

The Colors of WAR

Production and costume design experts were drafted to render realistic visions of combat for three of this season's most impressive projects.

By Todd Longwell

Re-creating the look of long-ago wars for the longform TV projects "Band of Brothers," "The Lost Battalion" and "Uprising" was a daunting task for production designers and costume designers. Not only did they have to pay close attention to historical accuracy, but they also had to make sure their work paid proper respect to the memory of those who risked — and often lost — their lives in the name of freedom. And they had to work with budgets and schedules much tighter than those of their big-screen counterparts.

The most elemental challenge for all involved was the scale of the enterprise. For the HBO miniseries "Brothers" — which recounts the exploits of American soldiers in the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne, leading up to and following D-Day — production designer Anthony Pratt re-created 11 English, Dutch and French towns, the Dachau concentration camp and assorted fields, forests and waterways at Hatfield Aerodrome, a former airfield outside of London. Used previously for portions of the 1998 Paramount-DreamWorks hit feature "Saving Private Ryan," the venue offered 1,100 acres of open space, empty airplane hangars to be used as soundstages and construction workshops and offices for production personnel.

The price tag for the Steven Spielberg-Tom Hanks-executive produced project was \$120 million, the highest ever for a miniseries but not overly generous considering that, at 10 hours, it is more than three and a half times as long as "Ryan," which cost \$70 million.

"It was obviously ambitious in scale, so we wanted to meet that ambition and do it within the budget," says Pratt, who was allotted \$17 million to construct the sets, including an indoor re-creation of Bois Jacques, the forest outside of Bastogne, Belgium, where the snowy Battle of the Bulge took place during World War II.

Working from a scale model, Pratt and his team of 15 draftsmen and nearly 200 construction workers spent 18 weeks in late 1999 and

early 2000 building a 12-acre village bisected by a man-made river. To save time and money, structures were built with interchangeable parts — windows, doors and gates — so sets could be redressed quickly to portray the bulk of the project's locations.

"It was shot in sort of a cinema verite style, so I'm not sure how much the changing architecture really comes across," Pratt says. "But from an art department point of view, it was quite a job."

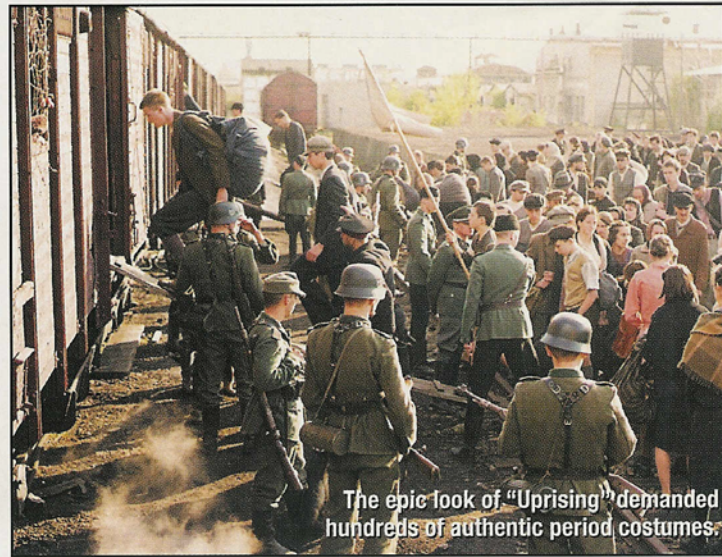
The challenge that "Brothers" costume designer Anna Sheppard faced dressing the 500 actors and 10,000 extras was not immediately apparent to some.

"The notion we were first faced with was, 'It's only army uniforms; we can get them from a surplus store,'" says Sheppard, who was also the costume designer on Spielberg's 1993 Universal feature "Schindler's List." "Not so! Paratrooper uniforms were rare enough in the 1940s, and what has survived has now passed into the expensive collectors' market. Also, with the quantities needed and the amount we knew we would destroy, our only option was to manufacture new uniforms."

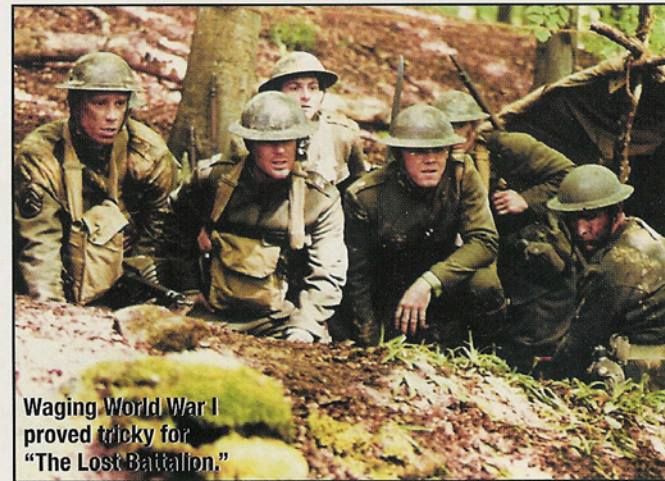
Sheppard's main supplier was Los Angeles-based S.M. Wholesale, a company that manufactures reproductions of U.S. and German World War II uniforms. For the jump boots worn by the paratroopers in "Brothers," she turned to the original 1940s manufacturer, Corcoran (now the Cove Shoe Co. in Martinsburg, Pa.), which interrupted its military boot production to manufacture 500 pairs of the retro footwear.

To secure 1,200 outfits for the civilian characters, Sheppard scoured vintage clothing stores and costume rental houses in the United Kingdom, France and Austria. Original period clothing usually had to be altered to fit the actors, who, because of better fitness and nutrition, generally are larger and more developed than their 1940s counterparts.

Sheppard's attention to historical accuracy was pricey, but a portion of her \$1.5 million



The epic look of "Uprising" demanded hundreds of authentic period costumes.



Waging World War I proved tricky for "The Lost Battalion."

budget was recouped.

"We sold all of our wardrobe on completion of shooting and raised \$300,000," she says.

Last year, when costume designer George L. Little set out to dress "Uprising," a four-hour NBC miniseries about Polish Jews in the Warsaw ghetto who rebelled against the occupying German army in April 1943, he found that supplies had been picked over by a gaggle of other World War II projects shooting near Bratislava, Slovakia, including the ABC miniseries "Anne Frank" and the Bruce Willis MGM feature "Hart's War." That forced Little to scramble throughout Europe assembling his stock from rental houses in Vienna, Prague, Madrid, Budapest, Hungary and Zagreb, Croatia.

"We had to do a lot of refurbishing on the uniforms — insignias, patches, accessories, belts and hats — and make a lot of things, but we were able to pull it together," says Little, who estimates that the production spent only \$300,000 on costumes, not including salaries. "I think we ended up with about 400 German uniforms."

Little's largest task was clothing civilian residents of the Warsaw ghetto, who numbered more than 650 during some scenes. He fudged historical accuracy slightly for dramatic effect, giving residents of the Jewish ghetto darker clothing than their Christian counterparts.

"We tried to use lighter beiges and tans and slightly brighter colors to show (that) just across

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the street where this wall was, things were that much better,” Little says.

For “Battalion,” a fact-based A&E telefilm about American soldiers pinned behind German lines during World War I, costume designer Cynthia Dumont sacrificed a bit of historical accuracy not for artistry but for dramatic clarity.

“Soldiers would often lose a boot in the mud because it was so rainy, so they would take what they could get from dead people or whatever,” says Dumont, a native of Luxembourg where the project was shot. “That makes for not a very uniform uniform. And (director) Russell (Mulcahy) cuts so quick, we had to very clearly see who were the Germans and who were the Americans. So we chose one look, which is very true, but it’s the optimal situation where a soldier would be outfitted and sent to war.”

Finding materials to re-create World War I was far more challenging than doing so for World War II. Not only is the so-called Great War further in the past, but also it has never been a popular backdrop for film or TV projects.

In some instances, “Battalion” production designer Roy Forge Smith had to break protocol and venture into the next decade.

“Our vehicles were actually from the 1920s,” he says. “But they were covered with mud and bodies and whatnot, so you didn’t really see them.”

Smith’s biggest challenge, artistically and logistically, was re-creating the bleak no man’s land where the sides battled.

“It was about 100 by 130 yards of trenches and shell-shocked landscape,” says Smith, who had about eight weeks to prepare for the economical 30-day shoot. “We had to go through a whole lot of business of getting permission from the environmentalists; the forests are one of the main resources in these small European countries. We needed to blast an area to bits.”

Of course, the goal of designers is not destruction but an accurate reconstruction of pasts lost or destroyed. Production designer Benjamin Fernandez discovered how powerful accuracy can be when one of the subjects of “Uprising,” Kazik Rodem (portrayed by Stephen Moyer), toured his extensive re-creation of the Warsaw ghetto on the Bratislava back lot.



Hundreds of costume uniforms had to be built for “Band of Brothers.”

“For me, it was really astonishing,” Fernandez says. “I was looking at Kazik when he was looking at the houses and the street; I was nervous because I was afraid he was going to say, ‘It looks nothing like it.’ But he just walked in silence. When he got back to the village square, he pointed at a window and said, ‘I used to live there.’ It was something incredible. I will never forget.”



Cheat Sheet

BY DAVID E. WILLIAMS

Series and longform programs that offered exemplary visual effects, costumes, cinematography and design

Title Network	Crafts Challenge	Prime Attributes	Title Network	Crafts Challenge	Prime Attributes
Dinotopia (ABC)	 Design and build an affordable netherworld where dinosaurs and humans happily coexist	Astonishing CG animation and other effects bring this fantasy to life.	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (CBS)	 Explore the arcane world of criminal forensics in a visual manner — and fake the Las Vegas setting	Evocative camera work, effects and production design blend seamlessly.
Shackleton (A&E)	 Reimagine the 1914-16 Antarctic adventures of Ernest Shackleton and his crew — filming on location in Greenland	Adventurous production design sets the period perfectly, as does fine camera work.	Smallville (WB)	 Bring Superman’s heroic teen exploits to life on a weekly basis	Epic effects and cool contemporary threads combine for a hip look.
Path to War (HBO)	 LBJ’s descent into Vietnam demanded fact-based reconstruction of 1960s Oval Office and Washington’s power-tripping elite	Costume design and art direction add here-and-now feel to period drama.	Malcolm in the Middle (Fox)	 Live-action cartoon show dependent upon frenetic action and comedic settings	Lively camera work and production design help elicit laughs.
Monday Night Mayhem (TNT)	 Revive those hip ABC Sports jackets and that overall 1970s-era, earth-tone tackiness	Clothes make the man, and Howard Cosell was <i>the</i> man of the time.	Enterprise (UPN)	 The retrofuturistic adventures of Starfleet heroes boldly going where four other “Trek” series have gone before	Expert visual effects and makeup expand this faux universe.
The Magnificent Ambersons (A&E)	 Make everyone forget the grand visual splendor of Orson Welles’ 1942 original	Spiffy costumes add an equally grand touch to a tale retold.	Alias (ABC)	 Globe-trotting action-adventure spy series with a high-fashion glam twist	Those nutty costumes and colorful wigs almost steal the show.