

# Five War Movies to Honor the Fallen

No one on the REO staff has served in the military. We have never had to risk our lives in service of our country. Yet, we recognize the bravery, courage, and sacrifice that so many of our citizens have displayed throughout the history of our nation. We recognize and we admire those men and women who have fought and died to protect those of us on the home front. There is little that we can do to honor that ultimate sacrifice. Our words amount to so very little in the end. Even so, we will forever be grateful.

So that we do not forget, the REO staff has selected a handful of movies to commemorate this Memorial Day. These films range in style and focus; some telling the story of a few soldiers, while others tell the story of many. Some were made decades ago and some are much more recent. All of them capture the nobility and sacrifice of the soldiers that fought and died so we can have freedom. Take some time this weekend to remember those who have given their all so that we can be free.

**The Longest Day – by Benjamin Plunkett**



[The Longest Day](#) recounts the hours immediately preceding and then every single hour on the day of the Invasion of Normandy. I have loved *The Longest Day* ever since I was a kid. However, it has not always been my favorite. I do not deny that I have had a long illicit love affair with war movies in general. It has not been until the last ten years or so that this has taken first place among the library of war movies that I love. There are a number of reasons it is a war movie to be deeply appreciated. Two are tops in my mind:

1) **A huge international cast of some of the most famous actors of all time.** Some of the most recognizable actors of yore appear in this movie, all-time greats like John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Richard Burton, Sean Connery, Henry Fonda, and Rod Steiger. While that is a very impressive lineup, it is only a sampling of the amazing cast from the U.S., Germany, France, and the U.K. This means that multiple languages are spoken throughout the course of the film, which, of course, means plenty of subtitles.

2) **The meticulous attention to historical detail.** The examples of this in the film are legion. And many of the scenes are said to have been among the most complicated scenes to shoot in movie history. To do this multiple directors and units collaborated on the project to make it painstakingly accurate. Two that are particularly impressive: The paratroopers dropping in Mere Eglise and the assault on Ouistreham (which was supposedly the most complicated shoot in the whole thing).

This blurb barely scratches the surface of this great war

movie. Its place as a historic educational tool is massive. D-Day was one of the greatest and proudest days in the history of mankind. This is one of the best ways to learn about that very historic event.

### **The Thin Red Line – by Phill Lytle**

“This great evil, where’s it come from? How’d it steal into the world? What seed, what root did it grow from? Who’s doing this? Who’s killing us, robbing us of life and light, mocking us with the sight of what we might’ve



known? Does our ruin benefit the earth, does it help the grass to grow, the sun to shine? Is this darkness in you, too? Have you passed through this night?” – Private Edward P. Train in [The Thin Red Line](#)

Meditative. Poetic. Profoundly spiritual: Qualities rarely used to describe a war film, but they serve as the perfect descriptors for Terrence Malick’s World War II masterpiece. There will be many who will walk away from this film bored or disengaged, but for those fortunate enough to understand the unique cinematic language, the film contains unexpected and unrelenting rewards. Malick uses narration, inner dialogue, and sublime visuals to move beyond the words and actions of the soldiers who fought and died. He allows their spirits to speak to the horror, the passion, and the humanity of war. *The*

*Thin Red Line* transcends the usual movie treatment, presenting instead an exploration of our deepest questions and longings viewed through the prism of combat and war.

## **Saving Private Ryan – by Mark Sass**



Very few movies truly redefine a genre. [\*Saving Private Ryan\*](#) was one such film. At the very least it revolutionized audio/visual techniques, style, and tone for war sequences in film. Prior to *Saving Private Ryan* no war movie had ever looked so real on screen. The film made a commitment to communicating the horrors of war like no other. At times the movie was visceral to a degree that was difficult to watch. However, the realism of the film encompassed much more than only violence. Audiences didn't merely watch the film; they experienced it. Several scenes stood out in this regard, but none so like the 22 minute sequence on Omaha Beach in Normandy on D-Day. Unlike many other war movies nothing was glamorized, toned down, or embellished in this film. To this day many regard the Omaha Beach scene as the most realistic depiction of war ever put on film. Audiences got the smallest taste of the true nature of war from the film. And that was very different from how other movies portrayed it. For this reason it's difficult to say this was an enjoyable movie. No, it's better said the movie was one to appreciate and respect. *Saving Private Ryan* told a story that was worth telling. The plot masterfully jumped between the events of WWII and present day in a way that captivated the viewer. Familiar emotions for the genre such as courage, heroism, and sacrifice permeated the film. Led by Tom Hanks, the entire cast delivered top notch performances from beginning to end. The acting, cinematography, editing, music, FX, and everything

in between, all came together to deliver a film of the highest quality which will never be forgotten. *Saving Private Ryan* might be the pinnacle of director Steven Spielberg's long and illustrious career.

## Sergeant York – by Gowdy Cannon

When I was a teenager I did not like history. Yeah, I was a doofus. I didn't like black and white movies. I didn't like war movies. So when Mr. Marshall Thompson, my 10th grade American history teacher, showed our class a [movie](#) that was both, and that I loved, he basically did the impossible.



Based on his personal diary and with the demand that Gary Cooper play the lead, Alvin Cullum York let Hollywood give us his story in a truly remarkable and unforgettable way. I bought the VHS and watched it over and over. I would go around randomly saying "Killn's agin the book" and "I'm fer the book" in high school and college. I did my character presentation for Mr. John Carter in U.S. History in college on him. (And to this day I regret not doing Sergeant York's turkey call when classmate and future best friend Joshua Crowe tried to prompt me to during the Q&A time.) I love "Give Me That Old Time Religion" because of this movie. Every time I am driving into Nashville on the interstate and see something off of an exit dedicated to him, I still smile.

A tale of not just war heroics but of a man's personal and riveting journey, notably of the struggles that come with the Christian faith and its convictions, I think most people can enjoy this film. Even the knuckleheads who do not normally go for movies of its age and genre. I am thankful to it for teaching me how good those types of movies can be.

## Band of Brothers – by Phill Lytle



Though not a film, no list of this type would be complete without including the HBO adaptation of Stephen E. Ambrose's [\*Band of Brothers\*](#). First released in 2001, *Band of Brothers* is a ten-part epic mini-series that follows the formation, training, and World War II experiences of "Easy Company", part of the Parachute Infantry Regiment of the Army's 101st Airborne Division. Due to its longer run time, *Band of Brothers* is able to do something that no film can: it can tell a long, sweeping, fully immersive story that features dozens of main characters, locations, and battles. The viewer is able to spend time with these brave men. We are able to get to know them, understand their strengths and weaknesses. See them perform heroically time after time.

Produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, every detail is handled with care and respect. These were real men that are portrayed on screen by an assortment of incredibly gifted and committed actors. There are interviews with the actual soldiers before and after episodes, which adds another layer of authenticity and power for the series. For my money, there is no greater picture of the war than *Band of Brothers*.