.
 23. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 14.
 24. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 19.
 25. John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 162.
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 27. Allison Romano, "On HBO, war is hype," *Broadcasting and Cable*, 131, No. 34 (August 13, 2001): 18, accessed May 7, 2013, http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/91190-On_HBO_war_is_hype.php.
 28. Kessler, in Romano, "On HBO, war is hype".
 29. Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe" in Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in the Media*, (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 272.
 30. For a representative article on *Band of Brothers*, see "D-Day Unveiling for War Epic", *BBC news, Entertainment, TV and Radio*, June 7, 2001, accessed May7, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1373148.stm> and Armstrong, "The Mother of all Wars," for an example on *The Pacific*.
 31. Hanks in Armstrong, "The Mother of All Wars," 5.

32. The original *Band of Brothers* website, constructed by AOL, is no longer available, but the website for *The Pacific*, established by hbo.com, can still be accessed on <http://www.hbo.com/the-pacific/index.html>
33. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 120.
34. Veteran Herbert Suerth in "Premiere in Normandy" (Entertainment News, 2001)
35. Debra Ramsay, "Flagging up History: The Past as a DVD Bonus Feature" in *A Companion to the Historical Film*, eds. Robert Rosenstone & Constantin Parvulescu. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 69.
36. Tom Hanks in "Tom Hanks Returns to *The Pacific*," Dave Itzkoff, *New York Times: Arts Beat*, June 3, 2010, accessed on 8 October, 2011, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/03/tom-hanks-returns-to-the-pacific/>
37. Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 107.
38. Caldwell, "Prefiguring DVD Bonus Tracks," in *Film and Television after DVD*, James Bennett and Tom Brown, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 161.
39. For example, a long-running thread on IMDb's message boards structured specifically around the subject of repeat viewings of *Band of Brothers* provides evidence of the incorporation of the series into private moments of memorialisation. One poster writes, 'we watch it once a year, sometimes on D-Day, or sometimes Veteran's day' (posted November 16, 2008). Another starts viewing the series 'ten days before Memorial Day, it makes the day even more meaningful' (posted May 14, 2009). *Band of Brothers*: Message Boards: 'Sign here if you watch BOB at least once a year.' Accessed on May 31, 2010, <http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0185906/board/thread/114317081?d=114317081&p=1#114317081>
This thread has since been archived, but others concerning repeat viewings persist.
40. I explore this trope as it relates to film in more detail in Ramsay, "Flagging up History", 66.
41. Leslie Woodhead, "*The Guardian* Lecture: Dramatized Documentary" in *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 109.
42. It is important to note that paratextual networks may also open up film or television to alternative interpretations and historical perspectives, as I argue in Ramsay, "Flagging up History".
Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 147.
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45. Will Lawrence, "Tom Hanks Interview on *The Pacific*," *The Telegraph*, 1 April, 2010, accessed on 8 October, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/7527926/Tom-Hanks-interview-on-The-Pacific.html>.

ABSTRACTS

World War II's long and enduring history on television is illustrated by the continued circulation of documentaries such as *The World at War* (Thames Television, 1973). While documentaries such as these can be considered a collection of memories, my interest in this article is to consider what happens when such a collection is positioned by televisual marketing strategies as more than either documentary or drama. I examine two 'docudramas' - *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010), co-productions of HBO, Playtone and DreamWorks SKG - and their paratextual networks. I expose the industrial interests underlying HBO's marketing strategies and move beyond the moment of broadcast to examine how the paratextual network generated via DVD and Blu-Ray posits the two series as authoritative histories. My goal is to demonstrate that the category of 'docudrama' may be inadequate for understanding how the series' paratextual network identifies and situates them within larger historical representations of World War II. Ultimately, I seek to answer the following question: how do paratextual networks of promotion and representation inflect our understanding of the relationship between television, history, and documentary?

INDEX

Keywords: World War II, HBO, docudrama, Band of Brothers, The Pacific, Steven Spielberg, Tom Hanks

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Debra Ramsay is an independent scholar who teaches part-time at Leicester University. This article is an adaptation of a chapter from her unpublished doctoral thesis, *Through a Glass, Darkly: American Media and the Memory of World War II* (Nottingham University, 2012). Ramsay has served on the editorial board of *Scope* and is an assistant and contributor to *Critical Studies in Television* (CST online). She has presented a number of papers at international conferences and has published articles on digital games and the memory of war, and on the impact of DVD on the historical film.