U.S. documentary
& the propaganda effort in WWII
U.S. 1941-1945

U.S. enters WWII after Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor – Hawaii
December 7, 1941

WWII brought English-language documentary together
  Great Britain  Canada  United States
Viewed one another’s documentaries
Exchanged materials – stock-shot library footage
  combat & captured enemy footage
Made compilation films & joint productions – “victory series”

Documentary & fiction filmmakers in these countries worked together

Four types of war films in the US
  training  - not documentaries
  indoctrination
  records of battle
  social documentaries
1. The Indoctrination film

U.S. Armed Forces called them “orientation” films

Key series  *Why We Fight*  produced by Frank Capra

Capra & collaborators  -  no prior documentary experience

The Capra unit – attached to the Office of War Information – made other large scale orientation films

*Know Your Ally*  –  Britain   1943

*Here is Germany*   1945

*Know Your Enemy*  –  Japan   1946
**Why We Fight series  1942-1945**

Assumption – soldiers would be more committed & fight better if the causes for WWII were understood

Goal – explain reasons for U.S. participation in the war

Point of View – historical treatise

  viewpoint of Roosevelt administration

    - New Deal Democratic

Structure  - seven films

  compilation of existing footage

    newsreels, Allied & captured records of battle

    U.S. fiction features, Nazi propaganda films

  edited as a fiction film

  voice-of-God narrator – guided commentary
Films in the series

*Prelude to War*  1942  
*The Nazis Strike*  1943  
*Divide and Conquer*  1943  
*The Battle of Britain*  1943  
*The Battle of Russia*  1943  
*The Battle of China*  1944  
*War Comes to America*  1945

Short features  - 50 minutes  
Shown to military personnel – obligatory viewing  
Later released theatrically
Design of the series

Challenge - How to give structure to vast & disparate materials

Strategies - dramatic form

- exposition, conflict, climax, denouement
- each film can be broken into acts
- visual & audio resources
  - film clips, dramatization, animated diagrams
  - still photos, drawings & maps, headlines,
  - printed titles
- soundtrack
  - narrator, quoted dialogue, music,
  - sound effects editing
- narrative & expressive purpose
2. Records of battle

Most made by Hollywood veterans - John Ford
  John Huston
  William Wyler

Ford - film unit attached to the Navy
  *The Battle of Midway*  1942  won Academy award
  *December 7  1943*  recreation of Pearl Harbor attack

Huston - *Report from the Aleutians*  1943
  *The Battle of San Pietro*  1945

Wyler - *Memphis Belle*  1944
  *Thunderbolt*  1945
Other combat films

Made collaboratively by film crews of army, navy & air force

Notable films about war in the Pacific

*The Battle for the Marianas*  1944

*To the Shores of Iwo Jima*  1945

*Fury in the Pacific*  1945

*The Fighting Lady*  1944
3. The social documentary

Made by Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, federal agency
Designed as public relations tools to increase economic &
political cooperation with Latin America

*The Bridge* 1944

*High Plain* 1943

*The Grain that Built a Hemisphere* 1943 - Disney studios

*Water – Friend or Enemy* 1944 - Disney

1942 Office of War Information
created to coordinate government information
liaison with Hollywood studios through its
Motion Picture Bureau
The Motion Picture Bureau

Divided in two sections

**Domestic Branch**
- made films for U.S. civilians

**Overseas Branch**
- for allies, neutral countries & those formerly occupied by Germany & Japan
- distinguished production record
- made by documentary veterans

*Autobiography of a Jeep* 1943
*Pacific Northwest* 1944
*Hymn of the Nations* 1944
The Case of *Let There Be Light* 1946

Directed by John Huston

Produced by the Army Pictorial Service
intended for civilian audiences
showed the mental & emotional casualties of war

Examined the rehabilitation of psychosomatically disabled soldiers

Released 40 years after it was made

Exposes the toll war takes on soldiers
Conclusions

By end of WWII – documentary had reached a pinnacle

Financial investment

Talent involved

Theatrical & non-theatrical releases
Documentaries about Hollywood & WWII


- *John Ford Goes to War* (2005) dir. Tom Thurman


- *Five Came Back* (2017) – 3-episode miniseries, dir. Laurent Bouzereau