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THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC

You know, that's the worst part about war. You meet somebody. You get to know them. Wham! You never see them again. You see something, but you never know how it ends. It would be nice to know right now how all this is going to end, wouldn't it?

—Bindle Jackson (Paul Fix) in *Back to Bataan*

We like the element of surprise.

—Yamato (Abner Biberman) in *Betrayal from the East*

HOLLYWOOD, LIKE THE REST OF AMERICA, was surprised by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The studios, as we have seen, had been preparing Americans to think about their potential involvement in the war in Europe in various ways; the narratives and rhetoric supporting this involvement had already become film conventions, easily recognized by audiences and presumably influencing or at least interacting with their ideas about Hitler, Germany, the European war, and America's part in it all. Japan, however, was a different story. Even though Japan had been waging a ruthless war against China since the summer of 1937, and even though U.S. diplomatic relations with Japan had been strained for some time due to competing interests in the Pacific, the Hollywood studios had not depicted the Japanese as a potential enemy—cruel invaders of a helpless China, yes, but not a threat to America. Indeed, the pathos of the Chinese seems to have been more the point than the cruelty of the Japanese. Two

films, *North of Shanghai* (1939), about newspaper reporters uncovering fifth columnists (strangely, all Anglo-Saxon) in Shanghai, and *International Settlement* (1938), about an American pilot mixed up in an arms-smuggling plot in Shanghai, talk about “fighting in the north” and depict attacks on Chinese cities, some by tanks with the Rising Sun on them, but they never name the Japanese as the attackers. So after December 1941, the studios, like the U.S. armed forces, had a great deal of ground to make up. They had to explain to the moviegoing public why Japan had attacked, why the United States had been unprepared, how it should respond, and, most important, why Japan had to be defeated, even at the cost of American soldiers dying to capture and hold Pacific islands whose names few people could even pronounce.

The first few months of the war in the Pacific were surprising, depressing, and confusing to the American public. The Japanese attacked an ill-prepared American fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, hoping to inflict enough damage so that the United States would be unable to interfere with their plans to seize the Philippines, Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Borneo, the Netherlands East Indies, and a number of islands in the central Pacific. At the time, the American losses were thought to be devastating: eight battleships and ten other ships sunk or damaged; 200 planes destroyed, mostly on the ground; 2,400 people killed and another 1,100 wounded.¹ Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese air force attacked Wake Island. The marines there beat back a December 12 invasion attempt but were finally overwhelmed by a reinforced Japanese fleet on December 23. In the early days of the Pacific war the British fared no better than the United States. By the end of December, Japanese forces had captured Hong Kong and were well on their way to capturing Malaya and Singapore, the East Indies (defended by British and Dutch troops), and Burma.

Amid the Japanese offensive, the story that the American public found most compelling—after the shock of Pearl Harbor had passed—was the doomed defense of the Philippines. The Japanese waited ten hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor before attacking the Philippines, time the American forces used poorly. Despite the warning, the initial Japanese air attacks caught and destroyed most of the U.S. air forces on the ground. Without air defense, army positions and facilities and navy ships were open to relentless air attack; the bulk of the navy was ordered to the defense of the Netherlands East Indies. Having established air and naval superiority and having successfully landed some troops on December 10, Japan launched its invasion of the Philippines on December 22 at Linguyen and Lamon

Bay. Earlier in the year, Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.S. and Philippine forces, had rejected a long-standing strategy for responding to an invasion of the Philippines: retreating to the Bataan peninsula, where supplies would be stockpiled, and holding the position until reinforcements could arrive from Hawaii. In an ill-advised move he substituted a plan to stop an invasion on the beaches. Although the combined U.S. and Filipino troops outnumbered the invading Japanese, they were undertrained, undersupplied, and unsupported from the air and sea. As a result, by December 24, MacArthur was forced to order a retreat to the Bataan peninsula, in effect returning to the original strategy, but without a stockpile of supplies.² The Allied forces were able to hold on far longer than the Japanese expected, but with Washington deciding against attempting a relief mission, the outcome was inevitable. On March 11, 1942, MacArthur was ordered to Australia to take up a new command. On April 9 Allied forces on Bataan surrendered; on May 6 Corregidor, the island fortress at the mouth of Manila Bay, followed suit. The remaining Allied forces in the Philippines, minus a few Americans and Filipinos who would fight as guerrillas for the duration of the occupation, surrendered by June 9. In the aftermath of the surrender on Bataan came the Bataan Death March: 78,000 U.S. and Filipino servicemen, many wounded, sick, and exhausted, were forced to march from Mariveles to San Fernando, some sixty-five miles; those who fell or couldn't keep up were beaten and killed by Japanese soldiers.

These combined events created the impression among the American people and even in the armed forces that the Japanese were unbeatable. However, a series of key events in 1942 would reverse this impression and the momentum of the Japanese offensive. On April 18, in a morale-boosting retaliation for Pearl Harbor, sixteen B-25 bombers commanded by Col. James Doolittle bombed Tokyo and several other Japanese cities. Between May 3 and May 8, Japanese and U.S. naval forces fought the Battle of the Coral Sea, the first naval engagement in which the opposing ships never sighted or fired on each other; attacks on each side's ships were carried out by planes. Although the results of the battle slightly favored the Japanese, for the first time since the war began, the United States was able to prevent the Japanese from accomplishing a main objective—the capture of Port Moresby in New Guinea. A month later, the Battle of Midway turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. The Japanese fleet, under the command of Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto—architect of the attack on Pearl Harbor—hoped that an attack on Midway Island would draw the American fleet into a

battle that it would certainly lose. That would pave the way for an attack on Hawaii and, presumably, a negotiated peace favorable to Japan. But Yamamoto made several mistakes: he split his naval force between Midway and an invasion of the Aleutian Islands, his information about the strength and position of the U.S. forces awaiting him was wrong, and he didn't know that the Americans had broken the Japanese codes and thus knew of his plans. The result was four Japanese aircraft carriers sunk, with the loss of only one American carrier. America's production of ships and planes increased throughout the war years, and Japan was never able to recover from the loss of these carriers, some 300 planes, and thousands of experienced pilots and sailors.³ After June 7, 1942, the Japanese were fighting a defensive war.

The American offensive began in August 1942. On August 17–18 Lt. Col. Evans Carlson led his Raider Battalion of marines, trained in the style of the Communist Chinese guerrillas, in an attack on Makin Island in the Gilbert Islands. This strike-and-withdraw action caused considerable damage to the Japanese forces there and, more important, provided a diversion for the landing of the marines on Guadalcanal. This bloody Guadalcanal campaign lasted from August 1942 until early February 1943 as the United States and Japan struggled on the island and on the sea. When the Japanese finally withdrew, each side had lost thousands of men and dozens of ships. Historian Gerhard L. Weinberg sums up the results of this first step in the island-hopping that would push the Japanese forces back toward their home:

The Americans learned here . . . that the Japanese were hard fighters but not invincible. When the odds were reasonable, and the leadership competent, the Allies could hold and defeat the seemingly invincible Imperial army and navy. But obviously only at great cost. It would be a very long and a very tough fight. As for the Japanese, they had seen that their basic strategy of defending the perimeter of their newly won empire was evidently not working the way they had planned. The assumption had been that the Americans would be unwilling to pay the price in blood and treasure to retake islands of which they had never heard, to be returned to allies for whose colonial empires they had only disdain. Here was proof that they would; and, in the face of this, the leaders in Tokyo displayed a bankruptcy of strategic thinking.⁴

Hollywood films combined with other pop-cultural media to create a mind-set that enabled Americans to accept their sons and husbands risking

their lives in these foreign places and thus do what was necessary to defeat Japan. Interestingly, once the United States entered the war, far more Hollywood films focused on historical events—actual places, battles, and campaigns—in the Pacific theater than in the European theater. This may be partly explained, as we suggested earlier, by the fact that the studios had already prepared the United States for war in Europe but hadn't touched on the Pacific as a possible place of conflict. But it goes further than that. Historical overviews like the one we narrated here—a series of events linked coherently by principles of cause and effect—are common knowledge today. But in 1942 Americans were smack in the middle of these events and naturally lacked the historical distance to appreciate their structure and sense. Moreover, in 1942 relatively little of this information was known to the general public. As we saw in the introduction, newspapers of the time offered general, big-picture reports of theaters and campaigns and more specific, up-close-and-personal reports on combatants in the field, but not the narrative links that would make a coherent story of it all. To complicate the narrative situation even more, although Americans knew about the attack on Pearl Harbor, the loss of Wake Island, and the fall of the Philippines, they weren't told all the details about these events; in fact, because of secrecy or the potential loss of morale or even military behind-covering, some information about these early defeats remained undisclosed until later in the war or well after it was over. For example, the story of the Bataan Death March, though known to the army and the federal government from reports of escaped prisoners, wasn't made public until January 1944.⁵ Even the details of U.S. victories were frequently kept from the American public.

An excellent example of this is the United States' first blow against the Japanese empire: the April 1942 Doolittle raid. The raid was part of President Roosevelt's plan to boost American morale by striking Japan directly. The problem was how to launch bombers toward their targets without bringing America's precious aircraft carriers within range of Japan's air force. The solution was to train pilots flying land-based B-25s to take off from the deck of a carrier. Once airborne, these long-range bombers would be able to fly to Japan, hit their targets, and fly on to safety with the Chinese forces in Chungking. Unfortunately, not everything worked out as planned. The sixteen B-25s had to take off some 400 miles farther away than expected because the carrier *Hornet* and its escort were spotted by Japanese picket boats well within the Japanese defensive perimeter. Thus, instead of attacking at night, Doolittle and his men arrived at their targets

around noon. Luckily, a general feeling of disbelief kept Japanese antiaircraft batteries from responding in a timely or efficient way, and the bombers hit targets in Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, Osaka, and Nagoya. A more significant problem was that the bombers no longer had enough fuel to reach their Chinese landing fields; in addition, bad weather over the Chinese coast complicated navigation in what would now have to be a nighttime landing. With the exception of one plane that diverted from its course and touched down safely in the Soviet Union, Doolittle's B-25s were all lost in crash landings, many behind the Japanese lines in China.

However, little of this was immediately known on the home front. In the United States the news about the raid was at first confusing and incomplete. Army officials didn't hear from Doolittle immediately after the raid and feared total failure, so they kept silent: After all, how could the loss of sixteen planes and eighty men boost morale? When news of the raid broke, it was from an unlikely source: Radio Tokyo. On the day after the raid, the *New York Times* and other newspapers picked up a Japanese report of the bombing, which claimed that only schools and hospitals had been hit and that nine planes had been shot down. In subsequent days reports from a Swiss news agency and from the Soviet Union confirmed that American planes had bombed several Japanese cities. The U.S. government and the army, however, refused to confirm or deny the reports. Moreover, there was some attempt to shift the blame; one Pentagon spokesman suggested that "such an attack could have been made without direct orders from Washington. Even if plans for a raid on the Japanese capital had been worked out with the assistance or at the instigation of Washington strategists, the fact that the raid was undertaken at a specific time would be the concern chiefly of the army and navy officials entrusted with the task of carrying it out."⁶ Meanwhile, the U.S. press was hungry for details of the operation. At an April 21 press conference, when pressed for information about where the bombers had come from, President Roosevelt responded, "Shangri-la."

When Doolittle finally got in touch with Washington, and when his men were accounted for as they made their way to Chungking, it became clear that the raid had been successful, and more information was given to the public. However, for several reasons, many of the details of the raid still couldn't be revealed. Secrecy afforded some protection. It was assumed, correctly, that the Japanese would try to wreak revenge on the participants: the raiders who were now Japanese prisoners, the *Hornet* and its crew, and the Chinese who had assisted the raiders. Also, the army didn't

want the Japanese to know that fifteen bombers had been lost. Finally, it was hoped that the Japanese, not knowing how the raid had been accomplished, would be expecting and preparing for more American bombers. The army didn't release the details of the raid until a full year after the event; on April 19, 1943, the *New York Times* printed an interview with Doolittle and several of the raiders still serving with him in North Africa in which it was revealed for the first time that the bombers had taken off from an aircraft carrier.⁷ The next day the War Department released its official report on the raid.

How could this morale-boosting event serve its purpose if the general public couldn't be told very much about it? How could our defeats be turned into rallying cries if the extent of our losses had to remain secret? The answer, we think, is in Hollywood's focus on the historical events of the early months of the war in the Pacific. By presenting these historical events in fictional form, the studios were, in effect, taking the public record and filling in the gaps, making fully developed narratives out of the newspapers' skeletal outlines. Taken together, these films defined the war in the Pacific and explained why these far-flung places with peculiar names were important to the United States.

These films about the war in the Pacific, then, can be seen as serving two purposes: first, to fill in the narrative gaps in the news reports and turn them into complete, coherent narratives; and second, to invest the places in the Pacific theater with value, making them something that Americans should fight for—making them, in effect, part of America. Because of the need to serve these two purposes, films set in the Pacific more frequently connect themselves, at least peripherally, to actual events than do films set in Europe. Along with other films discussed in detail later in this chapter, the following films give a sense of the ubiquity of this narrative strategy. Both *Submarine Raider* (1942) and the serial *Adventures of Smilin' Jack* (1943) present American military personnel who find out about the impending attack on Pearl Harbor but are unable to get a warning back in time. Many films were inspired by the battle for the Philippines. In *Remember Pearl Harbor!* (1942) three army pals fight fifth columnists just before and after the Japanese attack on the Philippines. In *Manila Calling* (1942) a band of American and Filipino guerrillas defends a plantation-house stronghold while struggling to repair a generator to power their anti-Japanese radio broadcasts. In the climactic broadcast, as Japanese bombs explode around him, Lucky Matthews (Lloyd Nolan) links the

Philippine and American people and their cause and offers this construction of the loss of the islands: "The blood of Americans and Filipinos flowed together on the battlegrounds of Bataan and Corregidor. America can never forget that, and her people have sworn to avenge and change what happened here. . . . Filipinos and Americans, we didn't surrender. We just ran out of soldiers, because the soldiers ran out of blood, but we're still in this fight." At the end of *Somewhere I'll Find You* (1942) reporter Clark Gable (in his last film before entering the army air forces) dictates a story about a small group of U.S. and Philippine forces that defeats a Japanese landing party. He too links the Philippine and American forces: "Brown men and white men fought and died together. When they bled, their blood was the same color." In *Salute to the Marines* (1943) retired marine sergeant Wallace Beery leads a group of American and Filipino civilians to safety and organizes some men to try to hold up the Japanese advance. *Bataan* (1943), which we discuss in chapter 3, focuses on a ragtag group of American military men who sacrifice themselves to defend a ravine crossing on the Bataan peninsula. *Corregidor* (1943), an especially weak film, features a love triangle among civilian doctors and nurses on the titular island fortress. In *Cry "Havoc"* (1943) American army nurses are joined by American, British, and Filipino women who volunteer to care for troops on Bataan; at the end of the film their bunker is overwhelmed, and they are captured.

Other Pacific areas of operation also provided inspiration for Hollywood films. *The Sullivans* (a.k.a. *The Fighting Sullivans*; 1944) is based on the true story of five brothers who died together when their ship was sunk in the fighting off Guadalcanal. *Pride of the Marines* (1945), also based on a true story, features a horrific banzai charge against American lines on Guadalcanal, during which hero John Garfield is blinded. *The Story of Dr. Wassell* (1944) is based on the true story of a doctor on Java who helped several wounded sailors, left behind in the general evacuation, escape the Japanese. *The Fighting Seabees* (1944) is loosely based on actual events in the Pacific; when civilian construction workers were attacked by Japanese troops, the solution was the creation of naval construction battalions—the Seabees of the title. *Objective, Burma!* (1945) follows a squad of American paratroopers caught behind enemy lines; their rescue coincides with a general American offensive that drives the Japanese out of Burma. This film was reportedly booed in London theaters because it downplays the British contribution to the Burma campaign, illustrating our contention

that wartime viewers on some level recognized Hollywood films as providing a narrative history of the war.⁸

Even films that were not specifically about actual events and places in the Pacific theater frequently anchored themselves to allusions to historic events. Many of these quickly became familiar, if not clichéd, tropes: references to the date December 6, or shots of a calendar revealing that date; references to, newspaper headlines about, or newsreel footage of the special Japanese envoy going to Washington on a peace mission just before the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor; President Roosevelt's speech to Congress on December 8; the announcement of General MacArthur's evacuation from the Philippines and his "I shall return" promise.

The cumulative effect of these films' focus on the first year of the war in the Pacific is to create a sort of mythic history that stands in for the unavailable real history. In doing this, the films work together, using common or similar themes, character types, and narrative conventions, to define the war in the Pacific as a war against the United States, to make connections between the island and mainland battlefields of the Pacific and the United States, and to project their endings into the future to offer a speculative but victorious outcome of the war's narrative—a narrative that is, for the original moviegoers, still in progress.⁹ *Air Force*, a Warner Bros. release, is a good place to begin because of its ambitious depiction of the key events of the first six months of the war. By linking in a single narrative the separate stories of these early months, *Air Force* manages to create an overarching sense of the war as a whole and to present specific characters as they grow into the kind of Americans who will be able to win the war.

Directed by Howard Hawks from a screenplay by Dudley Nichols (with assistance from an uncredited William Faulkner) and released on March 20, 1943, *Air Force* tells the story of a single B-17 Flying Fortress, the *Mary Ann*, and its crew as they travel from the U.S. mainland to Pearl Harbor, arriving at the height of the Japanese attack,¹⁰ then on to Wake Island, Clark Field in the Philippines, the Battle of the Coral Sea, and an Australian beach. This Cook's tour is interesting for its presentation of the history of these places and events and for the effect they have on the crew.

Significantly, the film begins in San Francisco as the crews of the *Mary Ann* and several other B-17 prepare for the flight to Hawaii. This allows the film to present mainland America, the America most viewers are familiar with, and then connect it via the animated maps that mark the *Mary Ann*'s

journey to the remote places where the actual fighting is taking place. In fact, this entire film is about making the connections—geographic, narrative, familial, emotional—that draw the Pacific battlefields into the world of the American viewer. In San Francisco, just before the *Mary Ann* takes off, crewmen say good-bye to sweethearts, wives, and mothers; the viewers, because we know what they are flying into and recognize the irony of their assurances of a quick return, feel the sorrow of this leave-taking. But this sad farewell is almost immediately countered, once the plane takes off and then throughout the film, by the presentation of the army air forces as a metaphorical family. Navigator Lieutenant Munchausen (Charles Drake) is the son of a World War I aviator who served with the *Mary Ann*'s crew chief, Sgt. Robby White (Harry Carey), whose own son is now a pilot stationed at Clark Field in the Philippines. Disgruntled Sgt. Joe Winocki (John Garfield) was washed out of pilot training several years previously by the *Mary Ann*'s captain, Mike Quincannon (John Ridgely). Copilot Bill Williams (Gig Young) is dating the sister of crewmate Tommy McMartin (Arthur Kennedy). At each stop on their journey they meet officers they have served under, pilots and crewmen they have served with, friends, and relatives.

The effect of all these connections is twofold. First, it creates the impression of the army air forces as an extended family or close-knit club where everyone knows everyone else; where rivalries, grudges, and black sheep exist but are mitigated by an ever-present foundational love; and where everyone shares a sense of tradition, common ancestors, and a heritage to be bequeathed. Second, these familial connections create an emotional net of sorts, bringing the characters and, more important, the places they visit into the viewers' world. In other words, these connections help the viewers understand these far-off, foreign places as part of America.

This understanding results from a series of emotional moments, each threatening to disrupt the sense of family the film has created and each associated with one of the geographic spots from the early months of the war. At Pearl Harbor Williams and McMartin learn that McMartin's sister, Susan (Faye Emerson), was seriously wounded in the attack. At Wake Island the marines stoically wait for the end they know is coming. They have no concerns for themselves, but they plead with the *Mary Ann*'s Corporal Weinberg (George Tobias) to save the dog they have adopted. "Just give him to the marines in Manila," one says, suggesting another extended family, and for the rest of the film the dog serves as an emotional reminder of the marines' sacrifice. At Clark Field the crew learns that White's son



Air Force: The crew of the *Mary Ann* (John Garfield, Harry Carey, George Tobias, and Robert Wood) rescue the marines' dog from Wake Island.

was killed in the initial attack, never even getting his plane off the ground. Later, Quincannon is wounded in the *Mary Ann*'s first combat action and then dies at the base hospital, his crew around him. The cumulative effect of all these emotional moments in which the metaphorical or literal family is threatened or disrupted is to demonstrate the stake Americans have in the Pacific, in effect, extending the U.S. border from California across the Pacific, all the way to the Philippines.

This sense of the disrupted family is augmented by the film's presentation of the Japanese attacks, especially in Hawaii. Interestingly, *Air Force* is one of the few films to represent the attack on Pearl Harbor visually. In an already noted war-film convention, viewers are ominously clued in to the imminence of the attack—here, after the B-17s take off, we are shown an innocuous log entry for December 6. As the B-17s approach Hawaii, they hear Japanese voices and the sound of gunfire over their radios. When they call Hickam Field for instructions, we see a brief shot of the control tower, planes buzzing by and explosions in the background. The planes are ordered to emergency landing fields elsewhere on the islands, and later,

when the *Mary Ann* flies back to Hickam, a shot from above shows the damage to the fleet at Pearl Harbor. Quincannon tells the somber crew, it's "something you'll want to remember." The shot recalls an earlier one when Quincannon tells the crew to take a look at San Francisco as they take off; we see the city, complete with Golden Gate Bridge, from above. The juxtaposition again connects the West Coast with Hawaii.

These connections are augmented by the film's repeated insistence that the Japanese attack was aided by Japanese living in Hawaii. While the *Mary Ann* is down at an emergency landing field on Maui, the crew is threatened by local Japanese snipers. At Hickam Field they're told that when the attack began, vegetable trucks driven by Japanese raced through the field smashing the tails off planes. Fighter pilot Tex Rader (James Brown), who was out with Susan McMartin when the attack began, tells McMartin and Williams that his route to the field was blocked by a truck driven by Japanese.¹¹ We know now that there is no historical evidence of this kind of sabotage, but for the purposes of this film, these stories of treachery and betrayal contrast sharply with the familial loyalty and support that have been established. As enemies, the Japanese threaten to disrupt family connections, and they do so by means that are antithetical to the concept and practice of family.

In addition to geographic, familial, and emotional connections, the film creates narrative connections, linking the different events of the early months of the war by means of the story of the *Mary Ann* and its crew. The improbability of the same plane and crew being involved in all these events is lessened and the sense of coherent narrative is increased by the film's obvious conflation of historical chronology. The *Mary Ann* leaves Hickam Field for the Philippines with a refueling stop at Wake Island on the morning of December 8, yet they arrive at Wake apparently after the December 12 attack by the Japanese and with the final December 23 attack imminent. They arrive at Clark Field in the aftermath of the December 8 attack there, but two days later, Bataan is falling (April 9) and the *Mary Ann* just barely makes it out. Flying away from the Philippines, the crew spots a Japanese fleet heading for Australia, reports it, and leads a devastating attack on it. But the Battle of the Coral Sea, the apparent model for this engagement, didn't occur until the first week of May. By condensing the historical chronology, the film takes scattered events and makes a coherent narrative based in a Japanese-strike and U.S.-response structure.

This narrative coherence is also important in showing how the crew members mature, turning into men who know why and how they must

fight the Japanese. In a variation on the extended-family metaphor, the film uses sports references, especially to baseball and football, to help establish the notion of the B-17 crew and the entire army air forces as a team. Individuality has to be suppressed so that every member of the team can perform his job and the team can win. Sergeant White—who is never seen without his Chicago Cubs baseball cap—tells one young crew member to “stay in the box, son, and keep right on pitching”; after restraining Winocki from going after Japanese snipers, White says, “Why, they’d have cut you down before you got to first base.” An officer at Hickam Field (Willard Robertson) says of the Japanese, “They took the first round, but there’ll be others.” Rader tells Williams and McMartin that during the attack Susan was “yelling and rooting like she was at a football game.” While repairing an engine, Sergeant White predicts, “We’ll have her hitting home runs in ninety minutes flat,” and the commander of Wake Island (James Flavin), in something of a mixed metaphor, tells Quincannon, “We’ll be in here pitching till they strike us out.” In trying to reach the bitter Winocki, Quincannon discounts the rank- and function-based hierarchy of the bomber and stresses its teamlike interdependence: “We all belong to this airplane. Every man has got to rely on every other man to do the right thing at the right time. You played football, Winocki, you know how one man can gum up the whole works. You got to play ball with us and play the game, or I’m going to have to get rid of you.” He had suggested the same idea back in San Francisco, when the mother of one of the younger crewmen asks Quincannon to look after her boy. He replies, “In a way he’ll be looking after me. That’s the way the crew of a bomber functions.”

This concept of interdependence is further developed in the running argument between the *Mary Ann*’s officers and Rader, the fighter pilot, over which type of plane is better. Rader sums up his argument by saying, “I don’t want to be responsible for eight or ten other guys or depending on them either.” In the subsequent action, however, Rader learns the value of being part of a team. In the escape from Bataan Rader becomes the *Mary Ann*’s pilot, and after the success of the attack on the Japanese invasion fleet he says of the plane, “I’ll take her for mine.” In the film’s final scene, projected into the future, Rader is a B-17 pilot.

This theme can also be seen in the stories of the two crew members, Munchauser and Winocki, who were unable to fulfill their dreams of becoming pilots. Munchauser, for vague reasons of ability, failed at pilot training and so became a navigator; though he tries to hide it, his disappointment at not following in his father’s footsteps is clear. Winocki washed out of

pilot school after a training accident in which the plane he was flying collided with another, causing it to crash and killing the other pilot. Winocki is bitter and feels that he was unfairly denied his chance to be a star; the chip on his shoulder is evident to everyone. But over the course of the *Mary Ann's* journey, both he and Munchauser have the chance to become heroes by playing their roles on the team. Pressure is put on Munchauser, the navigator, to direct the plane to tiny Wake Island, their refueling point. It is implied that if he can't find the island, the plane will run out of fuel and crash. All the crew members check in with Munchauser, trying to be casual as they ask how it's going, demonstrating their anxiety and their dependence on him. Of course, he gets the *Mary Ann* to Wake and learns that he can be a hero like his father, even if he isn't a pilot. Winocki, who is shaken out of his apathy by the Japanese attack, becomes a hero when he brings the crippled *Mary Ann* in for a crash landing at Clark Field, after its unsuccessful attempt to bomb a Japanese transport. He proves his worth as a pilot, saves the plane, and gives the doctors a chance to save Quincannon. But significantly, despite this moment of success as a pilot, Winocki returns without grumbling to his position as a gunner, and it is in this position that he contributes to the *Mary Ann's* survival. Learning a lesson from their first action, Winocki comes up with the idea of providing the rebuilt *Mary Ann* with a tail gun. He mans this gun and saves the plane from pursuing Zeros during the attack on the Japanese invasion force. Like Munchauser, he learns that his role on the team is important and offers, in its own way, the chance for heroism.

The *Mary Ann's* story ends when the plane is ditched on an Australian beach after the Battle of the Coral Sea, but the crew's story apparently goes on. The film provides an epilogue, projected into the future, in which dozens of B-17 pilots, copilots, navigators, and bombardiers—Rader, Williams, Munchauser, and McMartin prominent among them—are briefed on an imminent mission to bomb Japan. After the planes take off, a superimposed message reads, "This story has a conclusion but not an end—for its real end will be the victory for which Americans—on land, on sea and in the air—have fought, are fighting now, and will continue to fight until peace has been won." This is the film's way of completing the narrative connections it has tried to make. The film's focus, necessarily, has been on connecting the places where the Japanese defeated U.S. forces. Even with the presentation of the Battle of the Coral Sea as a U.S. victory, the overall impression is of the United States on the defensive. Thus, the epilogue serves as a way of showing how the narrative logic of what we've seen—

the types of men and what they've learned, the potential in everyone to serve heroically, the B-17 itself and the sophistication of American technology—points toward an inevitable victory, even if the film's characters and audience aren't experiencing it in the present.

Many of the films that focused on the early events of the war with Japan used strategies similar to the ones we've discussed to create a narrative of the war and to connect the viewers in the continental United States to the places, people, and events of the war in the Pacific. In the previously mentioned *Somewhere I'll Find You* Jonny Davis's (Clark Gable) climactic dictation of a story from the Philippines back to his New York newspaper offers the clearest example of projecting the end of the war, the end of the in-progress narrative of the war, into the future as a conclusion to the film:

Tomorrow morning the headlines will read "Bataan Falls." The headlines will be wrong though, because Bataan has not fallen. It stood for ninety-four days, and it still stands. The greatest delaying action of the war was fought in an area the size of a county. Three hundred thousand Japanese were tied in knots long enough for the U.S.A. to get its Sunday clothes off and go to work. . . . If a handful of Americans and Filipinos can do all that, living off rice and mule meat, fighting with bricks, bats, and bolos, then Bataan still stands. The Battle of Bataan was lost—by Japan.

In case the Japanese don't realize that, I have a message for them from the men dead and living of Bataan: "More to come." It's a newspaper term, and it means the story isn't finished, the punch line hasn't been written yet. Remember that, Tokyo. More to come.

Wake Island, released by Paramount on August 12, 1942, tells the story of the marines' gallant defense of a small island. Like *Air Force*, it creates geographic connections by showing maps marking the lines between the mainland United States, Hawaii, Midway, and Wake and by presenting the men about to leave for Wake saying good-bye to loved ones at Pearl Harbor. It also creates familial connections, as the men arriving on Wake meet men who served with them previously or with their fathers. In an interesting emotional strategy, the film shows the new commander of marines on Wake, Major Canton (Brian Donlevy), being given an inscribed cigarette case by his daughter before he leaves Hawaii. Each time he uses the case, we are reminded of his emotional attachment; he most frequently uses the cigarette case when he's seeking to make a connection of some kind with another person on the island—it becomes a gesture of goodwill and friendship,

an attempt to make the human connections fundamental to a community of men fighting to preserve not just their lives but also a way of life they value. When Canton has to tell Lieutenant Cameron (Macdonald Carey) that his wife was killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor, he offers his notion of a substitute family: "You're like me now: a man with a memory. But we're not alone. In this war, in any part of the world, wherever they've dropped a stick of bombs, they've made thousands like us—men without wives, without children, without a single thing they've ever loved or held dear. And for those men there's a job to do: to fight."

Wake Island also makes connections through allusions to historical events. Its written prologue invokes Valley Forge, Custer's Last Stand, and the Lost Battalion of World War I, all presented in popular American history as desperate stands that led to eventual victory. Similarly, when Canton tells his men to hold their fire as he draws the Japanese fleet closer, he quotes the order from the Battle of Bunker Hill: "Don't fire until you can see the whites of their eyes." Here, the Wake defenders are associated with another hopelessly outnumbered fighting force, the colonial army, that nevertheless was able to win. This connective strategy serves both to place the Pacific conflicts in the company of battles fought more directly in defense of the United States and to put the loss of the battle in the context of heroic sacrifices in wars that were eventually won.

Wake Island ends with Canton and construction crew chief Shad McCloskey (Albert Dekker), the last living Americans on the island, firing away at the Japanese from a machine gun nest.¹² The image fades before we can see the inevitable end, but, as in *Air Force*, the film assures us that the real ending is in the future. As the Wake Island scene is replaced by footage of marching marines, superimposed with a U.S. flag, a narrator tells us, "This is not the end. There are other leathernecks, other fighting Americans, 140 million of them, whose blood and sweat and fury will exact a just and terrible vengeance."

Whereas *Air Force* focuses on the way a crew of a Flying Fortress functions, *So Proudly We Hail!* (released by Paramount on June 22, 1943) focuses on a group of army nurses in the early days of the war. Like *Air Force* and *Wake Island*, it makes geographic connections. The nurses, led by Lt. Janet Davidson (Claudette Colbert), ship out from San Francisco just before December 7, 1941. The attack on Pearl Harbor occurs while they are at sea, and their convoy is attacked by Japanese submarines. They arrive at Manila after the initial attacks on the Philippines, join the troops making their stand on Bataan, and are nearly captured during the retreat

down the peninsula. They escape to Corregidor and are eventually evacuated just before the island falls. As in the other films, there are familial connections: army officers in the Philippines served with Janet's father; the senior nurse, Captain McGregor (Mary Servoss), is known affectionately as Ma; Janet marries John Summers (George Reeves), an officer she met after his transport was torpedoed and he was picked up by her ship. Here, too, familial relationships are disrupted by the enemy: nurse Olivia D'arcy's (Veronica Lake) fiancé is killed at Pearl Harbor; Ma's son is killed on Bataan; Janet breaks down after John fails to return from an attempt to bring medical supplies back to Corregidor.

Interestingly, though, the film also points an accusing finger at the movie audience back in the United States for breaking a familial relationship by abandoning the Americans in the Philippines. At one point, as we see shots of the nurses caring for soldiers in a jungle hospital, one of the nurses (Mary Treen), narrating in flashback, says, "We called ourselves the battling orphans of Bataan—no father, no mother, no Uncle Sam—as we wondered where the reinforcements were." Later, as the constant bombardment of Corregidor and the dwindling supplies threaten to break the nurses, Janet makes the most explicit articulation of the link between the locations in the Pacific and the U.S. mainland, again accusing the audience of not recognizing the connection: "It's our own fault. . . . Because we believed we were the world, that the United States of America was the whole world. Those outlandish places—Bataan, Corregidor, Mindanao—those aren't American names. No, they're just American graveyards. . . . We've become what they call a delaying action. That's what those 50,000 men over there were. They were merely saving time. I hope to God the people back home aren't losing it for us. Do you remember what the chaplain once told us? It's our present: we're giving them time." This accusation is mitigated at the end of the film when a doctor (John Litel) reads to the comatose Janet a last letter from John, which conjures an image of a future where the connections have been made: "This is not a people's war because civilians also get killed. It's the people's war because they have taken it over now, and they are going to win it and end it with a purpose—to live like men, with dignity and freedom. This is the good I've found. There's a small voice whispering around the earth, and the people are beginning to talk across their boundaries. This voice will grow in volume until it thunders all over the world. . . . It says: this is our war now, and this time it'll be our peace." This speech, combining elements of the barber's final speech in *The Great Dictator* with other films' projections

into a victorious future, awakens Janet and relieves the tension the film created in its depiction of the audience's betrayal of American forces in the Philippines.

Two other films, *Back to Bataan* and *They Were Expendable*, take similar approaches but focus exclusively on the Philippines. *Back to Bataan*, released by RKO on May 31, 1945, connects the main events of the fall of the Philippines—MacArthur being ordered to Australia, the surrender of Bataan and the Death March, the surrender of Corregidor—into a narrative but then goes beyond them to show the Filipino resistance to the Japanese occupation and the eventual liberation by U.S. forces. The film also uses an interesting thematic technique to connect the Philippines to the United States. At the beginning of the film, as Bataan is falling, a propaganda broadcast implores Filipinos not to fight America's war. Subsequently, the Philippine insurrection against U.S. colonization is frequently mentioned by American and Filipino characters. The U.S. Army's Colonel Madden (John Wayne) fought in the insurrection against the grandfather of Philippine scout Captain Bonifacio (Anthony Quinn). Considering that this fight for independence was against the United States, it seems potentially divisive for the film to repeatedly invoke it. But instead, the effect is to remind us that the Filipinos, like Americans, have a long history and tradition of fighting for liberty, and this similarity is more important than the fact that for the previous half century the fight was against U.S. colonizers. Moreover, as we saw in *Manila Calling* and *Somewhere I'll Find You*, this similarity is emphasized as conflicts are resolved and differences conflated to the point that Americans and Filipinos are practically interchangeable. The guerrilla band Madden leads is headquartered near Balintawak, the birthplace of Philippine freedom, as we're frequently reminded. Schoolchildren are shown discussing with enthusiasm the things America has given to the Philippines. When a school principal who refuses to haul down the American flag is hanged, we see his body draped by the flag he defended. Bonifacio at one point says to Madden—the all-American John Wayne—"You're a better Filipino than I am." And in preparation for the landings on Leyte, Bonifacio refuses to evacuate civilians to protect them from navy bombardment because it will reveal the locations to the Japanese. He says, "If it'll save American lives and help make the landings safe, our people will not evacuate." The effect of all this is to conflate Philippine and American history and, in effect, nationality.

Back to Bataan, because of its late release date, deals with the projected ending of the war differently from the other films we've discussed.

Back to Bataan was in production as the battle for the liberation of the Philippines was being fought, and it was released several months after the American victory there. Unlike the other films, which were released in 1942 and 1943, when the eventual outcome of the war was still uncertain, this film relates to its subject matter from a position of confident knowledge that the United States has indeed triumphed in that one part of the war and is on its way to total victory. So here the film begins with the recreation of the January 30, 1945, liberation of a prisoner of war (POW) camp at Cabanatuan.¹³ As a voice-over assures us that the film is based on “real facts,” we are shown actual POWs marching out of their captivity. This in itself isn’t unusual; almost every film we discuss in this chapter claims to be based on actual events and records. What’s unusual is the end of the film, where footage of the real POWs returns, but in a split-screen effect—the real POWs on the right and the characters from the film on the left. The result is to suggest another conflation, this time of the actual events of the war and the Hollywood history of the war.

Based on W. L. White’s best seller, *They Were Expendable* was directed by John Ford and released by MGM on November 23, 1945. This release date seems ill timed, as the Japanese had surrendered more than two months earlier. Even during production, while the war was still being fought, the U.S. victory must have seemed inevitable. So it’s striking how similar this film is to a film like *Air Force*, made relatively early on. Like *Air Force*, *They Were Expendable* is a technology film: the former explains the workings of a B-17; the latter the workings of the navy’s torpedo boats, more popularly called PT boats. Here again is a narratization of the early events of the war: the attack on Pearl Harbor, the initial attacks on the Philippines, the evacuation of MacArthur (we see PT boats ferry the general from Corregidor to Mindanao), the fall of Bataan. Here again are the familial connections, as the main characters encounter men they went to school with or served with. An aging boat mechanic (Russell Simpson) who is called Dad by everyone has lived in the Philippines since he arrived with American forces during the Spanish-American War—another link to past conflicts; Dad’s theme music is “Red River Valley,” connecting him to an idea of America’s frontier past. Here again, the need for the suppression of self in favor of the team is stressed. PT boat squadron commander Lt. John Brickley (Robert Montgomery) must constantly remind Lt. Rusty Ryan (John Wayne) that accomplishing their common goal is more important than being a star. There’s even a return to sports metaphors as the admiral (Charles Trowbridge) has to remind Brickley, “You and I are professionals. If the manager says sacrifice,

we lay down a bunt and let somebody else hit the home runs.” As Brickley and Ryan are flown out of the Philippines on one of the last planes to leave Bataan—they are needed in the States to train PT boat crews and plan strategy—the film superimposes the dramatic words “We Shall Return,” a projection toward a future victory that seems confusing, given that the audience knew that victory had already been achieved.

Why are all these filmic conventions at work in *They Were Expendable*, even though the late production and release date would have made them obsolete or at least unnecessary? Perhaps by this time, through sheer repetition, these devices had gone beyond the conventional to the epistemological. That is, rather than serving a conscious or articulated purpose in the film, they had become embedded in the consciousness of filmmakers and filmgoers alike, a part of the intellectual fabric by which the American mind made sense of and understood the war in the Pacific. This conclusion is supported by the way narrative devices from World War II films continue to crop up in postwar films about the war, even as recently as *Pearl Harbor* (2001), *U-571* (2000), and, despite its claims to realism, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); divorced from their original purposes, however, these devices seem clichéd and sappy. Even less successful were films about the Korean War and the Vietnam War that tried to apply conventions from World War II films to these later conflicts. We return to this idea in chapter 8.

The films we've looked at so far in this chapter all focused on the early defeats in the Pacific. Many other films dealt with the early victories, from the Doolittle raid to Midway to Makin Island and Guadalcanal, the series of events that turned the tide of war and pointed toward eventual victory. Some of the same implied narratives—the need to overcome differences and pull together, for example—are at work in these films, but many new ones are introduced as the emphasis moves from how the war began to the means by which the United States will win. The most important of these new narratives focus on the ordinary American—as opposed to the larger-than-life heroes of Bataan—and how he can rise to this occasion, a fine-tuning of the pulling-together theme to stress individuality within the team, and an attempt to restore confidence in American leadership.

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the Doolittle raid, America's first strike back at the Japanese. This adventure seems to have occupied a far larger place in the public imagination than one might have expected, given its modest results. As we suggested earlier, the many film treatments of the

Doolittle raid helped to imaginatively fill in the narrative gaps left, for various reasons, in the press accounts of the mission. Beyond this, the narrative of the raid also served as a frame to support a number of other narratives that were important for Americans' understanding of themselves, their leaders, and their technology as being able to defeat the Japanese.

One of the first film accounts of the Doolittle raid was the RKO film *Bombardier*, but it took a long time to reach the screen. The film had been in preproduction before Pearl Harbor, and after the war began, the project was delayed as the screenplay was rewritten and many of the principals were called to military service.¹⁴ It was finally released on May 13, 1943. The film follows a familiar wartime pattern used in *They Were Expendable* and in many of the technology films discussed in chapter 1. That is, a visionary promotes some new military technology, in this case, high-altitude bombing with the Norden bombsight; the visionary comes into conflict with pigheaded elements of the military establishment but finally proves the worth of the technology. In *Bombardier* the worth of high-altitude bombing is proved in a raid on Nagoya, obviously based on the Doolittle raid, but written and produced before many of the details of the raid were made public. The climactic sequence of the film is a stupendous night bombing of Nagoya, footage of which shows up in dozens of other World War II movies. An animated map shows us that the bombers are taking off from an unnamed "Island Base," clearly recalling Roosevelt's Shangri-la, and as the bombers approach Nagoya, the city is blacked out and searchlights slice through the night sky. The bombardiers are briefly stymied when they can't find their targets because the lead plane of Maj. Buck Oliver (Randolph Scott) has been shot down (bombardier Joe Connors [Robert Ryan] responsibly destroying his bombsight). Oliver, the pilot who most strongly opposed high-altitude bombing because it made the bombardiers more important than the pilots, manages to escape his Japanese captors and start a huge fire that illuminates the bombardiers' targets. As he shouts, "C'mon all you bombardiers!" the planes drop their bombs, blowing much of Nagoya and, unfortunately, Major Oliver to bits.

Although this sequence imaginatively fills in the gaps of the Doolittle raid, most of it turned out to be wrong: the Doolittle raiders didn't take off from an island; they didn't hit their target cities at night; and, most ironic from the point of view of the film's purpose, they dropped their bombs not from a high altitude but from 1,500 feet. In fact, the Norden bombsights had been removed from their B-25s.¹⁵ The narrative choices the screenwriter and director made served not history but the more immediate need

to explain elements of the war to the American public. By having Buck Oliver recognize the importance of high-altitude bombing and the bombardier, the film, like *Air Force*, incorporates a narrative about the privileging of teamwork (the crew of the bomber—the pilot, the bombardier, and the others—sharing responsibility) over the individual (the hotshot dive-bomber pilot working alone). With the success of the top-secret Norden bombsight, the film incorporates a narrative about the superiority of American know-how and technology; the bombsight signifies the American ingenuity and productivity that will eventually win the war. In the triumphant bombing of Nagoya, courtesy of the bomber crews and the Norden bombsights, the film incorporates a narrative about the accuracy and morality of American bombing techniques. The United States defended its use of high-altitude strategic bombing against charges of indiscriminate terrorism by claiming that the Norden bombsight made bombing so accurate (the bomb-in-the-pickle-barrel-at-20,000-feet theory) that only legitimate military, not civilian, targets were hit.¹⁶ *Bombardier* shows its version of the Doolittle raiders hitting only military targets with ease and accuracy; one bombardier asks his crewmates which factory smokestack he should drop his bombs down.

A second film representation, Warner Bros.' *Destination Tokyo*, released on December 31, 1943, is the story of a submarine and its contribution to the success of the Doolittle raid. The *Copperfin*, commanded by Captain Cassidy (Cary Grant), sails to the Aleutian Islands to pick up an army meteorologist, then across the Pacific to sneak into Tokyo Bay. The sub sends the meteorologist and two others ashore to observe and record weather conditions and then moves close to the city to note the positions of barrage balloons and possible targets. All this information is radioed to the *Hornet* and given to the bomber crews. As the raiders bomb the city, the *Copperfin* sneaks out of the bay under a fleeing Japanese ship. Once in open water, the captain decides to join in the fight and torpedoes an aircraft carrier, but subsequently the sub becomes the target of a depth-charge attack by the carrier's escort. After a long, tense, damaging pounding, the captain finally surfaces and sinks the only remaining Japanese ship. Submarine and crew then return to San Francisco.

Like *Bombardier*, *Destination Tokyo* imaginatively fills in the gaps in the Doolittle raid narrative. Because more information about the raid was available when the film was produced, it is much more accurate: the raiders take off from the *Hornet*—the film even includes actual footage of the B-25s taking off—and it is mentioned that their plan is to land in China.

More significant, however, are the ways the film consciously fictionalizes the raid. Most obviously, there was no submarine in Tokyo Bay sending information to the *Hornet*; in fact, the *Hornet* sailed under radio silence.¹⁷ The film also made some strange changes in the raid's chronology. Shortly after leaving San Francisco, the submarine's crew celebrates Christmas (Christmas 1941?), which seems much too early for the April 1942 raid; the raiders didn't begin training until the end of February. Moreover, the film seems to be set later than the first five months of the war. The captain refers to several previous missions, and the crewmen speak pointedly of the mission "last year." They also discuss the imminent invasion of Europe. One wonders how many missions a submarine crew could get under its belt between December 7, 1941, and April 18, 1942, and how the invasion of Europe could be discussed with certainty so early in the war. More to the point, one wonders why the screenwriters and director chose to disregard a readily available, historically accurate chronology.

One answer is that the Doolittle narrative was being used as a vehicle for two other interconnected narratives. The first is a celebration of the submarine service. There is a great deal of attention given to the technology of submarining: how the ship submerges and rises; how sonar works; how torpedoes are fired; how damage control is accomplished; and, in the best scene, how depth-charge attacks are withstood. The second narrative is less informational and more inspirational; it is about rising to the occasion. When the voyage starts, one new sailor confesses to a veteran that he doesn't know if he will have the nerve to do the things required of him under the pressure of battle. This concern is a paradigm for much of the action and many of the incidents that ensue. The smallest sailor on the sub must disarm a Japanese bomb lodged in the bulkhead, which only he can reach. The ship's pharmacist must perform an emergency appendectomy with the cook's knives as another crewman reads him instructions.¹⁸ The entire crew must perform under the pressure of the pounding depth-charge attack. For this film, the war is about facing pressure, rising above oneself, and meeting the challenge. As the captain says during the attack, "We can't win if we can't take it." This idea is emphasized by means of the link to the Doolittle raid, a real event already associated in the public mind with pressure, heroism, and success.

MGM's *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, released on November 15, 1944, was adapted from Ted Lawson's best-selling 1943 memoir, written with journalist Robert Considine. Lieutenant Lawson, one of the Doolittle raiders, wrote about his experiences—volunteering for a secret mission, training

at Elgin Field in Florida, the voyage on the *Hornet*, and, of course, the bombing of Tokyo. But the great bulk of the book focuses on his plane's crash landing on a Japanese-held island off the Chinese coast, his crew's escape and arduous journey across China to Chungking—made possible by hundreds of Chinese—and, especially, the horrific injuries he suffered in the crash that resulted in the amputation of his leg. The film version, easily the most historically accurate of the films about the raid, follows the narrative of Lawson's book fairly accurately, but it makes some subtle changes in emphasis. Preparations for the raid and the raid itself receive more emphasis than the postcrash adventures in China, with the result that the film is less Ted Lawson's story and more the story of the raiders as a group. Connected with this, the film fleshes out the supporting characters in a way that allows the plot to support a number of broader narratives about the war.

Several of these narratives are already familiar from the other films we've discussed. As in *Air Force*, *Wake Island*, and *So Proudly We Hail!* there is the sense of the army air forces as a big, informal family. When the various volunteers arrive at Elgin Field for their top-secret training, there is something of a family reunion atmosphere: they all know one another, their commanding officers, and the other men's wives. They even familiarly refer to the mission's leader as "Jimmy" Doolittle. As in *Air Force*, there is also a coming together across differences. Emphasis is given to the raiders being from various regions of the country, especially Montana and Texas ("Deep in the Heart of Texas" isn't sung a thousand times, but it sure seems like it); these regionalisms, though colorful, are superficial compared to the raiders' commitment to the mission and one another. On the *Hornet* there is a good-natured rivalry between the sailors and the airmen, but when the goal of the mission—to bomb Japan—is announced, the sailors go out of their way to support the fliers, and the fliers gain a new appreciation of the value of the sailors' work. As in *Bombardier*, there is a justification of America's bombing strategy. In briefing sessions aboard the *Hornet*, the military nature of the planned targets is stressed, and in the final briefing, Colonel Doolittle (Spencer Tracy) directly addresses the necessary and moral nature of the bombing: "Now let me repeat something I've said previously: you are to bomb the military targets assigned to you and nothing else. Of course, in an operation of this kind, you cannot avoid killing civilians, because war plants are manned by civilians. If any of you have any moral feelings about this necessary killing, if you feel that you might think of yourself afterward as a murderer, I want you to drop

out.” Of course, no one does, because all the fliers accept—as the viewer is encouraged to—the common sense of Doolittle’s argument: the bombing is moral because the greatest care has been taken to ensure that the targets are all legitimate military targets; if deaths result, they are “necessary” deaths within the scheme of America’s moral action.

Another type of narrative that became increasingly common as the war’s end neared (discussed in chapter 8) is the serviceman’s anxiety over being accepted by his family and fitting back into society. As in the book, Lawson in the film (Van Johnson) fears that his wife, Ellen (Phyllis Thaxter), won’t accept him with a missing leg and scars on his face. He tells everyone who might be in contact with her not to mention his injuries, and when he returns to the States, he delays contacting her; his plan is to wait until he’s fitted with a prosthetic leg and has plastic surgery to cover his scars. Doolittle steps in, calls Ellen, and arranges for her to come visit Ted. Of course, when she sees him in his hospital room, he and the viewer realize how foolish his fears were. Moreover, when Lawson wonders what kind of future he might have with only one leg and suggests that he might go back to school after being mustered out, Doolittle snaps, “What are you talking about? Do you think we’d let a man of your experience get away from us?” Lawson ends the film loved and useful, despite his injuries.

Doolittle’s role in resolving Lawson’s personal story happily connects with yet another narrative supported by *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*: faith in the military leadership. In the aftermath of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and the many early defeats in the Pacific, and in light of the Allies’ Europe-first commitment, which put the war against Japan on the back burner, it’s not surprising that anxiety about the competency and effectiveness of America’s military leadership might arise. The story of the Doolittle raid as presented in *Thirty Seconds* addresses that anxiety in at least two ways. First, it takes us behind the scenes and demonstrates the necessarily secret ways in which the military is determined to strike back at Japan to turn the war around. Having Doolittle and the other officers continually remind the pilots and crews not to say a word to anyone about what they’re doing (not that they know much—they don’t learn the point of their training until they’re well on their way to Japan) helps the viewer see that there are plans in the works that the public can’t know about; the public must accept being kept in the dark and have faith that the military is leading the country to victory.

The second way the film addresses anxiety over our military leadership is in its characterization of James Doolittle. Presenting a real person

as a major film character was unusual during the war years. Other fact-based films tended to fictionalize the commanding officers, even when the actual figure behind the character was obvious; for example, in *Gung Ho!* (1943) Col. Evans Carlson becomes Colonel Thorwald. The only other significant biographical presentation we can find is in *God Is My Co-Pilot* (1945), where the Flying Tigers' Gen. Claire Chennault is a character. Doolittle's association with the raid probably makes his presence in the film inescapable, but beyond that, the heroism of the raid, much of which was associated with its leader, allows the Doolittle character to stand in for a larger idea of a wartime leader. In other words, the Doolittle character represents all the qualities one would want in a leader. He is calm and confident in his plan. He is well prepared and insists that his men be too. He works his men very hard, but in doing so, he is enabling them to rise above themselves. His training is rigorous—in the Elgin Field scenes he seems humorless and all business—but he makes it clear that this is not just for the sake of the mission but also for the men's own good. He does everything he asks his men to do: his plane is the first to take off from the *Hornet*. And, as we see in the final scene with Lawson, he cares about his men and takes care of them paternalistically. The picture of leadership presented here augments the implied plea for faith in the military's plans and assures us that the servicemen and the country are in good hands.

Interestingly, in addition to supporting myriad narratives about the war, *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo* marks something of an apotheosis of the process by which filmic narratizations of historic events acquire a "reality" that substitutes for the actual events. Many of the reviews of *Thirty Seconds* commented on its "documentary" quality,¹⁹ implying that it is a comparatively direct presentation of reality. For anyone viewing it today, however, the cinematic techniques, the technical limitations, and the now clichéd narrative conventions are obvious; seeing it as anything but a Hollywood film is impossible. This demonstrates how the narratives about the war and their conventions had been naturalized to the point that, for 1940s audiences, they *were* reality. This may mark the greatest success of these films: that by imaginatively filling in the narrative gaps of the historic Doolittle raid, by using it as a frame to support many other necessary narratives about the war, these films, working together with other films and other pop-cultural representations of the war, created for their viewers a reality—the real war and the real history of the war.

Like the Doolittle raid films, *Wing and a Prayer*, about the Battle of Midway, creates narrative coherence of the early months of the war, but it

also makes the process of creating that narrative coherence its subject. Released by Twentieth Century–Fox on July 24, 1944, and subtitled *The Story of Carrier X*, the film follows a single, unnamed aircraft carrier around the Pacific in April and May 1942; the carrier serves as a decoy, convincing the Japanese that the Pacific Fleet is scattered and afraid to fight, buying time and luring the Japanese into a disastrous encounter at Midway.

The film immediately establishes a conflict between appearances and the truth behind appearances. We see a montage of newspaper headlines, editorials, and cartoons lamenting the sequence of military disasters in the three months since Pearl Harbor and asking: Where is our navy? Why doesn't it fight? The impression is of chaos on the part of the U.S. military as it offers a bumbling, sporadic, and inadequate response to Japanese attacks. We next see a Pentagon briefing room where an admiral (Cedric Hardwicke) answers these questions by laying out the navy strategy of using carrier X to roam the Pacific, allowing it to be sighted by the enemy at specific locations on specific dates but refusing to engage them. The plan is to lull the enemy into an overconfident attack on Midway as a step in their ultimate goal of seizing Hawaii. This strategy, of course, must remain secret; it can't be explained in the daily newspapers. Thus the editorials rail and the public stew over the appearance of inaction, while behind the scenes a plan is being put into operation.

This opening sequence sets up the tension that operates through much of the film. Like the general public, the crew and fliers of carrier X can't be told about the plan in which they are participating. They must simply follow orders, and their orders are not to engage the enemy, even if attacked. The film focuses on the fliers of Torpedo Plane Squadron 5, recently assigned to carrier X. Arriving eager to fight, they move from confusion to frustration to anger as they find themselves running from the enemy and suffering losses they aren't allowed to avenge. The viewer is put in the position of sympathizing with the fliers' feelings while at the same time being aware of the big-picture plans that dictate their orders. The viewer, in effect, occupies the position of the admiral and the other top officers: they know the plan and the reasons behind the orders, but they also sympathize with the men's emotions. The emotional release of the film comes not after the Battle of Midway but on the morning of the battle, when it is announced that the plan has worked and the men can finally fight. The overall effect, as in *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, is to persuade the viewer that despite appearances, despite the fragmented and

incoherent story of the war presented in the news, there is a behind-the-scenes design at work.

Many of the film's elements contribute to making the case for the almost religious leap of faith suggested here. Some of these elements invoke two media of illusion that the audience is presumably familiar with: movies and radio. One of Squadron 5's pilots is a film star, Hallam Scott (William Eythe), a man who keeps his Academy Award near him the way a child might keep a teddy bear for security. At one point, when the other pilots want to know what it's like to kiss Betty Grable and other leading ladies, Scott establishes the romantic atmosphere leading up to the kiss, then says, "Well then the hairdresser yelled out, 'Don't hold her so close, you're mussing up her hairdo.' The director screamed, 'Hey, take your arm from around her neck, you're tilting her collar.' The cameraman said, 'You can't kiss her square on the lips like that, I can't see her nose.' So I just kissed her way off center and smacked the air!" What appears real in a film is actually a carefully crafted illusion. Later, when the sailors break into the sacks of fan mail for Scott that somehow keep getting forwarded to the carrier from Twentieth Century-Fox, the humor comes from the fans not being able to distinguish between the images projected on the screen and the reality behind them. The suggestion here is that sophisticated moviegoers ought to know that what is seen in films is the product of behind-the-scenes, off-screen work. Radio is introduced in a curious moment when, after the successful attack on the Japanese carriers at Midway, the torpedo planes are pursued by Zeros. Their communications are heard all over carrier X, not unlike a radio broadcast.²⁰ We join the crew as listeners and must use our imagination to picture what's happening based on overlapping dialogue and sound effects. Viewers are asked, in effect, to apply the narrative-making techniques they use when listening to the radio to the war itself; the war can be made sense of through narratives if one is willing to help fill in the gaps.

This shipwide broadcast is important in another way. The sudden pulling away from the visual presentation of the battle to the broadcast of it suggests that in some sense the experience of war is unrepresentable. Earlier in the film, when the novice fliers crowd around an experienced and decorated pilot (Kevin O'Shea), asking him about combat and what dueling with Zeros is really like, he is confused and unable to answer; he finally demurs, saying, "I'm sorry, fellows, I'm writing my memoirs for the *Saturday Evening Post*. You can read them after the war for a dime." This idea that the war is unrepresentable is interestingly self-referential,

foregrounding the illusory nature of the film we're watching, and augments the film's contention that a leap of faith is necessary. The war, as presented in film or in the news media, will never be completely, coherently present to us; we must nevertheless be assured that there is some sense to our country's participation in it.

Whereas *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo* and *Wing and a Prayer* encourage faith in the plan behind the war news and in our military leadership, other films about the burgeoning offensive in the Pacific focus on ordinary fighting men. As in *Air Force*, these men must put aside their egos to function as a team, but even as team members, they maintain their individuality. *Gung Ho!* was released by Universal on December 20, 1943, and is, as its subtitle claims, *The Story of Carlson's Makin Island Raiders*. In retrospect, the Makin Island raid seems an odd choice for celebration in a film treatment. It was a minor action that succeeded in wiping out the Japanese on the island but failed to divert Japanese attention from the landings on Guadalcanal. In the long term it even proved harmful, since it encouraged the Japanese to fortify their Gilbert Island defenses, resulting in the bloody campaign for Tarawa in 1943. Furthermore, from a post-1949 perspective, the film's positive attitude toward the Communist Chinese guerrillas seems surprising. Beyond that, however, *Gung Ho!* can be seen as trying to reconcile the contradictions between a democratic tradition of valuing individuality and the suppression of individuality necessary for the teamwork required in the armed forces.

Gung Ho! employs many of the elements we have seen in other films focusing on the history of the war in the Pacific. An animated map connects mainland San Diego with Pearl Harbor and, eventually, Makin Island. We even see real footage of the burning battleships at Pearl Harbor, and we're assured by the subtitle and by text at the beginning of the film that we're watching the true story of the Second Marine Raider Battalion, even though Col. Evans Carlson has become the fictional Colonel Thorwald (Randolph Scott). Like the other films, too, *Gung Ho!* encourages teamwork, but a distinctly American teamwork. In his speech to the volunteers, Thorwald talks not only about the combat tactics he learned from the Chinese guerrillas but also about their philosophy of gung ho, working together harmoniously. He tells his men:

You are to receive a course of training unique in the history of the Marine Corps. If you justify the effort to be spent on you, you may be able to point the way in which this tremendously difficult war in the Pacific can

be won. Briefly, it can be won by teamwork, by trained men fighting together with the precision of a machine. But it's more than that. It must be a harmonious machine. Now, you start with the fundamentals. And at the bottom of everything is self-discipline. You must start by casting out all prejudices—racial, religious, every other kind.

I want you to feel free to ask questions, even embarrassing ones. Come to me with suggestions. We're going to be more than officers and men in this. We're going to be comrades. What I eat, you will eat. Where I sleep, you will sleep. I will take you into my confidence whenever it's possible before going into battle. We'll have a meeting in which I'll explain our plans and objectives so that each of you can make a more intelligent contribution to the result. Afterward, we'll have another meeting to criticize the way in which the operation was conducted. We'll fight and endure and win together.

This philosophy, which sounds less like a military structure than a laid-back corporate culture, suggests that the Raider Battalion is a microcosm of American society as a whole. As the narrator (an uncredited Chet Huntley) intones, "Some of us are going to die for democracy and freedom and equality. But right here in the Second Raider Battalion, we're going to live it while we can."

Contributing to the democracy of the Raider Battalion, and presumably to American society at large, is the fact that the harmonious team is made up of unique individuals. This is underscored in the scenes where potential volunteers give their reasons for wanting to be a part of this unit. No two reasons are the same, and they frequently reveal the unarticulated motivations of the men, as the officers engage in amateur psychologizing. Tedrow (Rod Cameron) is feuding with the members of a rival Kentucky family over who will kill more Japanese. Harbison (Alan Curtis) is a minister who wants the most dangerous assignment so that he'll be with the men who need him the most. Montana (Harold Landon) has been dismissed as a "no good kid" all his life. Pig Iron Matthews (Robert Mitchum) is a boxer who learned that fighting solved his problems and earned him respect. Richter (Noah Beery Jr.) and O'Ryan (David Bruce) are rival step-brothers. One man's brother was killed at Pearl Harbor. Another's sister was captured by the Japanese in Manila. One last man says simply, "I just don't like Japs."

This emphasis on the differences among individuals is set against a picture of the enemy as regimented drones. Thorwald tells his men, "The

Japanese are crafty, tenacious, tough, but they have a weakness. It lies in their inability to adapt themselves to unusual situations." This notion is confirmed by what some U.S. forces were actually learning about the Japanese from their banzai attacks on Guadalcanal. When a marine officer asked a prisoner "why they had mindlessly repeated their attacks instead of probing for a weaker sector of the line, the enemy soldier protested that the assault had been so meticulously planned that there could be no question of deviating from the strict orders of General Hyakutake."²¹ The raiders win their battle on Makin Island by taking advantage of their individuality—their ability to think for themselves, to be innovative, to be spontaneous, to be surprising. One marine strips off his uniform and dashes across a field of enemy fire like a track star. Two men turn a bulldozer into an impromptu tank. Thorwald tricks the Japanese air force into bombing its own men by painting an American flag on the roof of a building on the island. The lesson seems clear: the individuality fostered by the American democratic system is the strength that will allow us to defeat the regimented, conformist, closed-minded enemy. Individuality is to be prized, even in the context of the teamwork demanded by the armed forces.

Much more significant than the raid on Makin Island, the campaign for Guadalcanal was the subject of *Guadalcanal Diary*, adapted from the best-selling book by war correspondent Richard Tregaskis and released by Twentieth Century–Fox on October 27, 1943. In its early stages the film follows Tregaskis's book fairly closely, but soon after the marines take Henderson Field, the book and actual events are lost amid the coming-of-age adventures of one platoon. Yet this coming-of-age process is important to the film's thematic purposes. As in *Destination Tokyo* and *Gung Ho!* we see a group of young men learning to become the kind of soldiers needed to win the war: they move from insecurity to confidence and learn a lesson about the dangers of overconfidence. As in *Air Force* and *Wing and a Prayer*, the men learn that the Japanese can be defeated, and as in *Gung Ho!* they learn that their individuality can help them win.

The battle for Guadalcanal, probably even more than Midway, signaled the turning point in the war for most Americans. After Guadalcanal, the army and navy would be pushing the Japanese backward. It would take time, but America would win the war. In this context we can see two of *Guadalcanal Diary*'s concerns at work. First, despite the historic fact that in the early months of the campaign the marines' main goal was defensive, to defend the lines around Henderson Field from repeated, suicidal

enemy attacks, the film concentrates on the marines advancing—taking territory away from the Japanese and eventually driving them into the sea. This is connected to the idea that Guadalcanal marked the beginning of the U.S. offensive in the Pacific. The second concern seems to be the danger of overconfidence. On the troop ships before the landings, the marines are quietly insecure, concerned about what lies ahead. But shortly after they hit the beaches, encountering little enemy resistance, many of them become cocky. The film then presents a series of incidents in which overconfidence is punished; this is part of the process by which the marines, and presumably the audience, learn an appropriate attitude toward the enemy, the U.S. offensive in the Pacific, and our eventual victory. Strolling along Henderson Field, one marine scoffs, “I bet there ain’t a Jap within ten miles of here,” and then is immediately killed by a sniper’s bullet. Taking the word of a prisoner that a group of Japanese soldiers, starving and without weapons, will surrender without a fight, a small patrol of marines falls into a trap from which only one escapes alive. Pvt. Johnny Anderson (Richard Jaeckel) is seriously wounded when he tries to take a sword for a souvenir from a seemingly dead Japanese officer. Private Soose (Anthony Quinn) shouts, “Hey Jap, you forgot something,” and kills a fleeing soldier by throwing his own knife into his back. Sauntering up to the body, laughing over his joke, he is killed by a sniper. The need to overcome this overconfidence is emphasized by both the narrator and the officers. When reinforcements come ashore, the narrator (Reed Hadley) intones, “Kids full of big talk, itching for a fight: just like us a few months ago.” Colonel Grayson (Minor Watson) tells a newly arrived officer about the lesson his troops have learned (and echoes the lesson of *Gung Ho!*): “At least we’ve learned not to underestimate them, Colonel. We know now they won’t surrender, and we’ve got to bring them to their knees. . . . We out shoot them, we out fight them, and we usually out guess them, because our men have learned to act as individuals. Of course, it’s taken a little while to get rid of our cockiness, but I think we’re ready now.” As we’re shown the troops moving into position for the ultimate battle, the narrator tells us, “Gone now is the loud surface toughness of last summer. In its place is the cool, quiet fortitude that comes only with battle experience.” As the marines push the Japanese into the sea, the audience understands that in this offensive phase of the war, Americans need to be confident but not overconfident; victory will come, but only in time, after much hard work and much blood. Further, the audience sees the difference between the mindless drones produced by the

fascist Japanese military and the individuals working as a team in the U.S. military.

These films depicting the historical events of the early war in the Pacific, then, functioned in several important ways. First, they filled in the narrative gaps left by newspaper accounts of the events, in effect creating a complete story. Second, they used these stories to justify America's efforts in the Pacific. Third, they used these stories to draw a picture of the kind of servicemen America would need if it expected to fight and win the war. In the next chapter we explore how Hollywood films depicted and defined our enemies—the Germans, Italians, and Japanese—in order to explain how they were different from Americans and why they had to be defeated.

