
"Band of Brothers": Difference Between Fact And Fiction

Stephan E Ambrose, an American historian, became quite popular following the release of his novel, *Band of Brothers*, which told the story of the soldiers in East Company, 2nd battalion, 506th regiment. Its popularity sparked a miniseries produced by Steven Spielberg, who also famously directed *Saving Private Ryan*, which was praised for its historical accuracy. Ambrose wrote the book based on extensive interviews with the veterans of East company and their experiences during the Second World War, which allows valuable insight into actual experiences of first hand accounts of soldiers in some of the most devastating battles in World War 2. But how accurate does the novel reflect the actual events?

In 1942, the US military assembled a parachute infantry squad of volunteered soldiers, known as East Company, 506th regiment. East Company consisted mostly of ordinary American citizens who would be transformed into an elite group of battle-hardened soldiers, fighting in the some of the most decisive battles in World War 2, including operation Overlord, Liberation of the Netherlands and Operation Market Garden. These victories unfortunately leading East Company to sustain one of the highest casualty rates in World War 2, but remains as one of the key factors in the liberation of west Europe.

While the novel is quite well researched and its interviews of veterans gives us insight to the western front and traumatic events soldiers are faced with during war, Further analysis of the novel reveals the novels flaws, such as how it portrays the US as the penultimate force that lead to the downfall of Nazi Germany when evidence shows the USSR in the eastern front was more responsible and decisive to pushing Germany back and building pressure on both fronts. The novel also seems to suggest that the US was majorly responsible when it came to aiding the allies in World War 2 when a more fair and accurate analysis could be stated as a combined effort instead of a sole country, which is quite relevant to a quote from Joseph Stalin stating: "Britain gave the time, America gave the money and Russia gave the blood", In relevance to the amount of casualties the USSR suffered during World War 2 and summing up every country's contributions fairly.

The novel also seems to disregard efforts made by Britain, as it references no positive connotations in World War 2, which is often seen in the novel through Private First Class David Kenyon Webster, who often expresses dislike for Britain, even going as far as to labeling them as too easy going, lazy and dirty, which shows us past tensions between American and British soldiers and their involvement in World War 2, which Ambrose obviously wrote from the perspective of the Americans in East Company. Further analysis dictates Ambrose included inaccuracies which can be labeled as propaganda, such as the invasion of Normandy(also known as operation overlord) where the novel states, "Their training and confidence thus overcame what could have been a disaster, and thereby turned the scattered drop from a negative into a plus".

Which is a somewhat of a false account of East Company's parachute landing into Normandy, which can be analyzed in Richard Winters novel, "Beyond Band of Brothers", which tells some of the stories left out of the original novel in a more detailed and convincing way. It is revealed that the battalion was to land and gather in the French village of Sainte Marie du Mont, but in

reality were spread across twenty kilometers in the peninsula, losing crucial equipment along the way. Ambrose speaks about the success of the landing, when in reality East company had a much more difficult time during the invasion which Ambrose never references.

The challenges that East Company had to face were extremely difficult and had great effect on them, many of the soldiers from East Company lived with repercussions and traumatic memories from their experience in World War 2, such as a letter David Kenyon Webster sent to his parents, describing war as “a vicious nightmare”. The soldiers of East Company continually feared their next confrontation, and were often afraid of entering combat, which showed their true humanity. Richard Winters stated in his memoirs, “the extraordinary achievements of ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances”, showing that the men of East company were indeed brave and courageous, but also human, which Ambrose doesn't seem to include in his novel, as he seems to portray East company as a glorious band of true American heroes instead of the ordinary and fearful men they were who had to fight in one of the most devastating conflicts in human history.

Ambrose also seems to concentrate more on Major Richard Winters, who he sees as East company's driving force and the reason to why they succeeded so much, and Webster, who often expresses his criticism of war. Granted, Winters was an excellent leader and motivator, but Ambrose fails to address his lack of recognition of other members of East company who were just as important to the success of East company, which allows us to see that Ambrose does not portray as much empathy for the rest of East Company as he does for Webster and Winters, and simply sees those killed as a number instead of an actual person. Ambrose also makes inaccuracies in the final chapter, in which we follow the lives of some of the men after the war, which in a short paragraph includes Herbert Sobel, the first commander who trained East Company, although being generally disliked, he is still largely respected and appreciated for the first class training he was able to offer that helped East Company in their operations during World War 2.

Ambrose only mentions Sobel as a largely disliked individual instead of the actual respect most soldiers had towards him, “They hated him so much that even when he should've earned their respect, he failed”. As opposed to Richard Winters, beyond *Band of Brothers* where he stated, “He undoubtedly deserves much of the credit for developing such a cohesive team.” This allows us to see that Richard Winters' “beyond *Band of Brothers*”, offers a much more reliable and more accurate account of what happened in contrast to Ambrose's novel. But many critics have questioned whether Ambrose's novel was written to tell the phenomenal story of East Company or to if it was just to entertain readers who seeked to gain insight of World War 2.