

# *History on Television: A Critical Archival Examination of “The Valour and the Horror”*

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**“The Valour and the Horror - Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941” / “La Bravoure et le mépris - La Bataille de Hong-Kong,”** broadcast on CBC French television network, 3 January 1992, on CBC English television network, 12 January 1992, and on CBC Newsworld, 21 March 1992; 2 hours.

**“The Valour and the Horror - Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command” / “La Bravoure et le mépris - L’aviation de bombardement,”** broadcast on CBC French television network, 10 January 1992, on CBC English television network, 19 January 1992, and on CBC Newsworld, 28 March 1992; 2 hours.

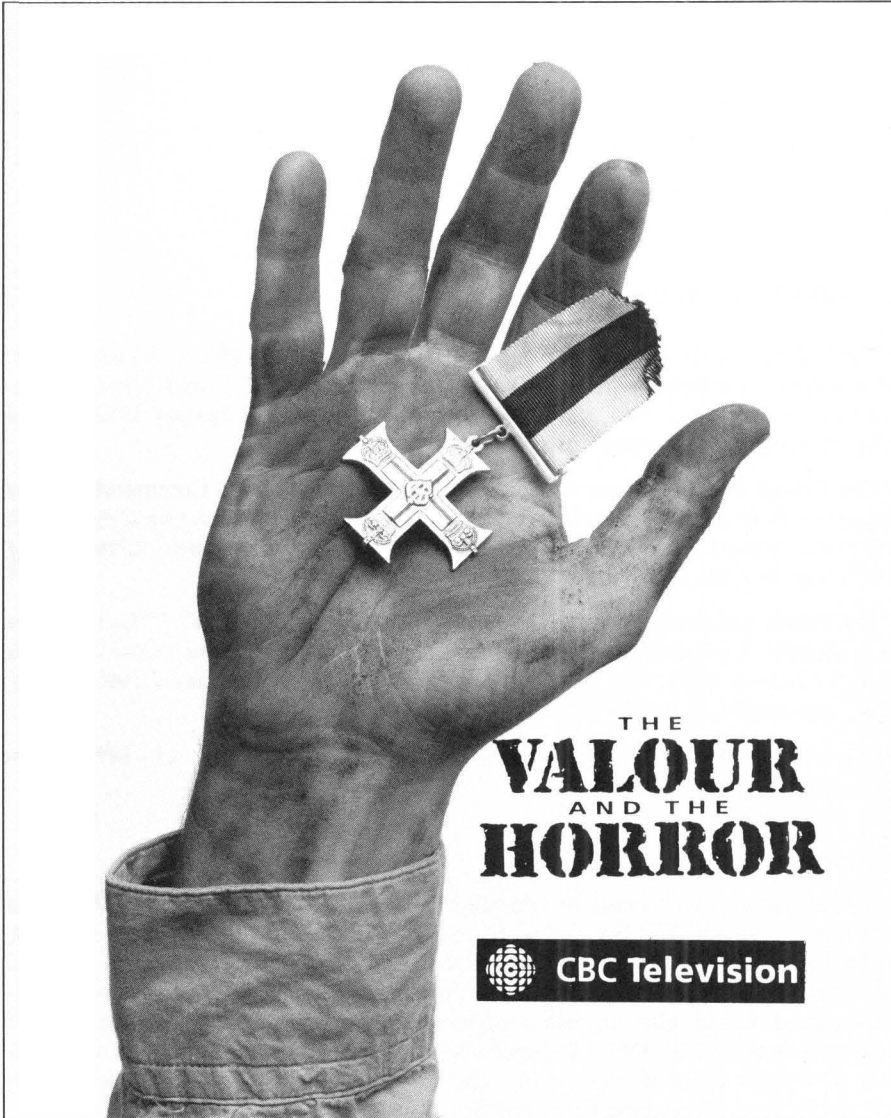
**“The Valour and the Horror - In Desperate Battle: Normandy 1944” / “La Bravoure et le mépris - La Bataille de Normandie,”** broadcast on CBC French network television, 17 January 1992, on CBC English network television, 26 January 1992, and on CBC Newsworld, 4 April 1992; 2 hours.

The television series is available for purchase on videocassette at a cost of \$49.95 from National Film Board offices.

## *Introduction*

Do we really want our history on television? We surely want to reach the millions that pay rapt attention to TV. But can we live with what television does to our documents and our past? CBC Television broadcast in January 1992 a retrospective series on World War II entitled, “The Valour and the Horror.” It was an ambitious project and stimulated a good deal of reaction, both positive and negative. The cumulative audience for each episode exceeded 4,000,000 Canadians, who watched at least a portion of the broadcast. Therefore, the phenomenon of “The Valour and the Horror” provides an excellent opportunity to examine these questions.

Archivists are often less than enthusiastic when they learn that a broadcaster or documentary-maker is requesting access to the records. Documentary-makers, especially, often have well-developed scripts and very firm pre-conceived notions of how the archival



THE  
**VALOUR**  
AND THE  
**HORROR**

 **CBC Television**

record “looks” and “sounds.” They sometimes decide how the document will be incorporated in their production before arriving at the archives, and consequently have little patience for the nuances and qualifications discerned by archivists. Documentary-makers are invariably working to close and urgent deadlines and have little patience with archival policies and procedures. Their equipment and crews can easily be more disruptive, and require more time than promised. Filming requirements can put fragile documents at risk, and some of the contortions asked of archivists and documents can be bizarre and downright difficult.

Then after all this, the footage supplied, the documents themselves or the archivists’s comments, may never make it into the ultimate product. Finally, the credits at the end of the documentary may get the name of the archival institution wrong, or omit mention of the institution altogether. Rarely are archivists or visual researchers individually acknowledged, although hair-dressers and chauffeurs are increasingly gaining their own credits.

Beyond these irritations, the misconceptions and superficialities that film and broadcasting can invent or perpetuate about history can be more serious. These media need to simplify complexities, telescope time and search out the dramatic. The arbitrary time limits of broadcasting and the conventions of such media can be unkind to our documents.

Yet for all this, archivists are still flattered when the broadcaster or documentary-maker calls — and so we should be. We have been long telling ourselves that we serve a much wider clientele than the traditional historians. Here is our chance to reach the millions who paid scant attention to the few history courses that they may have taken. The vast majority of those that watch television will never pick up the history books written by the conventional researchers using our collections. Here then is the opportunity to enable our documents to reach that wider public.

### “The Valour and the Horror” — *The Broadcast*

“The Valour and the Horror” was initially broadcast on the CBC Television network on consecutive Sunday evenings in January 1992, in prime time, from 8:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The French-language version, “La Bravoure et le mépris” was on prime time during Friday evenings in the same month. In March, the series was rebroadcast on Saturday evenings on CBC “Newsworld,” the second and third episodes being followed by panel discussions.

The first episode, entitled “Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941,” tells the stories of the Canadians taken prisoner when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in December 1941. The attack was apparently unexpected, and the Canadian and British forces were easily overwhelmed. Casualties were heavy because of lack of training and preparation, as well as incompetent leadership. Japanese atrocities are recounted from trial testimony, diaries, letters and recollections of two veterans who revisit the area. The prisoners were eventually moved to labour camps in Japan, where many more suffered and died before they were liberated at the end of the war. The episode follows two veterans on a return trip to Hong Kong and Japan, having them recount their personal experiences and meet with Japanese veterans.

The second episode, entitled “Death by Moonlight — Bomber Command,” tells the stories of Canadians flying in the Royal Canadian Air Force as part of Bomber Command.

Their training in Canada and Britain as well as social life in Britain is re-enacted. The dangers and horrors experienced by the pilots are recounted and dramatized. The strategy of the air offensive is examined and the German civilian casualties are documented. The episode follows two pilots on a visit to the British airfield where they were stationed, and then to Germany where they meet German survivors and are confronted with photographs of the horror that the bombs inflicted.

The third episode, entitled "In Desperate Battle: Normandy 1944," tells the stories of Canadian soldiers fighting in France. The atrocities inflicted on prisoners of war by both sides are documented. The episode focuses on the attack on the German position at Verrières Ridge and, particularly, the massacre suffered by the Black Watch Regiment of Montreal. It is critical of the training and deployment of the Canadians as well as the military leadership, which resulted in unnecessary casualties. This episode is also critical of the Canadian war reporters who saw their role as boosting rather than as reporting on the events. This episode again follows two veterans: Jacques Dextraze, who rose to become Chief of the Defence Staff, and Sydney Radley-Walters, a tank commander who also eventually became a general; together they tour the French towns and battlefields where they had fought.

The series was extensively researched and three years in preparation.<sup>2</sup> The cost of the series was \$2,800,000; given that it yielded twelve hours of prime time network television, those are not exorbitant costs.<sup>3</sup> Also, given that more than 4,000,000 Canadians, on average, watched some portion of each episode, the series would be considered a commercial success.<sup>4</sup>

The narration by Terence McKenna and Jean-François Lepine (for the French-language version) is strong and effective, because both are well-established journalists with proven credibility. They are seen on camera only briefly at the beginning of each episode, but through their voice-over the viewer is always aware of the documentary film-maker's presence.

### **Who**

This television series was very much the inspiration of Brian McKenna. He has been the Montreal correspondent for CBC Radio on "As It Happens" and Peter Gzoswki's "This Country in the Morning," and was a founding producer for CBC Television's "Fifth Estate." McKenna considers investigative journalism the highest of callings and brings a passion and energy to his projects that one can only admire.<sup>5</sup>

McKenna began his historical investigation of Canadian involvement in war with a documentary on World War I entitled "The Killing Ground." He is hoping to complete this investigation of Canada's participation in World War II with documentaries on the navy, the home front and post-war trauma. He is currently working on the television series, "Pierre Elliott Trudeau: The Memoirs." Trudeau's insistence on editorial control for this series has been well publicized, and given McKenna's independent investigative style, it will be fascinating to see the results of this collaboration.

Terence McKenna, Brian's brother, co-wrote and narrated the episodes. He also began as a CBC Radio producer, joining CBC Television's "The Journal" when it was created in 1982. He brings a very strong presence to these documentaries in

a voice reminiscent of Donald Brittan, the legendary NFB film-maker who died a few years ago.

The production was undertaken by an independent company, Galafilm, founded by André Lamy and Arnie Gelbart. Both are situated in Montreal and have long experience in film production. The NFB underwrote \$250,000 of the costs, which included all the film-editing. The CBC covered almost \$1,000,000 of the cost in exchange for television rights for four telecasts on the main networks and unlimited repeats on CBC Newsworld for a period of five years. CBC cameramen shot the original location footage. The dramatizations of the recollections and the re-enactments were shot in CBC studios with the assistance of the CBC drama department.<sup>6</sup>

### *How*

All the episodes are sympathetic to the ordinary soldier, treating him with great respect and dignity. At the same time the series is critical of the military leadership, both British and Canadian. Anger is manifested at the limited and misleading information provided to soldiers, as well as citizens at home. The episodes present both the valour and the horror of war from individual and personal perspectives. The series clearly wants to sound a warning about all wars that peoples engage in. Yet, it avoids sitting in judgement or criticizing the motives of the soldiers.

All episodes use young actors to bring to life recollections from the oral history interviews and archival research conducted by the investigators for the series. The soldiers are portrayed in military uniforms faithful to the period and their unit. Sometimes we see them against a black background, other times in a period environment speaking their thoughts directly to the camera. Typical war-time scenes, as well as historical events, moreover, are re-enacted in a period setting. The style of the presentation and editing of the series always makes it clear that this use of actors occurs within contemporary footage created specifically for the series.

Each episode has two veterans whom we see on camera and come to know as they visit the scenes of their World War II experiences. They were selected through the extensive oral history interviews conducted for the series. In each case they provide straightforward and compelling witness to the events which they recall. They provide the unifying thread for each of the episodes. Their presence on camera, moreover, makes the message of the series much stronger and more convincing.

There is no mistaking the style of contemporary investigative journalism brought to bear on history through this television series. Indeed, this style is quite intentional given the background of both the McKennas. Brian McKenna describes his objective in the series as trying "to do the reporting that was never done during or after the Second World War." In that sense, the series does not claim to provide the definitive history of the Canadian World War II experience.

Yet the series does claim to tell the "truth" about Canadians during the war, for the first time. Researchers for the series have relied heavily upon historians and have worked through the standard archival sources. Brian McKenna is angry with historians for what he calls "their lack of courage in not having drawn the conclusions that I found among their own evidence."

Therefore, both historians and archivists have good reason to watch the series closely and judge it by their highest critical standards. "The Valour and the Horror" is both good television and good history. It is oral history fulfilling the expectations that some have held for it. "The Valour and the Horror" is not conventional history, however, so archivists will have to ponder their records being used in different ways, and for different purposes, than they have been accustomed to.

### *Use of Archival Records*

Archival records play a leading role in this series, and the producers have only kind and generous things to say about the cooperation and assistance received from archivists and archives. Researchers for the series worked in archives in Canada, the United States, Britain, Germany and Japan, and went to great lengths to respect the context of the records. Indeed, a possible criticism of the series is that sometimes the stories to be told may have been selected according to the most graphic footage and still photographs available. This may well be the case, but it is also an inherent quality of television. For an archivist, in any case, this is a welcome change from researchers arriving with their stories well-developed before ever examining the archival record.<sup>7</sup>

Researchers for this series also went well beyond archives in their search for film footage, interviewees, personal photographs, diaries and letters. They actively searched out such records privately, using resources and energy that archives can only envy. They were entrusted with precious personal memorabilia that had been carefully safeguarded, and they subsequently returned all such records. Archives might well consider entering into a partnership with such historical documentary projects. Some of the records uncovered through such projects might well warrant archival preservation.

Researchers for this television series would have appreciated an inventory of visual sources relating to Canada and World War II. However, we know that in view of their next project the documentary-maker may be asking for dance, party footage, after that perhaps dust storms on the prairies; thereafter, even they cannot anticipate what they may be requesting. Archives, therefore can hardly be expected to anticipate which historical subjects television will be exploring, so as to have the inventories ready beforehand.

Since their product is in a visual medium, researchers for this series greatly appreciated index systems which included a sample image. Some photographic holdings have included such images on their index cards, and recent computer cataloguing systems can include images. Archives that seriously want to be accessible to film and television producers should, therefore, consider incorporating such visual aids in their research tools.

A television historical documentary series such as "The Valour and the Horror" obviously relies heavily upon moving image archives. Researching such footage takes substantial time and money, given that most such archives have to be visited in person in order to undertake the research. It can be tedious and time-consuming to browse through huge holdings in order to locate precious moments that will be used in a production. Shooting ratios for studio or location footage can easily be 20 or 30 to 1 and, similarly, documentary projects regularly screen and request much more archival footage than they can ever use.

It is therefore easiest for film and television productions to rely upon stock shot film and video resources. Stock shot companies, which own the rights to film and video footage for the purpose of sales to such productions, are aggressively responding to the growing demand for footage. They are marketing their holdings by means of full-colour brochures and imaginative promotional techniques. They are describing the visual content of their holdings in minute detail, sometimes down to every frame on every foot of film or videotape. They offer reference viewing compilations on any subject requested, and promise to furnish professional quality and format copies when and as required. They charge for all these services, of course, expecting to make a profit. Their materials tend to consist of generic footage of locations and events that can be used for a variety of purposes.<sup>8</sup> Moving image archives rarely can equal the resources provided by stock shot collections.

“The Valour and the Horror”, nevertheless, relied upon moving image archives rather than the stock shot film and video companies, and searched out footage that had not been used before. Particularly in the Bomber Command and Normandy episodes, they used German footage that, only recently, has become available because of changing political circumstances in Germany. The liberation of the Hong Kong veterans and the documented devastation in Hamburg are particularly striking examples that remain etched in one’s memory long after the broadcast.

Amateur 16 mm footage taken by one of the Canadian soldiers assigned to go to Hong Kong, moreover, was located at the Manitoba Museum of Man. The project covered the costs for the restoration of this footage at the NFB, including generating video copies for the Museum. Some small extracts of this colour footage reveal the soldiers in training in Jamaica. The soldier was obviously a skilful cameraman, and apparently continued filming in Hong Kong. This footage was never recovered.

Actual footage of historic events is often less dramatic and revealing than documentary-makers would like. Staged or re-created footage, therefore, is frequently represented as actual footage in television documentaries. Particularly if the footage comes from training, publicity or fiction films of the same era as is being depicted, it can have a very “authentic” or convincing look. Once such footage is represented as actuality in a documentary, moreover, it can reappear repeatedly as historical actuality. Such period re-created footage can, of course, be used perfectly legitimately. The context of how and why such film was made will often enhance, rather than detract from, its impact.

Training and publicity footage illustrate much about their time and are used to good advantage throughout “The Valour and the Horror.” Especially in the body language of the soldiers in training does one see a robustness and eagerness that intensifies the viewer’s apprehension at the horror which they are about to endure. The series does not misrepresent re-created footage as actuality, but it does not always remind the viewers of the context of what they are watching.

Fiction footage represents the intention of the film-maker, and is as good as the skills and technology of his crew. Particularly in representing war-time “action,” fictional footage is invariably more dramatic than reality: consider, for example the visual limitations of the footage of the “actual” devastation wrought by the bombing of Iraq during the Gulf War, despite dramatic advances in television technology.

The magic of film and television production techniques make re-creations of war-time bombing and combat so dramatic and effective that actual footage often looks weak

and contrived by comparison. Fiction footage from the same era as is being depicted conspicuously bears the same “look” and “feel” as the actual footage of the period. Documentary-makers sometimes represent such fiction footage as actuality, either deliberately or quite innocently. If done well, moreover, even the informed viewer can be fooled, and only the film connoisseur or visual researcher, through recognizing the particular cinematic sequence, could ever tell.

“The Valour and the Horror” used footage from the 1954 Warner Brothers film *The Dam Busters* and did so very effectively.<sup>9</sup> The documentary contrasts the reality of the very limited success of these bombing missions with the enthusiasm of the feature film a decade later, which was still perpetuating the myth that this mission was a great success. This use of fiction footage served the purpose of “The Valour and the Horror” very well, because it again demonstrated the dichotomy between popular postwar perceptions of the wartime experience and the reality of war itself.

Docudramas are a genre devised to facilitate greater latitude and flexibility than actual, staged or fictional footage can provide. Sometimes docudramas may mix and match actuality and specially-shot footage, while at other times they may totally re-create a sequence of events. Canadians have been particularly adept in developing this genre, and it can be very effective in bringing history to life on television.<sup>10</sup> Given all the costs and limitations of using archival footage, moreover, it can sometimes be less expensive for a documentary-maker to re-enact an event than search out the appropriate archival film.

Because this format is so malleable however, and can be fashioned exactly as the documentary-maker wants, it can lose in “authenticity” what it gains in dramatic quality. Because contemporary viewers are so familiar with moving images refashioning “reality,” they are naturally sceptical of re-enacted reality, whether it be done in a crude or a sophisticated style.

Even when docudramas are faithful to well-documented “facts,” they tend to provoke disbelief. Oliver Stone’s film, *JFK*, which re-creates the investigations into the Kennedy assassination, has prompted vigorous reaction although his “facts” have not been proven wrong. A Canadian example of a similar controversy was the National Film Board film, *The Kid Who Couldn’t Miss* about Billy Bishop, the World War I ace. Although the facts stated or implied in the production were generally found to be reliable, the controversy became a burning issue in the Canadian Senate for some months.<sup>11</sup>

“The Valour and the Horror” used this docudrama technique sparingly and carefully, but these “re-created” sequences nonetheless prompted vigorous reaction. The series did not invent composite characters in whom disparate “facts” are conveniently brought together for dramatic effect. Where the series did re-create scenes, they usually represent wartime ambience and environments more generally rather than specific events. For such period re-enactments, they always had a military adviser on location, in order to ensure that all details were faithful to the period. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of the criticism received was to point out perceived errors of “authenticity.”

The third episode shows the current Black Watch regiment of Montreal re-enacting the fateful attack on Verrières Ridge, where 300 out of 320 soldiers died. The narration repeatedly reminds the viewers that they are watching a present-day re-enactment. The contribution of this re-enactment to the documentary is the demonstration of the power of the collective memory of these events for today’s members of the Black Watch. Once

this context is established, the viewer can appreciate the re-enactment for its own sake, rather than reasonably expecting it to add to one's understanding of the actuality of the event.

Still photographs represent an important resource for documentary productions, and many of their challenges are the same as for moving image archival records. Again, the context of who took the photograph and for what purpose can add to the authenticity and impact of the documentary. "The Valour and the Horror" consistently used photographs within appropriate contexts and sometimes explicitly made that context known to the viewer.

A good example is the photographs shown of the victims of the Hamburg bombing raids in 1943 in the second episode, on Bomber Command. The images are haunting and powerful enough on their own, but when they are in the hands of the former Hamburg fire chief and then given to the Canadian pilots, they become even more potent. They become tangible evidence of the events.

Researchers for the series searched for parallel photographs of the London blitz to counterpoint those of the German victims. Apparently, British censorship forbade the taking of any such photographs because of the discouragement and fear that their distribution might provoke. Such clandestine photographs would therefore be very valuable and archives should be alert to the existence of such materials.

The classic television documentary to make exemplary use of still photographs in recent years was the "Civil War" series by Ken Burns, broadcast on PBS in 1990. For their visuals the producers used only still photographs, whereas the sound-track consisted of voice-over readings from diaries, letters, newspapers etc., and appropriate period music. With the visual techniques being used to animate still images, these images can be very effective on television. "The Valour and the Horror" used many of the same techniques, but because they also used on-camera actors the viewer focuses less on the archival images. On the other hand, the use of these dramatic techniques may well make "The Valour and the Horror" accessible to more viewers than the PBS series.

The sound-track of all film and television production has a much greater impact on viewers than is often realized. Sound may appear as background to the visual material, but it certainly reaches the viewer at a more subliminal level. Sound is edited quite separately from the visuals in such a documentary, and requires special expertise and equipment. Given the contemporary multi-track mixing capacity, a great variety of sound-tracks can be controlled and combined to create exactly the effect required. When it works well, sound complements the visuals and often directs the viewer's attention. The sound-track of a documentary often conveys more specific information than the visuals, moreover, although it is usually the visuals that one remembers more vividly.

The sound for the "The Valour and the Horror" was mixed on sixteen different sound-tracks, as is common in documentaries these days. Viewers' expectations of sound being clean, crisp, and strong, without background hiss, are so exacting that archival sound recordings are invariably disappointing. The CBC's Overseas Broadcast Unit were using state-of-the-art recording equipment in London during the blitz, and the recording engineers were both courageous and foolhardy in locating themselves in such a position as to obtain the best possible recordings of this bombardment.<sup>12</sup> For years these recordings were inserted into war reporting on radio, into all manner of documentaries, and

even into fiction films, in order to represent bombs, sirens and devastation. They were used as one of the sixteen tracks on "The Valour and the Horror," for the bombing scenes, but were greatly enhanced to create the final intended effect.

"The Valour and the Horror" did make extensive use of the radio war report recordings by Matthew Halton and Marcel Ouimet (for the French-language version), in the third episode on the Normandy invasion.<sup>13</sup> Halton and Ouimet became journalistic "celebrities" in Canada because of their vivid and authoritative reporting; they are used by "The Valour and the Horror" as archetypes of all Canadian war reporters. Halton and Ouimet are represented as "cheer-leading" for the Canadian war effort, and discrepancies between their reports and the actual events are demonstrated and deplored.

War-reporting is being examined with the wisdom of hindsight by "The Valour and the Horror" and is judged to be gravely lacking. Brian and Terence McKenna are journalists who have strong convictions about the integrity and honesty that should be demanded of the journalistic profession. Journalists understood their responsibilities for supporting the Allied cause somewhat differently during World War II. However, "The Valour and the Horror" does not hesitate to judge the journalists from the perspective of the 1990s.

"The Valour and the Horror" relied more heavily upon oral history interviews than any other type of archival records. The collection of interviews initiated in the early 1970s by the Manitoba Museum of Man with the Winnipeg Grenadiers, who were among the Hong Kong veterans, provided the backbone for the episode on Hong Kong. Subsequently, researchers for the series conducted further interviews, totalling as many as 100 different interviews for the subsequent episodes. All interviews have been transcribed and indexed. Brian McKenna acknowledges that he fully intends for these interviews to be deposited in an archives, but no arrangements have thus far been made.

The oral history interviews themselves are not directly used in "The Valour and the Horror." Rather they have been used to generate scripts for the actors whom we see on screen, either against a black background or in a period environment. Young actors were decided upon by the producers of the series for the sake of dramatic impact, and to emphasize the youth of Canadians serving in the war. All interviewees are portrayed with sensitivity and respect, which must have affected everyone connected with the series.

"The Valour and the Horror" resisted the temptation to create composite characters, combining recollections from a number of interviewees. In fact, many more recollections were dramatized than could ever have been used in the final edited version. The viewer sees a great variety of veterans being portrayed, some infrequently, others with disparate attitudes and personalities. This technique is often very effective, particularly if the interviewee has a personality that the viewer gets to know through prolonged exposure. Perhaps the most notable example is that of Donald Pearce of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, in the Normandy episode. He is even more disillusioned than the rest, yet does not bear any grudge. As a consequence, he is completely believable, which has to be a tribute to the quality of the original interview, as well as to the actor, Wayne Robson, portraying Pearce.

The impact of these oral history interviews also led the producers to include two veterans in each episode. The veterans seen on camera were chosen through these oral history interviews, and it is through their eyes that we see the scenes of their "war." All

of them were well-chosen and are straightforward, thoughtful individuals. None have an agenda or cause to convince the viewer of and all were obviously moved at contemplating the horror they had witnessed or endured. They all represent soldiers and airmen; only in Jacques Dextraze, the former chief of the National Defence Staff, in the Normandy episode, does one listen for the official line or politically acceptable explanations. Dextraze, however, was obviously chosen exactly because he was speaking personally, on behalf only of himself. The presence of these veterans allows the series to tell a much stronger story and ask more difficult questions of the Canadian experience during the war. It is not present-day researchers or documentary-makers asking many of these questions, so the viewer is prepared to accept more unpalatable conclusions.

Notable Canadian artists, such as Molly Lamb Bobak and Alex Colville, were commissioned into the Canadian armed services to document the war. Although they were assigned to particular services and ordered to paint specific subjects, they were given considerable latitude in style and interpretation.<sup>14</sup> These 6,000 officially commissioned works of art are held by the Canadian War Museum, although other galleries and archives hold non-commissioned works by the same artists or by others. "The Valour and the Horror" makes a plea on behalf of this war art, lamenting inadequate storage and display of this documentary heritage. Archivists can only hope that someone in authority was listening.

"The Valour and the Horror" made use of selected works of war art in the Bomber Command and Normandy episodes. Some are effective, but it is always difficult to represent documentary art on television. The small screen and limited resolution of the television signal can rarely do justice to the full impact of a painting.<sup>15</sup> One can only commend "The Valour and the Horror" for incorporating this component of the archival record. However, it would have required different pacing and a different editing style for these paintings to be as effective on television as they are in reality.

Textual documents, in and of themselves do not make for very exciting television, yet they provide the backbone of any historical examination. In the case of World War II, these records have been used by conventional historians to generate a wide variety of books and articles. The researchers for "The Valour and the Horror" tended to rely upon the existing secondary sources, rather than work through the textual archival record again. The researchers became familiar with the textual documents, but certainly did more archival research in the audiovisual records that naturally lend themselves better to presentation on the television screen.

The purpose of the series was to tell the story of World War II from the perspective of the ordinary soldier and airman, rather than the political or military history of the war. Therefore, the researchers were looking for diaries and letters providing such personal accounts and were disappointed not to find more examples. Apparently, the pace of the war, and military regulations, which prohibited the keeping of journals and censored letters being sent back home, discouraged the creation of such records.

A notable exception is the letter of John Payne in 1942, explaining to his mother his intention to try to escape from the Japanese prison camp where the Hong Kong veterans were being held. Payne failed in his escape attempt and was executed. The letter was safe-guarded by a comrade throughout the war and finally delivered to Payne's family in 1945. The family sent the original letter, together with other memorabilia from Payne, to a researcher for the series. In "The Valour and the Horror," John Payne is portrayed

by an actor, and words from his letter are re-enacted. The letter itself is seen on the television screen, which very effectively reinforces its impact and the credibility of the documentary.

The Bomber Command and Normandy episodes also relied extensively upon secondary accounts and textual documents for their portrayal of some key personalities in military command positions. Others that were portrayed by actors included Arthur "Bomber" Harris, the British air vice marshal in charge of the Royal Canadian Air Force; Guy Simonds, the general officer commanding the 2nd Canadian Corps; Kurt Meyer, the German SS commander fighting opposite the Canadians in the Normandy campaign; and Rod Keller, the Canadian commander of the 2nd Division of the Canadian Army during the Normandy invasion. These were less than flattering portrayals, but scrupulously put in the actors' mouths, words that could be found in the actual records.

These portrayals prompted more viewer reaction than any other feature of "The Valour and the Horror." The portrayal of "Bomber" Harris, especially, prompted a good many protesting telephone calls to the CBC and letters to the editors of newspapers, as well as to the CBC. Sir Arthur Harris may have been as much a caricature as he was portrayed. Controversy surrounding Harris began shortly after the war and continued through to the spring of 1992, when protests were prompted by the unveiling of a statue in his honour in London.

The re-enactment, or personalized depiction, of historical events and personalities invariably attracts criticism. Textual evidence is used selectively, and the historical imagination fills in what the evidence does not document. The portrayal of Rod Keller, the troubled Canadian commander, trying to excuse himself from his command during the Normandy invasion, is a case in point. Evidence supports his having been as troubled as portrayed, but the contention that he actually consumed alcohol while on duty, as he was depicted to have done, has been challenged. Keller, moreover, was commanding the 2nd Division of the Canadian Army during the Normandy campaign, whereas one gets the impression from this episode that he was somehow responsible for the disastrous massacre of the Black Watch, who were part of the 3rd Division. "The Valour and the Horror" generally made great efforts in their re-enactments to respect the context of time and place, and not ascribe words that could not be verified from direct evidence. Nevertheless, the medium of television encourages dramatic techniques that do not always correspond to the evidence available.

### *Archival Reaction*

Given all these myriad uses of archival documents, archivists had much to appreciate in "The Valour and the Horror." Generally, the series presented the documents in their appropriate context, so archivists should have few complaints. Film footage, photographs and war art were presented as depicting the actual events from which they were taken. Interviewees were portrayed with dignity and intelligence by the actors. Re-enactments were based on extensive research, although small errors have inevitably been detected by veterans.

Archival citations are much beloved by archivists, but, admittedly somewhat difficult to accommodate on television. They are increasingly being jettisoned in popular history, in any case, and only survive in publications designed for academics. Still, there

may be valid production arguments for allowing viewers of a moving image documentary to “understand” that the images on the screen are being derived from genuine archival documents. Viewers these days know so well what magical illusions film and television can create that the “reality” of a television documentary can be blunted. “The Valour and the Horror” was very successful television. Therefore, viewers might naturally expect to see the dramatic techniques and similar artistic licence that are commonplace on television, but which they do not take very seriously.

In order to distinguish itself from all the fiction on television, “The Valour and the Horror” might, therefore, have benefited from reminding viewers that its re-enactments were based on archival evidence or actual interviews with veterans. Showing the viewer that the re-enactments were scrupulously derived from the actual interviews or documents might well have added to their credibility. This is stated at the beginning of each episode, but reminders throughout would only have reinforced the factual basis of the documentary. Training, promotional or fictional footage might have a stronger impact if viewers were briefly to hear the accompanying sound-track, or see something of the credits that accompanied such film. The reading of the John Payne letter at the end of the Hong Kong episode is all the more moving and eloquent because the viewer actually sees the letter.

Finally, archivists, like everyone else involved in the enterprise, look to the credits at the end of the production to see whether their institutions are acknowledged. Credits are greatly valued in the industry and are growing lengthier for many productions nowadays. “The Valour and the Horror” provided an extensive list of credits, including archivists as well as the archival institutions which had contributed to the research. Unfortunately, the producers got the name of the National Archives wrong, both in the television series and in the book, citing it anachronistically as the Public Archives of Canada. Nonetheless, their intentions were honourable and the correction has been duly noted.

### *Viewer Reaction*

Audiences both loved and hated “The Valour and the Horror.” For a television programmer that means it was a great success; indifference is the great anathema. Documentary programming in Sunday evening prime time is usually considered too risky for North American commercial television. For audiences to be watching in significant numbers,<sup>16</sup> and to be calling and writing in, therefore, is a tribute to the quality of the programme and the interest which it held for Canadians.

The reaction to the first episode was quite universally positive, whereas it was almost the reverse for the second, and rather mixed for the third. A partial explanation might be that the Hong Kong episode focused primarily on the atrocities committed by the Japanese, whereas the Bomber Command episode focused on the civilian casualties caused by Allied bombing, and the Normandy Campaign episode more evenly documented atrocities committed by both sides. Certainly it is more disagreeable to be reminded of atrocities that one’s own side may have committed.

The second two episodes, moreover, included re-enactments of historical events and portrayals of key commanders, such as “Bomber” Harris and General Simonds, whom some Canadian veterans would have known personally. Significant numbers of veterans both wrote and telephoned the CBC, as well as to local newspapers, lamenting

the series in general and often specifically deploring the portrayal of Sir Arthur Harris. Although researchers insist that every word in these portrayals can be documented, viewers reacted sceptically, sometimes hostilely, to such re-enactments.<sup>17</sup>

The bulk majority of popular criticism came from veterans who were offended at the tone of the series and began their letters, "I know whereof I write; I was there." Many of the letters received by the CBC go on for two or more pages, often documenting how their authors' own experience contradicted what was presented on "The Valour and the Horror." Much of the anger was exceedingly personal and simply defended the sanctity of how the veterans would prefer to remember their experience. For historians, of course, "The Valour and the Horror" was not the first time such questions had been asked. Yet to see these historical questions so effectively being raised on television, an inherently popular medium, provoked a strong reaction.

Many of the protests to the CBC also begin by explaining that the authors have always supported the CBC and have never before written such a letter of protest. Admittedly, negative reaction to any media controversies will always outweigh the positive response. Yet one does have to take the disaffection seriously.<sup>18</sup> Viewers consider the CBC responsible to them, unlike the commercial networks, because their tax dollars are supporting it. For the CBC to do only 'safe' programming, calculated not to offend, however, would soon erode the CBC's credibility and purpose. This is not only the constant dilemma of public broadcasting, but also an ongoing theme of CBC history.

Media critics generally praised "The Valour and the Horror"; Peter Trueman, former news anchor for Global News, was the most effusive in his praise. Trueman wrote:

CBC is due to distinguish itself by beginning some long overdue programming on the obscene nature of war, the perfidy of politicians and military general staffs, and the astonishing courage and decency of ordinary Canadians. . . . This is not just a documentary about the real face of war and the slaughter of innocents, however, but about the invincibility of the human spirit. . . . In fact it is the kind of Canadian television that should give us hope as we face the current threat to our survival as a nation.<sup>19</sup>

Other newspaper columnists were not so favourably impressed, Charles Lynch in the *Ottawa Citizen*<sup>20</sup> took great umbrage at the Normandy campaign episode. Again, he had been "there" as a war reporter, and was obviously deeply offended at the manner in which the Matthew Halton war reports were supposedly being used to denigrate all war correspondents.

Veterans' organizations had great success in sustaining the outrage over the NFB's film *The Kid Who Couldn't Miss*, and mounted a similar campaign against "The Valour and the Horror." Senator Jack Marshall placed a motion for the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs to investigate the series<sup>21</sup> and the CRTC is carrying out its own investigation. Many others, however, are questioning whether it is appropriate for Parliament to examine questions of historical and journalistic truth.

Veterans are also coming forward in support of the series; presumably, many of those interviewed for the series will support "The Valour and the Horror." Brian McKenna may well be able to defend his understanding of history within the context of historical debates. In the meantime, however, the popular reaction may well encourage book

editors, or television production management, to be very cautious when dealing with historical issues events that fall within living memory.<sup>22</sup>

The popular controversy surrounding “The Valour and the Horror” reflects how ordinary citizens understand the past and what they expect from history. It demonstrates the importance of history at the non-academic level. Archivists, therefore, need to understand the potency of their documents on television.

### *Conclusion*

“The Valour and the Horror” asks Canadians who died together whether they cannot live together. This series was a rare occasion of the same history being narrated simultaneously in French and English. The only content that changed was that the French-language reporter, Marcel Ouimet, replaced Matthew Halton in the third episode. Ouimet was as famous in French-speaking Canada as Halton was in English-speaking Canada, and therefore an appropriate replacement. In the re-enactments, the francophone soldiers spoke French while the anglophones were heard in a voice-over translation.

In these troubled times for our country, it is difficult to pose the question of the survival of Canada in a fresh and compelling manner. “The Valour and the Horror” did so and by relying on the archival record.

“The Valour and the Horror” is oral history finally living up to all the promises which the boldest oral historians ever made for it. Not only did it make splendid use of oral history interviews, but it also accomplished much more than that. It becomes cathartic by allowing the active participants in history to come to terms with their actions. The bringing together of the Hong Kong prisoners with the Japanese prison guards, or the Bomber Command pilots with the Hamburg fire chief, are but two memorable examples. Neither side shrinks from confronting the other with the atrocities and the horror of war; yet no recriminations or justifications are offered. The honesty and authenticity of these scenes is searing.

One senses that they were not simply repeated for the camera, but rather that these scenes occurred much as we are viewing them. One senses, moreover, that Radley-Walters could not again tell anyone about his cutting the dead tank commander’s body in half with his machete, in order that it could be removed from the tank, so that the tank could be put back into service; that the Hong Kong veterans do not relish seeing again the graves of their comrades. This coming to terms with our past, individually or collectively, may not always be pleasant or uplifting. The popular controversy still swirling around “The Valour and the Horror” certainly demonstrates this. For archivists, it should simply be a reminder of how potent archival records on television may be.

“The Valour and the Horror” asks difficult questions of war. As Brian McKenna candidly put it, “Let us celebrate the valour. But let us speak the evil and the horror. People will be torn by these two things. But let them know what war is really about. Because without knowing, we’ll fall into it again.” This perspective undoubtedly provoked much of the vigorous reaction to the series. Some viewers may not want our past sacrifices probed and examined critically. However, it is not for archivists to determine whether the past will be celebrated or criticized. We have to ensure that archival records will allow both to happen.

“The Valour and the Horror” purports to tell the truth about Canadian participation in World War II for the first time. It praises the war artists, as the only ones telling the truth about the wartime experience. For archivists and historians, however, these boasts are more than a little exaggerated. The truths illuminated by “The Valour and the Horror” have been documented and available in archival records for some time. Facts of different orders of value can be found in a variety of archival records. Archivists know well that the ‘truths’ for one generation will be different for the next. Historians will continue to debate and evolve new interpretations over many generations. Therefore, “The Valour and the Horror” does not represent the only ‘truth’ that we need to know about Canadians during World War II.

Nonetheless, “The Valour and the Horror” is telling a story in Canadian living rooms that may not have been heard there before. That is why it prompted such a vigorous reaction. The medium of television reaches different audiences than academic debates. It also affects viewers in different ways than do the best history books.

All the more reason, then, why historians should debate the facts illuminated by “The Valour and the Horror” and why they should invite the journalist, Brian McKenna, to those debates. Few historians could muster the research resources and the passion that Brian McKenna brings to his television documentaries. Therefore, the dialogue between journalist and historian should be most lively and mutually instructive. The archivist needs to be there also in order to hear out the historian, the journalist and the citizen.

### Notes

- \* I want to thank archival and broadcasting colleagues, Rosemary Bergeron, Dick Gordon, Steve Harris, Jeannette Kopak, Sam Kula, Robert O’Reilly, Peter Robertson, Philip Savage and Glenn Wright for their observations on this series. Their careful eyes and ears noticed aspects of the documentaries that I had missed. However, the views expressed in this review are only those of the author and do not represent the views, nor the official position, of the CBC.
- 1 *The Valour and the Horror: The Untold Story of Canadians in the Second World War*, by Merrily Weisbord and Marilyn Simonds Mohr [from the film series by Brian McKenna and Terence McKenna], (Toronto, 1991), 171 pp. The book presents the same three stories as the television series and similarly relies upon the recollections of veterans. It is very much inspired by the same investigative tone and research as the television series. However, the book is not, by any means, simply the script of the television series. The most moving recollections and references show up in both, but the book uses stills and comments that we never see and hear on television. Of course, the moving image excerpts and dramatizations that are at the heart of the television series cannot be presented on the printed page.
- 2 An extract from the research report by Lieutenant Colonel Roman Jarymowycz, Military Staff College at Kingston, to Brian McKenna is a good case in point: “. . . before Normandy was written, the researcher interviewed and corresponded with over 150 survivors of Operation Spring - from privates to officers at Battalion and Brigade Headquarters. All published histories and a dozen unpublished manuscripts (including one dealing with Gen. Simonds by his personal ADC, a Harvard lawyer) were reviewed. Further, all War Diaries, After Action Reports, Intelligence Reports and Radio Logs were studied, including over 45 survivor statements taken after the battle by Col. Stacey and Major Brisette. We conferred with prominent Canadian and French military historians and corresponded with German historians. Finally, the Director and Researcher spent well over six weeks (on three separate occasions) in Calvados, studying and filming the actual battlefield from the air and ground — this included two weeks in the company of German and Canadian veterans of the operations.”
- 3 Costs for Canadian television production range from \$200,000 per hour for in-studio shooting with limited sets and participants, to \$1,000,000 per hour for prime-time television drama shot on multiple

- locations. American productions often cost two or three times these amounts, and set the technical standards for what Canadian audiences expect.
- 4 CBC's dramatic series, "Road to Avonlea" was seen by an average 1,400,000 Canadians on the English network, and may be watched by hundreds of thousands more in its French-language version. This is considered one of the greatest popular successes of Canadian television in recent years. The "National" evening newscast averages an audience of just over 1,000,000.
  - 5 Interview with Brian McKenna, 3 February 1992, Montreal; follow-up telephone conversation with Brian McKenna, 14 April 1992.
  - 6 Interview with Adam Symansky, NFB producer for "The Valour and the Horror," 1 April 1992.
  - 7 Steve Harris, Department of National Defence History Directorate, suggested that the Allied bombing attack on Dresden inflicted more horrific civilian casualties than the Hamburg raids depicted in the Bomber Command episode, but that the photographic and motion picture evidence was not necessarily as strong for Dresden, which occurred later in the war: interview, 18 February 1992. Brian McKenna's reply is to argue that the civilian casualties of the Hamburg raids were fundamental to the policy of the Allied command and, therefore, deserve to be featured.
  - 8 The National Film Board and Jack Chisholm Film Productions are perhaps the most active Canadian stock shot companies. The CBC makes extensive use of film and video footage for internal production purposes and does sell footage upon request from offices within the French and English networks in Montreal and Toronto. Any television station with an ongoing news programme has a stock shot component in its news library.
  - 9 Purchasing the rights to use even short extracts of such fictional footage is often prohibitively expensive for a documentary.
  - 10 An excellent example of a successful docudrama was the three-part series on Mackenzie King, "The King Chronicle," co-produced by the NFB and the CBC in 1988. Donald Brittan was the director, script-writer and narrator for the series, which brought alive the personal and political events of Mackenzie King's career.
  - 11 In order to appease this hostile reaction, the NFB eventually added a disclaimer at the beginning of the film explaining that *The Kid Who Couldn't Miss* was a docudrama and, therefore, had used artistic licence in presenting history. They are now completing a film on an ordinary World War I pilot, and are taking great pains to represent historic authenticity.
  - 12 A. E. Powley, *Broadcast From the Front*, (1975). CBC Radio broadcast a documentary, "Art Holmes, Bombcatcher" by Steve Wadhams, on "Morningside," in which the sound restoration technology, Sonic Solutions, and digital editing did allow these recordings of the London blitz to be heard very effectively.
  - 13 An extensive collection of 5,315 of these reports (506 hours) by all reporters assigned to the CBC's Overseas Broadcast Unit is held at the National Archives. The reports were recorded on transcription discs in Canada, as they were transmitted on shortwave for subsequent broadcast in Canada, and have survived intact.
  - 14 Heather Robertson, *A Terrible Beauty: The Art of Canada at War* (Toronto, 1977).
  - 15 "The Valour and the Horror" was completed as a production on film, rather than video, and, therefore, the film version seen in a proper cinema would undoubtedly represent these paintings more effectively.
  - 16 The Hong Kong episode was watched by 4,700,000 viewers, in whole or in part, the English network, 351,000 on the French network, and an undetermined number on CBC "Newsworld." The Bomber Command episode was watched by 4,000,000 viewers for the same portion on the English network, 305,000 on the French network, and an undetermined number on CBC "Newsworld." The Normandy Campaign episode was watched by 4,300,000 viewers (for at least a portion), on the English network—opposite the Superbowl and, therefore, representing remarkable viewer loyalty to the series, 398,000 on the French network, and an undetermined number on CBC "Newsworld." This 18-20 per cent audience share of all Canadians watching television is quite exceptional, given the more

- than thirty channels that most Canadians have available to them. A researcher for the CBC Audience Research department suggested that these figures gave "The Valour and the Horror" the largest audience for a CBC documentary programme over at least the past four years. The numbers ordering the videocassette copy of the series, moreover, promoted through a toll-free number during the third episode, were most impressive. 1500 orders have been placed, most of them in the first three days; many callers unable to get through because insufficient operators had been assigned to staff the toll-free number.
- 17 A CBC Audience Research Report surveying an audience panel of over 200 viewers of the first and third episodes found that they ranked the commentaries of Canadian war veterans, film footage of the war, the voice-over commentary and the dramatic portrayals in descending order of importance. All received a most favourable rating.
- 18 Every letter of protest coming to the CBC received a point-by-point reply. Researchers for the series prepared rebuttals to all criticisms and these were then edited by CBC Management and CBC Communications officers before individual replies were sent for close to 300 letters. Usually letters of protest to the CBC receive standard replies but, in this case, those involved in the series were keen to demonstrate the extent of their historical research and were quite prepared to enter historical debates. CBC "Newsworld" rebroadcast "The Valour and the Horror" on Saturday evenings, 21 to 28 March, and 4 April 1992 concluding the second and third episodes with a panel discussion. CBC Radio on "As It Happens" and Bill McNeil's "Fresh Air" also provided the critics and producers of "The Valour and the Horror" opportunities to debate the series.
- 19 Peter Trueman in his weekly column, "Yours Truly . . .," *Starweek*, 4-11 January 1992.
- 20 Charles Lynch, "Canada's War Role Deserves Better Treatment than CBC Film Gave It," *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 February 1992.
- 21 At the time of writing (22 June 1992), the Senate Committee is scheduled to hear only the critics of the series before it adjourns for the summer and then will hear rebuttal by the producers in October.
- 22 CBC's nightly television programme "The Journal," broadcast a full-length documentary on the Dieppe Raid on 15 June 1992. The producers also had veterans visiting the battle field, recalling the events. This documentary very carefully ensured that one of the veterans defended the military objectives of the raid, despite the massive Canadian casualties, and much controversy about operational planning. The interviewer did not challenge the contradictory views of the veterans, but the overwhelming sentiment, nevertheless, was of the horror and futility of war.