

The drama of news: war, lies and videotape

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/07/16/making-a-drama-out-of-a-crisis/

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What's the difference between a drama and TV news these days? One of my summer school students brought the new miniseries from [HBO](#) to my attention.

"[Generation Kill](#)" (I kid you not) is the 'true story' of a bunch of US marines going through the first 40 days of the (second) Iraq War. It's based on Evan Wright's [book](#) of the same name.

[generationkill.jpg](#)

It takes the side of the grunts against the incompetent military and political leadership, so it manages to have it both ways. Patriotic but critical. It also has a webpage where you can donate to send gifts to serving officers in Iraq. I guess that suggests that this is not anti-war TV. But HBO have produced some pretty effective drama about contemporary America in the past that doesn't paint an entirely approving picture. Take "[The Sopranos](#)".

But how do drama-documentaries, or drama 'based on a true story' compare with news? We compared the BBC's series of drama-documentary films about the build-up to the war in Iraq, [Ten Days To War](#), with a [Channel 4 News](#) film about a British military medical emergency team in Afghanistan.

[10daystowar.jpg](#)

Cameraman Stuart Webb described how they worked under such strict military control that it was difficult to create a free journalistic narrative. But their portrayal of the violence of the war and the impressive work of the medics got past the censors. Stuart has written a great [article](#) about the experience of making that piece:

"Next to me, Siggers stands with the blood of the dead soldier on his uniform. Outside in the peace and quiet, away from the noise of the helicopter, I start to feel a little shell-shocked. I'm not the only one. The trauma nurse who fought so hard to save the soldier starts to cry. This is her first day in the job"

It was obvious that Stuart's shocking [film](#), reported by Alex Thompson was first-class reportage under appalling circumstances. But [Ten Days To War](#) to was also an incisive version of events. Of course, one was made in the heat of battle at the time while the other was a much better resourced re-creation of reality made many years after what had happened.

[channel4webb.jpg](#)

Both used dramatic narratives and tried to humanise brutal reality. Both were selective versions of what actually occurred. But in the end drama is about imagination and art while news is about facts. Discuss...

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