Guts, Glory, and Doctrine

Films as an Educational Tool for the U.S. Army

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Abstract

This article provides an introduction to the Army University Press (AUP) Films team. The AUP Films team uses historical vignettes to teach current U.S. Army doctrine, developing historically accurate documentary films as educational tools for the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and the U.S. Army at large. This article discusses the origin of the AUP Films team, its mission, and its current offerings, while also examining the benefits and challenges of teaching with film. Professional military education aims to educate soldiers in current doctrine, as well as provide lessons in leadership, tactical, operational, and strategic concepts. Film is a useful educational tool to explore each of these areas.

Until recently, film has not been largely accepted as an educational tool for adult learning. When properly assigned, however, film can serve as a powerful tool in developing critical and creative thinking skills; introducing new topics, ideas, and themes; and increasing students' awareness of differing perspectives. Film can be employed independently as a source or paired with other educational materials by level of instruction. As Ender (2019) examines in "Charlie Don't Surf: The Military, War, Film, and Teaching," film can work well to convey human issues to students, especially human interactions and relationships, by taking these complex experiences and condensing them for the viewer. Film also is a useful tool to include in a multimedia learning environment. When films were incorporated into A724: Organizational Leadership Case Studies (elective) at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, students found the course more engaging and thought provoking. Pairing film with readings, PowerPoint presentations, and writing assignments allows students to reach their highest learning potential from multiple learning styles (Bradbeer & Porter, 2017).

Recognizing film's usefulness as an educational tool and for its malleability and applicability, the Combined Arms Center (CAC), in conjunction with the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), established Army University Press (AUP) Films at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The AUP Films team is dedicated to pro-

ducing doctrine-focused and historically accurate documentaries for use in professional military education (PME) and leader development.

The Films Team

Created by CAC in September 2018, the AUP Films team works closely with the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate to produce documentary films that integrate and explain current Army doctrine to educate U.S. Army soldiers. In recent years, CAC has directed the revision of several of its key Army doctrine publications (ADPs) and field manuals (FMs) to better align with large-scale combat operations and multi-domain operations. Accordingly, the AUP Films team creates documentaries that support this new doctrinal emphasis and disseminate concepts from FM 3-0, *Operations*.

Composed of nine members—four Department of the Army civilian historians, two contractor historians, and three contractor audiovisual specialists—the AUP Films team is expected to produce a collection of readily available documentary films, ensuring all lessons integrate current doctrine with historical vignettes. The films are available on the AUP's official website, social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), and on its YouTube and DVIDS pages (see https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Educational-Services/Documentaries/). The films are free to viewers for streaming and download, and on DVDs by request.

Teaching with Film

CAC had several reasons for creating the AUP Films team. Today's students have more experience with visual media and technology in and out of the classroom than previous generations (Trent, 2019). For example, at the Command and General Staff College and the School of Advanced Military Studies, the classrooms are equipped with smartboards, computers at each sitting station, projectors, and other technology. Many of the soldiers attending these schools have never known life without a computer. When developing courses, instructors should consider the use of technology and media, both in and out of the classroom. Films, like those available from the AUP Films team, can be accessed on in-classroom computers, at-home computers, or on the go from tablets or smartphones. Film expands the learning environment and provides opportunities for digitally fluent students to learn beyond lecture or text. There is nothing

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wrong with traditional brick-and-mortar classroom experiences; however, film is an additional instructional tool that can be used to augment and enhance PME.

In 2011, TRADOC published TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015*, to describe and develop a learning model for the all-volunteer Army and, specifically, the 21st-century soldier (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2011). TRADOC strives to provide an educational model to challenge and inspire learners who grew up in the digital world and are adept at using technology, while also meeting the needs of seasoned Army professionals (DA, 2011). Although the document did not expressly name film as a learning tool, its emphasis on technology through which to teach teamwork, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and other leadership skills dovetails with the benefits of film.

Another reason film is an excellent addition to an instructor's teaching toolbox is students seldom need to be coaxed into watching films. In some adult research theory, many students would rather watch a film than read a textbook or monograph. Not only are films generally more entertaining, or at least more engaging and emotion provoking, but they are also more accessible (Suid, 2002). Digitally available films provide the student with a lightweight, easily accessible medium through which to learn. Students do not have to purchase a book, carry that book to and from the classroom, or spend hours reading. Films, especially those provided by AUP Films, are available to be streamed online or downloaded and can be accessed by computer or mobile devices. The documentaries produced by AUP range in length from 45 to 60 minutes. A student could easily watch one of these feature-length films in less time than it takes to read a book or even a lengthy book chapter. The sections of the films are organized by topic or doctrinal focus that allow the viewer or instructor to pause the film without disrupting its overall flow. This provides instructors time to review the previous section, propose questions for the next section, or assign the film by section. Beginning in 2020, the AUP Films team will create shorter films (5-15 minutes) that, like the sections in the feature-length films, will facilitate discussion and provide additional focus on specific doctrinal concepts or historical events.

Students who learn visually will be the greatest beneficiaries from these films. Visual learning is one of the different learning styles popularized by Neil D. Fleming in his VARK model of learning—the model also includes kinesthetic, reading, and auditory learning. While most people learn to varying degrees across these four learning modalities, those who learn best in the visual learning style are people who need to see information to learn it (Fleming & Baume, 2006). Films allow the instructor to communicate with these visual learners more effectively. For instance, in the AUP-produced film *Stalingrad: The Grain Elevator*, to convey the incredibly high casualty rate during the fight for the city, red dots consume the screen (Army University Press [AUP], 2019a). Each dot represents one casualty, and the screen, and thus the viewer, is overwhelmed with red dots. This method, when paired with auditory expression of casualty rates, conveys the devastation of war with greater effect than text or voice alone.

The introduction of film into a course creates an intellectually stimulating as well as emotionally provoking learning experience. Film can serve as a concrete learning experience in and out of the classroom. David Kolb's Learning Style Inventory supports this approach to teaching (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's experiential learning theory works on two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles. Effective learning occurs when a student progresses through a cycle of four stages: having a concrete experience, reflecting on that experience, forming abstract concepts and conclusions, and testing hypotheses in future situations. How a student resolves the tensions between conceptualization and experience and between action and reflection determines the student's dominant learning style: convergent, divergent, assimilative, or accommodative (Kolb, 1984). The introduction of film as an experiential assignment, then, provides instructors with an entertaining and useful tool to help students develop critical thinking and analytical skills (Sprau & Keig, 2001).

By incorporating films into more PME courses, TRADOC will reach more students and more effectively convey complicated information to a wider audience, many of whom are more visual and experiential learners. When paired with recommended readings and assignments, instructors can cover complex and complicated topics through multiple modalities to ensure every student has the best opportunity to gain a more thorough understanding of the material. Having students watch a film in addition to reading is a form of dual coding, which Clark and Paivio (1991) have proven as a key learning strategy to enhance students' understanding of a subject matter. The dual-coding theory postulates that the human mind processes visual and verbal information differently and, along distinct channels, creates separate cognitive representations for information processed in each channel. The mental codes for these representations organize new information and recall stored information. According to dual-coding theory, students learn best when they combine two encoding systems—text and visual (Rupley, Paige, Rasinski, & Slough, 2015). Film, then, when paired with text, serve as the visual tool that enhances students' learning and facilitate understanding of complex concepts beyond that of the assigned readings.

To assist instructors and students in their learning objectives, the AUP Films team also provides a list of recommended additional readings for each film for students and instructors desiring a deeper understanding of the information presented in the documentary. Assigning these additional texts alongside the film and doctrine manuals enables the students to comprehend the doctrinal concepts emphasized in the film more fully.

Challenges of Teaching with Film

Although films can provide insight into many current doctrinal concepts, films are limited in time and space. For instance, a 70-minute feature film is produced from approximately a 35-page script. If doctrine excerpts average one every two pages, that is an average of 17 doctrine excerpts per film. Even if all from one manual, such as FM

3-0, the film would not fully describe current Army operations. This limitation requires instructors and students to engage with the doctrine and the history for a more complete understanding of the concepts and information presented in the film. AUP's *Korea: Twin Tunnels*, for example, explores the qualities of strong leaders through the case study of Col. Paul Freeman (AUP, 2019b). During one part, the film highlights "leaders at every echelon are expected to display the initiative necessary to assume prudent risk" (DA, 2017, p. 1-19). Although not a groundbreaking concept, this excerpt can serve as a discussion catalyst for leadership, initiative, and risk. The instructor could also pair this film with FM 3-0 or ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, for a more detailed discussion of current Army doctrine.

Another challenge with film as an educational tool is the availability of primary sources and other materials. To engage and educate the target audience, the AUP Films team strives to use historically accurate film footage and photographs. Locating and obtaining these materials can be difficult depending on the film's focus. For instance, many materials pertaining to Operation Iraqi Freedom are owned by private news companies or remain classified. As such, the team was forced to rely heavily on materials collected by veterans of the conflict and other publicly available materials. Not only does this paucity of visual media materials limit the themes and topics that can be covered in a film, it also limits the sources available to the instructor.

Conclusion

In spite of its limitations, film is, and will continue to be, a useful educational tool for the U.S. Army. Films are accessible, adaptive to multiple learning environments, entertaining, and suitable to visual learners and the 21st-century soldier. By introducing this multimedia tool into PME, instructors can explore multiple topics, themes, and doctrinal concepts. The films produced by the AUP Films team enhance soldiers' understanding of current U.S. Army doctrine and serve as innovative educational tools to be used in and out of the classroom. ℭℨ

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