1-1-1999

Revisiting the Recordings of Wars Past: Remembering the Documentary Trilogy of John Huston

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Recommended Citation

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January 1999

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REFLECTIONS IN A MALE EYE

JOHN HUSTON AND THE
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

**EDITED BY
GAYLYN STUDLAR AND DAVID DESSER**

**SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION PRESS
WASHINGTON AND LONDON**

Revisiting the Recordings of Wars Past: Remembering the Documentary Trilogy of John Huston

GARY EDGERTON

I went through the war more as an observer than a participant. But I saw enough of it that it shaped something in me.

—Bill Mauldin, in *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*

Through the exploits of his characters Willie and Joe, Bill Mauldin spoke for and mirrored the sentiments of many of America's GIs in his enormously popular and Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated cartoon, "Up Front." His understated and sardonic attitude appealed to and reflected a generation of enlisted men and women who would be profoundly shaped and changed by the grit and trauma of their war experience. John Huston was one of the individuals; and it was not by coincidence that he cast Bill Mauldin and Audie Murphy, two famous ex-GIs and virtual nonactors at the time, as his leads in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), a motion picture that Huston had passionately wanted to make ever since the end of World War II.

Similar to Mauldin, Huston's role in the Second World War was essentially that of an observer, although he directed film crews under fire in both the North Pacific and Italian theaters. He likewise used his observation to record resonant and meaningful documents in response to what he

was seeing and experiencing. John Huston's three wartime documentaries—*Report from the Aleutians* (1943), *The Battle of San Pietro* (1945), and *Let There Be Light* (1946)—are pivotal works in the evolution of Huston as a moviemaker as well as seminal in the history and development of the nonfiction film form. The intended and subtextual messages within these motion pictures, along with the stories behind their subsequent distribution and reception, certainly afford a privileged view of a wider spectrum of feelings, insights, and attitudes about living through and fighting the "good war" than those provided by any other American documentaries produced in this period.

DOING HIS DUTY

Several of the best people in Hollywood grew, noticeably, during their years away at war; the man who grew most impressively, I thought, as an artist, as a man, in intelligence, in intransigence, and in an ability to put through fine work against difficult odds, was John Huston, whose "San Pietro" and "Let There Be Light" were full of evidence of this many-sided growth.

—James Agee, *The Nation*, January 31, 1948

As is well known, several of Hollywood's most talented and successful filmmakers—Frank Capra, John Ford, Anatole Litvak, William Wyler, and others—entered war service in late 1941 and early 1942 to make documentaries for various sections of the U.S. Armed Forces. John Huston soon followed suit by reporting for duty to the U.S. Army Signal Corps in April 1942. His first assignment was to proceed to the Aleutian Islands for the purpose of documenting the conflict there for both civilian and enlisted audiences. The working title of this film was *Alaska—1942*, and it was part of the "War Department Historical Series" and was essentially designed as a public relations and informational piece about the major theaters of combat attended to by Allied forces.¹ What resulted was a conventional military documentary that can be characterized as effective advocacy, conservative in ideology, and traditional in film form and style.

The intentions of *Report from the Aleutians* unmistakably echo the clichés of the customary World War II documentary, while also showcasing a number of conventions that we have come to expect from the Holly-

wood war film, such as the proverbial melting pot; the bugler blowing Taps; busy, smiling soldiers, singing and playing harmonicas; scores of American flags waving; and heroic background music. The primary impressions that the movie imparts are "morale is first-rate . . . and getting stronger," and the Japanese are being kept at bay in the North Pacific while the Americans rapidly rebuild their sea power after the tragedy of Pearl Harbor. As Huston himself explained in a 1981 PBS interview, "It was a simpler period."²

The film itself outlines the day-to-day experience and routine of manning a remote outpost while occasionally flying bombing missions. The usual and commonplace events of the motion picture eventually culminate in a stirring and successful attack on the Japanese where "our bombers found the target. Nine bombers went out and nine are coming home." In point of fact, this final ending and declaration were a result of poetic license. Huston and his production crew went on several bombing raids, and as is typical of the authoritarian style, the filmmakers recreated this final sequence during the editing process from footage taken over a number of missions into one action-packed climax, providing the audience with a rousing, obligatory happy ending. Huston later confessed, "This was not a routine flight [the episode depicted in the film's denouement]. Planes were lost on this mission, but the War Department wanted it to be a completely successful mission . . . it was a propaganda film—definitely."³

This admission by Huston is, of course, no surprise; like the aforementioned Hollywood filmmakers, he was "very anxious to enlist . . . and honored with the invitation to get a commission."⁴ Authoritarian documentaries had moreover been the standard approach to nonfiction filmmaking throughout the 1930s and into the war years, and Huston was understandably in tune with the spirit of the country at the time by following orders and doing his job and duty. John Huston's attitude about the nature of war and how to film and understand its complexities only began to take shape during the production of *Report from the Aleutians*. Spending six months in the rain and almost constant fog of Adak, Huston did in fact pepper the overall structure of his documentary with numerous scenes of enlisted men doing mundane tasks and ultimately fighting the routine and boredom of army life. In an otherwise ideal propaganda film, these shots of idleness and digging latrines are the only parts of this movie that may be construed as portraying the underside of being at war; in other words, "war isn't hell" in *Report from the Aleutians*, "it's just a drag."⁵

Since there were genuine censorship problems with both *The Battle of San Pietro* and *Let There Be Light*, much has been made in retrospect of the delayed distribution of *Report from the Aleutians*.⁶ The public exhibition of the film was indeed postponed two to three months because of a bureaucratic disagreement between Army Public Relations and the domestic motion picture division of the Office of War Information. The minor controversy surrounded the OWI's support of the preference by U.S. movie theater owners of only booking shorts of two reels or less. The full-length forty-seven-minute version of *Report from the Aleutians* would have therefore needed to be cut anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five minutes. Army Public Relations balked at this proposal, and thus backed the wishes of the Signal Corps and John Huston.⁷

The assertions that the film was held back because it either contained military secrets or too graphically documented the boredom of manning a remote outpost in the North Pacific, "as if Huston knew that the banalities of Army life in his first war film would gain poignancy and meaning when paired with its successor, *The Battle of San Pietro*,"⁸ is simply a matter of making this documentary out to be more subversive and controversial than it really is. *Report from the Aleutians* is in most ways a traditional and undistinguished effort. What it does show us in hindsight, however, is how dramatically Huston matured in vision, attitude, and style as a nonfiction filmmaker by the time he made *The Battle of San Pietro* and *Let There Be Light*. In comparison to *Report from the Aleutians*, it is clear in his later documentaries that he soberly learned through the experience of making these films that war can be more than dull; instead, Huston exactly communicates in these ensuing efforts that it can undeniably be hell.

HUSTON'S UNSPARING GAZE

I realized it [*The Battle of San Pietro*] wasn't any picture about combat or any military film that they had ever seen. I knew they were in for something of a surprise, but I wasn't prepared for the shock with which they received it.

—John Huston, "John Huston: A War Remembered"

The Battle of San Pietro needs little introduction; the public has always embraced it as one of the very best war documentaries ever made. The

The Battle of San Pietro: Huston was a pioneer in the art of combat photography.

power and poignancy of its imagery still speak eloquently about the horror and futility of war and the resiliency of the human spirit, despite the film's melodramatic and propagandistic storyline. Indeed, this latent tension in *The Battle of San Pietro* between intentions that are doctrinaire and reactions that are personal, sensitive, and spontaneous is also implied in Huston's later explanation that "we knew what we wanted to say, but the story told itself."⁹ *The Battle of San Pietro* is unique in that the winning is constantly underplayed while the suffering and sacrifice is accorded tantamount attention.

This result was clearly not what the high command had in mind when it originally ordered Huston in the fall of 1943 to produce a film that would document the successful liberation of Rome by the Allies. When in fact the Italian campaign didn't proceed as smoothly as anticipated, Huston's mandate was adjusted to his making a film specifically for American audiences on why the advance of the U.S. Army in Italy had been slowed to a virtual halt. Proceeding to the front and learning firsthand how to tell his story was an experience that had a profound effect on Huston, the man and film artist. The tragedy of the Italian campaign was a ripe stimulus for

such soul searching and rethinking of priorities; this phase of World War II was marked by useless battles, herculean body counts, and seemingly endless sieges with a retreating German army that stubbornly entrenched itself in the rugged and mountainous Italian terrain.

The Battle of San Pietro is actually a mixture of two documentary film styles. Like *Report from the Aleutians*, the movie has many authoritarian aspects; on the other hand, *The Battle of San Pietro* also exhibits formal elements that are closely associated with the cinema vérité movement of the 1950s and 1960s, such as longer takes, hand-held- and mobile-camera work, and on-the-spot interviewing. Huston's approach to filmmaking benefited greatly from his temporary, war-imposed sojourn from Hollywood; he had come to rely too heavily on working in a studio and doing adaptations from literary sources. In this way, his war experiences provided him with opportunity to broaden his filmmaking repertoire by essentially forcing him to create original motion pictures on location. The liberating effect of these changes in setting and context cannot be underestimated when explaining the reasons behind Huston's attitudinal and stylistic development in the nonfiction mode which begins to noticeably take hold in *The Battle of San Pietro* and later continues to have an even greater impact on the results of *Let There Be Light*.

The battle for San Pietro took place between December 8 and December 15, 1943. The bloodletting and body counts were relentless as Allied forces slowly battled both the geography and the German resistance. Huston's documentary has its share of diagrams, maps, and a narration that is intended to describe the strategy behind the conflict and explain how this struggle developed. The American army eventually triumphs over the terrain and the retreating Nazis while John Huston's voice-over announces the victory; still, the overall tone of the film is inconclusive. The audience is never told why San Pietro is so important or what justifies the death and sacrifice of more than one thousand GIs in the combat surrounding this tiny village.

Several Vietnam-era critics have from their mindset interpreted this disquietude on Huston's part as being full-fledged "pacifism" and "anti-war" in sentiment.¹⁰ Huston himself has said, however, that "it was anything but done out of hatred of war on my part. It was done out of a profound admiration for the courage of the men who were involved in the ghastly thing."¹¹ In other words, Huston's direct familiarity with a battleground as brutal as San Pietro further demystified the war experience for

him beyond just the boredom that is communicated in *Report from the Aleutians*; combat makes most soldiers suspicious of warrior legends. Instead of presenting his comrades within the romance and artificiality that frames most World War II documentaries, John Huston accorded his fellow GIs the compliment of recording their actions as honestly and as unencumbered by hyperbole and official doctrine as he could.

Huston first unveiled *The Battle of San Pietro* to a screening room filled with his superiors and other army officers during October 1944. The reaction was nearly unanimous: Members of the audience began to walk out about three-quarters of the way through the documentary.¹² Despite the fact that *The Battle of San Pietro* is still a propaganda film that portrays the conflict exclusively from the American point of view, the pain inherent in many of the images is both poignant and unmistakable. As the sometimes sardonic narration provides a step-by-step accounting of the Allied victory, graphic pictures in this first cut of the documentary included handheld shots capturing falling and wounded GIs in battle; a close-up of a single boot attached only to the fragment of a leg and foot; an occasional world-weary or even shell-shocked stare from a U.S. enlisted man or Italian civilian; and finally an ending composed most powerfully of several easily recognizable American soldiers now being placed by fellow comrades into body bags as their previously recorded words are heard in voice-over speaking about what they thought the world would be like after the war. In Huston's mind he had constructed, in the most personal and expressive terms he could, a tribute to these soldiers that revealed the enormity of the horror that they were forced to face and endure, and in turn the resulting sacrifice that they all had made in the war effort. His initial audience of Pentagon officers interpreted the motion picture differently, and a move was quickly expedited to either censor or shelve this documentary.

The controversy surrounding *The Battle of San Pietro* actually heated to a level that the army's chief of staff and newly appointed five-star general, George C. Marshall, asked to see the film. His reaction to the subsequent viewing was generally positive, much to the relief of Huston. General Marshall did, however, suggest a number of cuts, including the shot of the bloodied boot and more significantly the entire final sequence highlighting the dead faces of the GIs and their voice-overs. In the film's final edit, in fact, the only dying stares that remain are those that are frozen on Nazi soldiers; in contrast, the fallen Americans are typically shot from the back as they are hoisted into their body bags. All of these shots are still

Too many American soldiers filling body bags caused the censorship of portions of *The Battle of San Pietro*.

disclosive and moving; the illustrative and vivid impact of these pictures is not easily censored. Nevertheless, the released version of *The Battle of San Pietro* is somewhat watered down from the original, although this film still remains the most graphic and honest account of combat during World War II ever documented on celluloid.

John Huston "more or less agreed" with General Marshall's deletions, including the ending sequence, which Huston found in hindsight to be "rather too emotional I think."¹³ What remains is a camera-eye that begins to step back at times from the usual authoritarian posture of most World War II documentaries in order to record in fascinating detail men under the pressure of live fire; this time, though, the violence and danger saps the spirit and wreaks devastation. The test of combat in *The Battle of San Pietro*, therefore, is one of survival, not some rite of passage. In his own way, Huston successfully exposes a good deal of the reality that underlies

this traditional adolescent fantasy of proving one's worth and toughness in battle. In so doing, he offers a more understated and compassionate memorial to the men who fought and died at San Pietro; and in the process, he violates and demystifies what the Pentagon had wanted to believe about the heroism and glamour of GI Joe and the grand significance enveloping each American victory in the Italian campaign.

Huston also adopted more "objective" strategies, such as mobile, probing camera work, and the filmed interview. In the former instance, World War II precipitated the more rapid refinement of 16mm film equipment; this gauge became more common and widespread throughout the duration of the global conflict. Developments in technology, therefore, made it possible for Huston's troops to gather a majority of the combat footage in *The Battle of San Pietro* at close range and under fire. Some question has been raised recently about whether most of the sequences in this documentary are in fact reenactments.¹⁴ Reviews of the film's outtakes at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., do demonstrate that some of the battle scenes as well as the final sequence involving the Italian civilians coming out of hiding and returning to San Pietro after the Germans had been driven from their town were actually shot as late as January 22, 1944, or five full weeks after the battle ended.¹⁵ Still this stock footage has a more artificial and unhurried look than what is evident in most of the explosive, vérité-like fighting sequences. It is reasonable to literally accept the final title in *The Battle of San Pietro*, which states, "All scenes in this picture were photographed within range of enemy small arms or artillery fire. For purposes of continuity a few of these scenes were shot before and after the actual battle of San Pietro." Whether or not more footage was indeed staged than is readily apparent through a review of the surviving outtakes remains to be seen. This possibility, however, still doesn't detract from the overall "poetic truth" of *The Battle of San Pietro*; this film clearly is more honest, insightful, and complex than any other combat documentary of its era.

The Battle of San Pietro was not the only World War II nonfiction film to employ hand-held combat footage taken at close range. What is significant, though, is that John Huston at times strikes the pose of an observer rather than a propagandist, and lets these pictures stand on their own without interpretation. He was also wise enough to give voice to the American foot soldiers through the aforementioned interviews. As cited before, these recordings, used as voice-overs in the first edit, were elimi-

nated in the final cut. In this way, the technique itself provided a final sequence that made the thrill of victory unconvincing, if not the purpose of the battle questionable; the vérité aspects of these interviews were frankly ahead of their time and downright taboo in 1944.

On balance, John Huston willingly "agreed with the cuts," and stated in 1981 that "the body of the picture was left intact."¹⁶ Huston's growing awareness about the essential nature and impact of warfare on the humans involved enabled him to reach beyond his contemporaries in the Armed Forces Pictorial Service to produce a lasting document of inspiration and subtlety in *The Battle of San Pietro* that audiences today respond to with more than feelings of mere nostalgia or a passing historical curiosity. Overall this film was highly progressive in breaking beyond the bonds of what was acceptable to think and speak about in a public forum during 1943-1944, and in the process this motion picture provides future generations with the most honest appraisal available that fighting the "good war" could indeed be as overtaxing and heart-wrenching as fighting a "bad war" like Vietnam.

The Battle of San Pietro was finally released to the general public across the United States between May 21 and July 1945, or seven months after the final version was completed; this delay also followed on the heels of V-E Day, which occurred on May 7.¹⁷ As a small consolation and vindication, however, Huston did receive a promotion from captain to major for his efforts. His troubles with army censorship were far from over though; he would venture even further into the realm of challenging official and acceptable attitudes about the American GI in the shaping and design of his next project, *Let There Be Light*.

SEARCHING FOR THOSE MOMENTS OF REVELATION AND DISCOVERY

In the thick of the Sicily campaign and not far from the front,
Patton was touring hospital tents near San Stefano.
He went the rounds commending wounded soldiers.
Then he came upon one who sat on the edge of his cot.
"Where are you wounded?" asked Patton.
The soldier, a "shell-shock" case, mumbled something
about hearing shells that never landed and
guessed it was his nerves. Well known for his disbelief

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in the reality of "shell-shock," Patton flew into a rage, called the soldier "yellow-bellied," and gave him a back-handed cuff that knocked off the man's helmet lining.

A nurse lunged at the general but was restrained and led away weeping. As he was leaving, Patton heard the soldier sobbing. He strolled back and slapped the private again.

At about the same time, Patton similarly upbraided another "shell-shocked" victim.

—"Patton's Slap," *Newsweek*, December 6, 1943

The American war most associated with the "shell-shocked," or the mentally fatigued, disabled, or even disturbed soldier is Vietnam; this linkage has as much to do with unknowingness and the suppression of information surrounding these kinds of disabilities in respect to World War II as it has to do with the character of the war itself in Southeast Asia. The raw and gritty nature of *The Battle of San Pietro* offers some explanation to the contemporary viewer on why "20% of all battle casualties in the American Army during World War II were of neuro-psychiatric nature."¹⁸ Huston's charge to produce a documentary about the "Returning Soldier—Nervously Wounded (or Psychoneurotic)" offered him a project that continued logically from the lessons that he had learned and the darkness that he had encountered in his battle experience in the Liri Valley; now he was ordered to investigate and record the rehabilitation process of those war-weary GIs who had themselves become casualties of the mind in the face of their own personal "San Pietros" in theaters throughout Europe and the Pacific.

The above incident involving General Patton also is meant to give some indication into the general ignorance and naiveté of most Americans about mental illness in 1945–1946. Granted, the general population was typically not as savage in its nescience and inexperience with neuropsychiatric disorders as George Patton. Still, there was evident backlash that manifested itself in the American mass media in the form of hysterical newspaper and magazine articles designed to address the worst fears of people at the home front about the returning state of GI Joe's mind: "Any former serviceman who got into trouble was seized upon as empirical support of the War-Crazed Veteran theory. Daily newspaper headlines exploited the fears, and the following were not atypical: 'Veteran Beheads Wife with Jungle Machete'—'Ex-Marine Held In Rape Murder'—'Sailor Son Shoots Father'—'Crazed Vet Goes Berserk.'"¹⁹

The ultimate irony about this feverish outpouring of distrust is that "the veteran problem turned out to be no problem at all. Except for a troubled handful, most veterans wanted nothing more than to pick up where they had left off before induction, or to make up for civilian joys lost while in uniform."²⁰ William L. O'Neill performed this diagnosis decades after the fact in the introduction to his book, *American Society since 1945*; the War Department's orders of May 7, 1945, engaged a problem that appeared to be all too real at the time:

The film on the "Nervously Wounded (or Psychoneurotic)" should (1) point out what a small proportion fall into this category; (2) eliminate the stigma now attached to the psychoneurotic through explanation of the conditions of what it really is—thus to offset the exaggerated picture that has already been given to the public through the press, magazine and radio stories; and (3) explain that in many cases the reason that makes a psychoneurotic unsatisfactory for the Army is the very reason for which this same person could be a real success in civilian life. (It has been stated by separates that those qualities which made them a success as a civilian were the very things that made them *crack up* [my emphasis] as a soldier.)²¹

By June 25, 1945, Major John Huston was assigned to produce *The Returning Psychoneurotics* with the specific command that, above all else, the documentary should convince prospective employers that they have nothing at all to fear in hiring one of these ex-GIs. Like most everyone else in American society at the time, Huston admits that "beyond a superficial acquaintance with the ideas of Freud, Jung and Adler, I was completely uninformed regarding the new science of psychiatry."²² Indeed, the level of the army's unsophistication and naiveté concerning the area of psychoneurosis is clearly evident in its May 14, 1945, directive to obtain a print of RKO's *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945) as a means of doing background research on the topic of mental disturbances and their relationship to the soon-to-be-discharged World War II veterans.²³

To put this order into perspective, *The Enchanted Cottage* is a well-meaning but contrived melodrama about an injured army flier who is struggling to cope with civilian life. The role of the discharged veteran is played by Robert Young, whose injury is a nasty scar on the left side of his face; his trial in life, therefore, is "to face life as ugly." The heroine is Dorothy McGuire, who proves that love transforms personal hardship by eventually bringing the hero out of his shell. *The Enchanted Cottage* was

one of four similar morality tales about disabled or disturbed veterans that were produced by Dore Shary for RKO and United Artists between March 1945 and July 1946.²⁴

The reassimilation of shell-shocked or injured GIs was obviously a popular issue to many Americans during the months that served as the production period for Huston's developing documentary on neuropsychiatry; still, it is a telling index to the attitudes about mental illness at the time that one of John Huston's commanding officers in the Signal Corps would actually direct him to a Hollywood potboiler as being good source material for further understanding of the subject matter at hand.

As much as *The Battle of San Pietro* was an education for Huston into the ravishes of war and suffering, the evolution of *Let There Be Light* out of the initial order to produce a film about the "Returning Soldier—Nervously Wounded" was even more of a growing and learning experience for him. Psychoanalysis had been somewhat of a fad in the Hollywood community just before World War II; therefore, Huston's knowledge of psychiatry up to this point was a result of what he had been able to pick up informally through his conversations with his friends in the movie colony.

He began the research phase of *Let There Be Light* by visiting a number of military hospitals on both the east and west coasts. He quickly decided to use Mason General Hospital on Brentwood, Long Island, for a number of reasons: First of all, Huston was impressed by the openness and receptivity of the doctors and staff that he met there; Mason General was also the biggest and most modern facility of its kind on the East Coast; and finally, the hospital itself was conveniently located near the army motion picture production center at Astoria Studio in Queens, New York. Huston next spent ten weeks on location executing a strategy that was designed to follow one group of soldiers suffering from war-induced neurosis from their entry into this particular military clinic until the time they would have completed the necessary therapy, and were thus ready to be discharged back into civilian life.

As with his previous documentaries, the structure of *Let There Be Light* is typical of the conventions of its era, such as a predictable storyline and an obligatory happy ending. Even more so than with *The Battle of San Pietro* before it, however, there are sequences in *Let There Be Light* that transcend the characteristic melodramatics with a hard-edged and emotionally authentic camera-eye. The integrity and compassion of Huston's

point of view is well honed at this point after his experiences in the Liri Valley as he now communicates an intimate understanding and sympathy for the predicament in which these GIs find themselves.

Huston incontestably had orders to follow, and *Let There Be Light* is still a propaganda film with a cumulative design that is meant to quell the fears of prospective employers. Huston nevertheless went much further in experimenting with both the form and content of his final wartime documentary than he had with his previous efforts. Despite the finely judged irony in the narration and the clarity of perception within certain scenes of *The Battle of San Pietro*, *Let There Be Light* is uncompromising in letting people and events be seen for what they are in the film's vérité segments; this time, no scenes are staged.

Like *The Battle of San Pietro* before it, *Let There Be Light* is a hybrid of both the authoritarian and cinema vérité styles; still, there is more of the "objective," probing camera in the latter motion picture as Huston had become more accustomed to this approach of photographing nonfiction footage. The director and his crew exposed approximately 375,000 feet of celluloid for *Let There Be Light*, which computes into an astronomical shooting ratio of 72 to 1 for this fifty-eight-minute documentary. By this time, Huston was obviously more taken with the joys of discovery through his use of the motion picture medium than with his lone charge to dictate a specific message and thus produce a film of influence and propaganda; in the final analysis, *Let There Be Light* is much more than a work of public relations.

The plot structure of this documentary is meant to put the "nervously wounded" veteran in the best possible light. The motion picture begins with the usual voice-over interpreting a montage of mentally injured and combat-exhausted soldiers being admitted for rest and rehabilitation to Mason General Hospital. Each group is typically composed of seventy-five patients who the film presents as "casualties of the spirit" that "in the fulfillment of their duties as soldiers, were forced beyond the limit of human endurance." Huston evidently confronted some of his own limitations and recognized those of his comrades at San Pietro; he was therefore perceptive enough, sensitive of what was to come, and consequently inclined to stand back and improvise with his film technique to allow the impact of the next important sequence to unfold on its own.

Huston thereupon sets up one camera on a doctor and another on a series of incoming GIs and then lets the technology record the subsequent

proceedings as each patient responds to questions about the whys and wherefores of his present disability. The resulting twelve minutes is arguably the best footage in *Let There Be Light* and reason enough to earmark this film as an exceptional human and social document.

The style of this segment predates the British free-cinema and American vérité movements by more than a decade, as Huston relies solely on "talking heads" and the inherent drama in each of these disabled soldier's individual stories to hold interest in the sequence. He is successful as twelve different GIs recount their various fears, as well as the horror of seeing friends and acquaintances killed before their eyes; in the process, these men exhibit a number of psychoneurotic symptoms, such as whispering, mumbling, crying, stuttering, shaking, wandering concentration, and a tendency to avoid their doctor's gaze. It is a genuinely sad and poignant sequence filled with rambling conversations, faraway looks, and startling self-appraisals like "I guess I just got tired of living" and "I used to always have fun. I used to be going places . . . I don't go no more."

The rest of the documentary evidences a pattern of checkerboarding where a conventional montage sequence, which describes the action in a voice-over, is interspersed with a more neutral and observational vérité segment of much longer takes and ambient sound. This strategy ultimately makes certain parts of *Let There Be Light* far more satisfying than the whole since the artificiality of the authoritarian style clashes with the inherent spontaneity of those sequences that speak for themselves.

Besides the aforementioned sequence of interviews, there are five scenes in *Let There Be Light* that are predominantly vérité in style. These five sections constitute forty-three of the film's fifty-eight minutes, or nearly three-quarters of the screen time. This percentage is a substantial stylistic change from *The Battle of San Pietro*, which is composed of a running voice-over that accompanies most of the text, interpreting the action and images.

The five scenes in *Let There Be Light* that contain elements of vérité filmmaking are: a young soldier unable to walk is administered an injection of sodium amytol as "a short cut to the unconscious mind," which successfully begins his therapy by dramatically allowing him to walk again; a room full of men undergo group psychotherapy and talk about their "inner conflicts"; a GI who lost his memory during a shellburst at Okinawa is hypnotized and begins to recall his fear and terror of battle; another soldier who stutters is also given sodium amytol to induce a state

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Let There Be Light: the agonized faces of the psychoneurotic soldiers.

similar to hypnosis that emphatically brings him to tears as he clearly states, "I can talk! Oh, God, listen! God, I can talk!"; and a final group meeting that is actually less an exercise in therapy than it is an opportunity for the men to speak directly to the camera about how they want to be treated, how they think the world will react to them after they are discharged, and what they believe they have to offer to future employers.

Several critics have rightly pointed out that the above scenes in *Let There Be Light* create a strong impression that many of these patients are quickly and miraculously cured despite several sections in the narration that qualify the dramatic turnabouts on the screen as merely first steps toward total rehabilitation.²⁵ The major flaw in the film certainly is this strong disposition to believe in the unfailing powers of the various military psychiatrists at Mason General. This sense of blind faith about the wonders of psychiatry is indeed reinforced by the very title of the film, *Let There Be Light*, which at times deflects the film's focus from its premiere strength: Huston's undaunted and unadorned gaze at the struggle of each of these GIs with his own personal neurosis.

The highlight of the final sequence, for example, is a baseball game where painful and telling segments from the opening interviews are cross-cut with the vigorous displays of energy and enthusiasm that are presently being brandished on the ballfield, most particularly, the stutterer is now portrayed as an assertive umpire, while the young man who couldn't walk speeds around the bases for a home run. The implicit conclusion in this documentary's final, upbeat sequence is clear: These shell-shocked soldiers have been taken care of and transformed by a caring and understanding army that won't abandon its men.

Unfortunately, this specific use of parallel editing diverts attention away from the men's pain and the potential to further explore in depth the process of their recoveries. No doubt, the propaganda imperative of *Let There Be Light* will always give contemporary audiences pause, as viewers today are much less inclined to accept without question that these men have recovered so thoroughly and completely in just ten short weeks.

To put the film into perspective, *Let There Be Light* is simply not as pure an exercise in cinema vérité as audiences are now accustomed to after more than three decades of development and maturation of this form; the film is, however, a hybrid example and precursor to the eventual emergence of this style in the late 1950s. Moreover, *Let There Be Light* offers

much more than the predictability of the official military position. Huston's honesty, intelligence, and sensitivity also allowed him to select and focus on those telling moments that those in the army typically ignored, didn't notice, or frankly wouldn't admit. The sight of sincere though tormented GIs left crying, stuttering, or shaking in the wake of their combat experiences flies in the face of the "warrior" myth, which said that our American soldiers went to war and came back all the stronger for the experience, standing tall and proud for having served their country well."²⁶ Huston's message was, in its own way, patriotic but with a different twist: He exposes us to the unabashed pain and anguish of World War II's forgotten GIs and implies in the process that they too "served their country well."

Huston went further to assert that a psychoneurotic impairment is no more disgraceful than a physical injury. This point of view is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that most people in the America of 1945–1946 were traditionally indifferent or even antagonistic toward the "the returning soldier—nervously wounded." Mental illness was still a taboo subject in American society, and the shell-shocked soldier was considered by many in the armed services to be a malingerer, a quitter, or a coward. Dr. William C. Menninger's pioneering study about the extent and reality of the army's psychiatric casualties during World War II, *Psychiatry in a Troubled World*, was still nearly two years away from publication.²⁷

Huston, therefore, was well ahead of his time in taking pains in *Let There Be Light* to reveal the truth, as he knew it, about the prevalence and ordinariness of being a psychoneurotic casualty of World War II; in so doing, he was also wise enough to gravitate slowly to a newer, more probing, and observational film style that was necessary to let these veterans, in a sense, speak for themselves. The reaction of the Department of the Army to such an unfettered picture of veteran GIs in psychological distress far surpassed the alarm and outrage elicited by *The Battle of San Pietro*. What resulted was a long-term ban of the film that in effect successfully inhibited and suppressed the future influence of *Let There Be Light* on the subsequent evolution of both the style and content of nonfiction filmmaking in America during the 1950s and 1960s; it would be nearly a decade after the completion of this documentary before similar vérité experiments began to appear in either England or the United States.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE MILITARY IS PARAMOUNT

To this day I don't know who the opponents of this picture were, or are, but they have certainly been unflinching in their determination that it shall not be seen.

—John Huston, *An Open Book*

In the second and final group therapy scene in *Let There Be Light*, one of the GI patients sums up his feelings and hopes about the prospective employers he believes he will likely encounter after his discharge: "Well, if he's an intelligent man . . . why he's going react the same way as any other normal human being would. He's going to say . . . I'll try him out." The irony of this statement, in hindsight, is that the army, his then present support group and association, would itself come up short in having the necessary faith and intelligence to accept these recovering psychoneurotic veterans for who they were, as well as trust that the civilian population across the United States would be able to understand and respond appropriately to the intended message of this documentary.

No one, of course, got the chance to prove that Army Public Relations was wrong in suppressing this motion picture. On February 14, 1946, Maj. John Huston was ordered to hand carry a release print of *Let There Be Light* on a trip from New York to Washington for the usual approval showing the next day.²⁸ Huston obeyed this directive, and the film was approved verbally for public release by the Army Pictorial Service the following week.²⁹ Sometime between the end of February and the beginning of March, however, the policy group of Army Public Relations convinced the United States War Department to restrict the distribution of *Let There Be Light* from each and every public and military concern except seven military hospitals in America, the Veterans Administration, the U.S. Department of the Navy, any service command Signal Corps libraries, and all overseas theaters of battle for viewing by relevant military personnel.³⁰

The official order limiting the release of *Let There Be Light* was issued on March 11, 1946; this dictate contained no reasons whatsoever for the ban. In a letter sent the same day by Lt. Harry P. Warner, post legal officer of the Army Signal Corps, mention is made of a telephone call to the Pentagon in reference to the existence of "clearances on [the] subject." Lieutenant Warner moreover states that "all personnel who appear in the

film have authorized showing of the film on a world-wide basis."³¹ On April 2, 1946, Capt. David Burman of the Signal Corps mailed two photostatic copies of each of the military personnel releases for *Let There Be Light* to the Pentagon; by this time, though, he also makes mention of the fact that four of the enlisted men who appeared in the film had not "executed releases."³² In addition, these veterans had already been discharged from the army and no effort was made henceforth to secure clearances from them. It appears that Army Public Relations now had found its first official rationale for restricting the subsequent distribution and exhibition of *Let There Be Light*; the Pentagon began to use this question of the film's waivers as a means of arguing for its prohibition.

John Huston and the Army Pictorial Service were next informed by Army Public Relations that their documentary was deemed an invasion of privacy for the shell-shocked patients depicted in the picture; consequently, *Let There Be Light* was subject to policy censorship. Huston's reaction was adamant: "It was decided by the policy department. The film was 'unsuitable.' They said they felt it was unfair to the patients, to the men. In that case, I could see no justification for the film ever having been made at all. The original purpose, you know, was stated by the same people. Their argument is rather a paradox."³³ What makes this claim even more paradoxical in retrospect is the fact that the Pentagon had approved the publication of photographs made from certain frames of *Let There Be Light* as pictorial accompaniments for articles related to the topic of psychoneurotic veterans in two major, mass-circulated, American magazines. The first of these instances, it should be noted, occurred before the entire controversy seemed probable, or even possible. In early October 1945, Helen Robinson, an editorial staff member of *Life*, contacted the army to secure clearance for 241 frames of the film that Huston and Gene Fowler were then editing.³⁴ *Life* needed the photographs to support a short story written by John Hersey about the dramatic treatments that were being experimented with and developed by the army at the time to treat psychiatric casualties. Since Hersey's article was a work of fiction, no actual soldiers were identified by name; nevertheless, eleven stills appeared with the text: nine pictures of the young soldier who could not walk, and two shots of the chronic stutterer.³⁵ Both men had been located at their homes after being discharged by officials of the U.S. Signal Corps, and each cable a release to *Life* by Western Union.³⁶ On October 29, 1945, this issue of *Life* reached the newsstands, and photographs in close-up and medium

shot of the two relevant parties were then available for millions of readers to see.

More surprisingly, the same scenario replayed itself during the six weeks that approval for the standard, domestic distribution of *Let There Be Light* was being debated and reviewed. On January 27 and again on February 1, 1946, Dorothy Wheelock, associate editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, wrote the chief of Army Public Relations at the Pentagon to acquire frames from *Let There Be Light* in order to make photographs that would be used to reinforce a favorable commentary of the documentary that had been written by Frances McFadden.³⁷ In deference to the army and in good faith, Wheelock enclosed a copy of McFadden's review so Pentagon officials could inform the magazine of "any deletions which [they] wished made."³⁸ Wheelock, McFadden, and *Harper's Bazaar* art director, Alexey Brodovitch, had seen a rough-cut of the film at Astoria Studio in early January at the personal invitation of John Huston. Maj. Dallas Halverstadt, chief of Army Public Relations, next informed Wheelock by phone that permission would only be granted when he received the appropriate releases from the men appearing in the motion picture.³⁹ As mentioned earlier, photostatic copies of these clearances did not reach his office until April 12, 1946, or nearly three weeks after the official ban was imposed.⁴⁰ Quite clearly, the argument about holding back the film because of the four missing releases had not been formulated yet because, preposterously, approval was relayed to Dorothy Wheelock at *Harper's Bazaar*, and three close-ups of the young veteran who couldn't walk accompanied publication of McFadden's commentary in the May 1946 issue of the magazine; again, the soldier was not identified by name, but his face was ever present for millions to witness.⁴¹

Why would Army Public Relations ban the distribution of *Let There Be Light* to the general public on March 11 and then release frames of the film in early April for the purpose of eventual publication in *Harper's Bazaar*? The reason for this seeming contradiction appears to be twofold: First, the Pentagon's argument that *Let There Be Light* was an invasion of privacy had indeed not been formulated yet. Consequently, Army Public Relations was not thinking in terms of the fact that they too would be "invading a patient's privacy" by releasing pictures of him to a magazine that had national exposure. Second, there had to be a misstep or oversight in the decision-making process by what Huston calls "that bureaucratic morass [at] the War Department."⁴² Why else would Army Public Rela-

tions agree to release pictures to accompany a review of a film that they had no intention of releasing domestically?

On orders in April 1946, the Signal Corps sent the original releases from *Let There Be Light* to the Pentagon. Huston later reported that "the War Department decided that they would pay no attention to any releases. And then the releases themselves became 'misplaced' there, or lost in the shuffle at the Pentagon."⁴³ Obviously, there was no fighting the jurisdiction of the Pentagon; the authority of the military is always paramount in matters that fall within its own purview. Huston himself had been shocked by the entire controversy; he had from the start believed that *Let There Be Light* was a hopeful and inspiring film. He instead found some solace in the fact that he had taken one of the first two release prints back with him to California, much to the chagrin of the War Department; at least he would now have a copy of his own motion picture for safe keeping.⁴⁴ Huston was also left with a modicum of consolation in the belief that someday the ban on *Let There Be Light* would be lifted; unfortunately, this reprieve took thirty-five years.

Let There Be Light became a cause célèbre with several New York film critics, especially James Agee of *The Nation* and Archer Winston of the *New York Post*, when the motion picture curators at the Museum of Modern Art tried to have a special screening of this documentary during the early summer of 1946. Huston requested and received permission from Army Public Relations to schedule and screen his picture. On the afternoon of the showing, however, just minutes before the appointed starting time of the viewing with an audience assembled, two military policemen arrived and confiscated the print: the Pentagon had changed its mind at the very last minute, and much of the New York film community was outraged by the action.

What resulted was a vigorous effort by Arthur Mayer, a prominent New York exhibitor and importer-distributor of both notable international and controversial domestic motion pictures, to rescue and release *Let There Be Light* for public consumption in 1947. The time was not propitious for such a coup, though, as the War Department only allowed the documentary to be seen during 1947 and 1948 by three groups or individuals other than those who were originally authorized in the aforementioned March 11, 1946, directive that had limited the scope of the picture's distribution and exhibition. Not surprisingly, two of these parties were respected members of the American psychological establishment, while the third

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was a Hollywood producer who was researching a film on psychoneurotic behavior.⁴⁵

The U.S. Army Pictorial Service actually produced a docudrama in the summer and fall of 1947 that was based on *Let There Be Light*. *Shades of Gray* (1948) was released in January and was entered by the U.S. Signal Corps in that year's best documentary category for the Academy Award; the film was not selected, nor was it nonfiction. The army wanted to recreate the impact and immediacy of *Let There Be Light*, but this time they decided to use actors in a drama employing documentary stylistics that would be based on actual case histories of psychoneurotic patients. The result is tepid, overly sentimental, and superficial when compared to the original. This time the "powers that be" controlled the characterizations of the shell-shocked GIs, and the result was a picture of fictionalized courage and valor, rather than the reality of disabled and distressed veterans who were overwhelmed and sometimes out of control. John Huston thought little of the film when he saw it.

The concern about the suppression of *Let There Be Light* subsided considerably after 1948. The issue of psychoneurotic GIs was obviously no longer current or pressing; the attention of most Americans went elsewhere. John Huston himself enjoyed one of the greatest successes of his career in 1948 with the production and release of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; with this film, he returned to making adaptations, although his war experience would in the future incline him toward shooting most of his subsequent motion pictures on location.

Some twenty-five years after the initial ban of *Let There Be Light*, James B. Rhoads, head archivist at the National Archives and Records Service, conceived of a program that would be a "Salute to John Huston" during the first week of October 1971. He intended to promote and screen for the public each of Huston's wartime documentaries, including *Let There Be Light*. On September 9, 1971, nevertheless, Mr. Rhoads was notified by the Pentagon that the ban on this documentary was still in effect because "it is believed that a public release now would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy."⁴⁶ Not enough of the right people had applied the necessary pressure to free the film this time; the process to recover and extricate *Let There Be Light* would actually begin in earnest nine years later during the final year of the Carter administration.

The course of events that ultimately led to the documentary's release really began at the instigation of Ray Stark, who at the time was develop-

ing the motion picture adaptation of *Annie* with Huston, and who had produced three of the director's previous films: *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), and *Fat City* (1972). Stark, then head of Raystar Productions, spent months carrying his personal crusade to both industry and government officials. On Stark's suggestion, Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, requested a print of the film from the Pentagon and screened it at his Washington office on November 7, 1980. Valenti's reaction was, "I was so moved by the film. I think it's a really seminal documentary"; and in turn, he began to use his considerable influence in the nation's capital to lobby for the release of *Let There Be Light* once and for all.⁴⁷ On November 8, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art held the first-ever public exhibition of the picture in an unauthorized screening during a Huston retrospective that the institution sponsored.⁴⁸ Joseph McBride contributed to the renewed interest in this documentary by writing a series of articles for *Variety* that championed the merits of the film and functioned to keep the issue of the ban in the public eye. *Let There Be Light* was a cause célèbre again after more than three decades.

During the second half of November 1980, Valenti convinced Army Secretary Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., to preview the motion picture in the context of reconsidering its prohibition; Valenti even obtained Vice President Mondale's assistance in his lobbying effort. Alexander, who was an old friend and associate of Valenti's from their days together in the Johnson administration, "lifted the ban after viewing the once controversial film and conferring with other Pentagon officials and legal counsel."⁴⁹ The order for the release of *Let There Be Light* was executed on December 16, 1980, by Brig. Gen. Lyle Barker, deputy chief of public affairs for the army. The film then had its first commercial, public opening at the Thalia in New York on January 16, 1981. Response by the New York film critics was generally mixed with a few even wondering "what the fuss is about."⁵⁰

Let There Be Light had a very successful run in revival theaters across the country that year; and afterwards, the motion picture was shown with Huston's other wartime documentaries, along with an interview with the director on the topic of these productions, in a PBS broadcast that was syndicated to stations nationwide in late 1981 and 1982.⁵¹

In the succeeding years, *Let There Be Light* has been paired with *Report from the Aleutians* and *The Battle of San Pietro* to form one of the most popular distribution packages in the history of the National Audio

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Visual Center. This agency, which functions under the aegis of the National Archives and Records Service, serves as a central clearinghouse for all federal motion pictures, audio recordings, and videotapes. In the words of William J. Blakefield, a research administrator at the center, the Huston "trilogy has met with overwhelming critical and popular response when shown before standing-room-only audiences at international film festivals, universities, and film societies . . . seen together they reflect an evolving awareness of the true nature of war."⁵²

Beginning with the patriotic conviction and unselfconscious optimism of *Report from the Aleutians*, a straight-thinking and bitter sense of irony springs forth with *The Battle of San Pietro*. This second documentary is more questioning, exploratory, and upsetting than the first work. It is therefore little wonder that this film was cut down from five reels to three, and the controversial footage destroyed; *The Battle of San Pietro* had edged into those equivocations and subtleties that are always off limits for the official army version, and contrary to the myth of the invincible warrior. Lastly, *Let There Be Light* picked up where *The Battle of San Pietro* left off: Huston clearly understood from his own combat experience why the greatest number of psychoneurotic war casualties are always among the first troops going into fire; moreover, he now understood firsthand that the shell-shocked soldier was not a second-class citizen. With *Let There Be Light*, then, the clarity and compassion in John Huston's gaze became even sharper and more riveting than it had been in his previous documentaries.

Taken together, these three motion pictures are both a story and record of personal growth as well as a lucid index of their era and culture.⁵³ Huston's penchant toward a direct, unsentimental, and hard-boiled view of people and the world was well served through his trilogy; in hindsight, Huston's production of these war documentaries was a simple and elegant example of the right artist tackling the appropriate subject.

NOTES

1. Col. K. B. Lawton, "Memorandum to Officer in Charge, Signal Corps Photographic Center, Western Branch," Dec. 19, 1942, in production case file for *Report from the Aleutians*, Film AF-114, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.

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2. "John Huston: A War Remembered." KCET-TV (Los Angeles: Raystar Television, 1981). During this program, which was syndicated on PBS, John Huston was interviewed by Cleve Roberts about his documentary trilogy. These films were then shown in their entirety.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Richard Corliss, "The Disasters of Modern War," *Time*, Jan. 19, 1981, 80.
6. Ibid.; Scott Hammen, "At War with the Army," *Film Comment*, Mar. 1980.
7. Theodore Strauss, "The Signal Corps' Fine Film on Aleutians Was Held Up by Lamentable Argument," *New York Times*, Aug. 8, 1943.
8. Hammen, "At War with the Army," 20.
9. "John Huston: A War Remembered."
10. Hammen, "At War with the Army"; Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 181-83.
11. Richard Griffith, "The Courage of the Men: An Interview with John Huston," in *Film Book 2: Films of Peace and War*, ed. Robert Hughes (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 29.
12. John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 119.
13. "John Huston: A War Remembered."
14. David Culbert, "The Making of John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro*," a presentation of the University Seminar on Cinema and Interdisciplinary Interpretation, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Feb. 23, 1984.
15. "Source Film: Captain Huston's Team Coverage--San Pietro, Italy," 111, ADC, 636, Signal Corps MP, silent, 980 feet, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.
16. "John Huston: A War Remembered."
17. James Agee, "Films," *The Nation*, May 26, 1945, 608; Bosley Crowther, "'San Pietro' Is Given A 'Bell,'" *New York Times*, July 15, 1945; Manny Farber, "War without Glamour," *New Republic*, July 30, 1945, 133; Philip T. Hartung, "The Stuff of Heroes," *Commonweal*, May 25, 1945, 141-42; and "San Pietro," *Time*, May 21, 1945, 94, 96.
18. Opening graphic in *Let There Be Light*, 91946, Army Pictorial Service, Signal Corps, U.S. War Department.
19. Joseph C. Goulden, *The Best Years: 1945-1950* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 38.
20. William L. O'Neill, ed., *American Society since 1945* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 5.
21. Maj. A. M. Whitlock, "Memorandum to the Chief, Army Pictorial Service, the Pentagon," May 7, 1945, in the production case file for *Let There Be Light*, PMF-5019, 111, M, 1241, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. (This production case file will hereafter be referred to as PCT-Light.)

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22. Huston, *An Open Book*, 122.
23. Maj. J. C. Blaustein, "Memorandum to the Director of the Training Films Division—What Is a Psychoneurotic?" May 14, 1945, in PCF-Light.
24. Besides *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945), Dore Shary produced the following three films involving the theme of shell-shocked or mentally disturbed GIs between 1945 and 1946: *I'll Be Seeing You* (1945), *They Dream of Home* (1945), and *Till the End of Time* (1946).
25. Corliss, "Disasters of Modern War"; Hammen, "At War with the Army"; Stanley Kauffmann, "Old but New, New but Old," *New Republic*, Jan. 31, 1981, 20; and Andrew Sarris, "Hobgoblins of Reality," *Village Voice*, Jan. 21–27, 1981, 45.
26. Huston, *An Open Book*, 125.
27. "Minds and War," *Newsweek*, May 24, 1948; and William C. Menninger, *Psychiatry in a Troubled World* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).
28. Capt. John G. T. Gilmour, "Memorandum to Mr. Harburger, Editorial Branch," Feb. 14, 1946, in PCF-Light.
29. Capt. John G. T. Gilmour, "Memorandum to Director, Control Division," Feb. 21, 1946, in PCF-Light.
30. Lt. and Col. K. McClure, "Memorandum to Chief Signal Officer, Army Pictorial Service," March 11, 1946, in PCF-Light.
31. 1st Lt. Harry P. Warner, "Memorandum to the Chief, Army Pictorial Service, the Pentagon," Mar. 11, 1946, PCF-Light.
32. Capt. David Burman, "Memorandum to the Chief, Army Pictorial Service, the Pentagon," Apr. 2, 1946, in PCF-Light.
33. Griffith, "Courage of the Men," 32.
34. Helen Robinson, letter to Maj. Warren Wade, Oct. 13, 1945; and Maj. Warren Wade, "Memorandum to Chief, Film Library Branch," Oct. 18, 1945, in PCF-Light.
35. John Hersey, "A Short Talk with Erlanger: The Army Is Using a Dramatic Treatment Called Narco-Synthesis to Help Psychiatric Casualties," *Life*, Oct. 29, 1945, 108–22.
36. Robert A. Gerardi, telegram to Hildegard Maynard, "A Release to Publish Photographs of Gerardi," Oct. 12, 1945, in PCF-Light; and Eric M. Hofmeister, Jr., telegram to Hildegard Maynard, "A Release to Publish Photographs of Hofmeister," Oct. 12, 1945, in PCF-Light.
37. Dorothy Wheelock, letter to the chief, Army Public Relations, the War Department, Jan. 27, 1946, in PCF-Light.
38. Dorothy Wheelock, letter to Maj. Dallas Halverstadt, chief, Army Public Relations, the War Department, Feb. 1, 1946, in PCF-Light.
39. Dorothy Wheelock, letter to Colonel Barrett, commanding officer, Signal Corps, Photographic Center, Long Island City, N.Y., Feb. 1, 1946, in PCF-Light.

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40. Capt. David Burman.
41. Frances McFadden, "Let There Be Light," *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1946, 116-17, 177.
42. Huston, *An Open Book*, 126.
43. Griffith, "Courage of the Men," 33.
44. Capt. John G. T. Gilmour, "Memorandum to Mr. Harburger, Editorial Branch," Feb. 27, 1946, in PCF-Light.
45. Col. R. E. Burns, "Memorandum to Chief, Motion Picture Branch—Authorization for Dr. Benjamin Simon, Clinical Director of the Connecticut State Hospital and Member of the Committee on Occupational Therapy of the American Psychiatric Association," Aug. 29, 1947, in PCF-Light; Emil A. Gutheil, M.D., letter to Lt. Col. James B. Buchanan, Signal Corps Photographic Center, a thank-you note for authorization accorded to the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy, Feb. 28, 1948, in PCF-Light; and Col. R. E. Burns, "Memorandum to Chief, Motion Picture Branch—Authorization for Mr. Joseph Seidelman of Universal International," May 8, 1947, in PCF-Light.
46. Jerry W. Friedheim, letter to Mr. James B. Rhoads, archivist of the United States, Sept. 9, 1971, in PCF-Light.
47. "Huston's Suppressed Army Film Prompts Valenti Plea to Pentagon," *Variety*, Nov. 19, 1980, 5.
48. "Suppressed 35 years. [sic], Huston's 'Let There Be Light' Is Great," *Variety*, Nov. 12, 1980, 26, 44. Bootleg prints of *Let There Be Light* had been circulating among private collectors ever since the mid-1970s. One of these unauthorized copies was shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
49. "Huston's 'Let There Be Light' Gets Green Light from Army," *Variety*, Dec. 17, 1980, 7, 28.
50. Vincent Canby, "Film: 'Let There Be Light,' John Huston vs. the Army," *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1981; Corliss, "Disasters of Modern War"; Kauffmann, "Old but New"; Sarris, "Hobgoblins."
51. "John Huston: A War Remembered."
52. William J. Blaketfield, *Documentary Film Classics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 1984), 35.
53. The following are credits for Huston's documentary trilogy: *Report from the Aleutians* (1943), forty-seven minutes, color; producer: Army Pictorial Service, Signal Corps, U.S. War Department; director and writer: John Huston; camera: Jules Buck, Freeman Collins, Herman Crabtree, Buzz Ellsworth, and Rey Scott; and narrators: Walter and John Huston. *The Battle of San Pietro* (1945), thirty-three minutes, black and white; producer: Army Pictorial Service, Signal Corps, U.S. War Department; director, writer, and narrator: John Huston; camera: Jules Buck, John Huston, and many other Signal Corps cameramen; musical performances: Army Air Force Orchestra, Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and St. Brendan's

Boy's Choir. *Let There Be Light*. Producer: Army Pictorial Service; director: John Huston; writers: John Huston, Lloyd F. Lusk, and Lloyd F. Lusk Jr.; music: Dimmock on Dec. 16, 1945.

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Boy's Choir. *Let There Be Light* (1946), fifty-eight minutes, black and white: producer: Army Pictorial Service, Signal Corps, U.S. War Department; director: John Huston; writers: Charles Kaufman and John Huston; camera: Stanley Cortez, John Doran, Lloyd Fromm, Joseph Jackman, and George Smith; editor: Gene Fowler, Jr.; music: Dimitri Tiomkin; narrator: Walter Huston (released to the general public on Dec. 16, 1980).