

Chapter 6
THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR
II. Re-staging a war for the moving pictures

INTRODUCTION

While film companies and individual cameramen like William Paley made great efforts to film the events of the Spanish-American War, no-one could pretend, either at the time, or in retrospect, that the filmic reporting of the war had been a total success. Few films shot by the actuality cameramen gave much sense of the intense military conflict on the ground; none could portray the stirring geopolitical events which were taking place, whereby one nation lost its empire and another, the United States, for the first time became an imperial power. Nor did these little vignettes of troop movements and the like of themselves slake the patriotic ferment that was sweeping America's entertainment venues. The early film business had to do something more. That 'something' came in two main forms: staging and programming.

In the following chapter we will describe how exhibitors programmed together war-related films to create extensive shows about the conflict. In this chapter we deal with the production of war-related staged films, which might also be called 'imaginative representations', including fakes. Of course this was not the first time that such films had been produced: the previous year Méliès had made his four 'artificially arranged scenes' of the Greco-Turkish War. But during this war with Spain the numbers and variety of such films increased greatly, with several identifiable sub-genres emerging. Their common feature was that they were not straight recordings of events, but had been dramatised or staged. I will deal with these in three categories: symbolic or allegorical films, re-staged battles using actors, and re-staged naval battles using model ships.

SYMBOLIC AND FLAG FILMS

The symbolic film is a rarely discussed genre of early cinema, yet one which was quite significant. Such films used national symbols such as 'Britannia' or 'Uncle Sam' or various flags, to express and evoke nationalist feelings and emotions. Interestingly, it seems that symbolic films about conflict in Cuba were some of the first moving pictures ever shown in America. These scenes, dealing with the preceding conflict between Spain and Cuban nationalists, were entitled *Monroe Doctrine* and *Cuba Libre* and featured in a programme at Koster and Bial's music hall for the week of 20 Apr 1896.¹ The latter film, also known as *Cuban Liberty*, was a burlesque based on a press cartoon about Uncle Sam bringing to a close the disagreement between Cuba and Spain.²

By 1898 there was intense interest among Americans in the Cuban issue, and filmmaker Edward Hill Amet (1860–1948) – a name we shall come across again in this chapter – filmed short allegorical tableaux, such as *Freedom of Cuba* (aka *New Republic*), to crystallise public feelings.³ This film is rich – indeed overflowing – with symbolism, with five separate emblematic characters presenting a triumphant version of Cuba’s liberation. The action has President McKinley and Admiral Dewey parting to reveal Columbia (or ‘Liberty’) entreating Uncle Sam (with an unaccustomed rifle and bayonet in hand) to intervene on behalf of helpless ‘Cuba’. Cuba, portrayed as a child – implying that the country was incapable of self-rule – then drops the Cuban flag, grasps the US flag and is wrapped in its folds.⁴ [Fig. 2]

The ‘Stars and Stripes’ appears in several films of this time, along with other flag combinations, and these – what I will call ‘flag films’ – were so common that they virtually became a genre in themselves. The most celebrated and influential was made by Albert E. Smith (1875-1958) and J. Stuart Blackton (1875-1941). This pair, both originally from England, began collaborating in the film business in 1897. When the Spanish-American War loomed early the following year, they were both still working as exhibitors, but the renewed interest in cinema in these militant times, and the need for new subjects, encouraged them to go into film production, using a camera that the inventive Smith had devised.

In the Spring of 1898 they made their film, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* (aka *The Spanish Flag Pulled Down* or *The Spanish Flag Torn Down*) which was shot in their little studio on top of the Morse building in New York. The shooting date has conventionally been given as 21 April.⁵ However, the cash ledger for Smith/Blackton’s company reveals a purchase for 3 May of ‘2 flags – 20 cents’, which strongly suggests that the film was made soon after that. This later date would make some sense, in that Dewey had sunk the Spanish fleet on 1 May, and subsequently there would be a big demand for any film which could celebrate the US victory.⁶

The film doesn’t seem to survive (see below), but there are several descriptions of it, though all seem to date from many years after it was produced. The earliest I have seen (from 1914), probably originating from Blackton, describes the beginning of the film as showing, ‘a Spanish flag fluttering proudly on the breeze. For fully thirty seconds there was nothing to be seen but this hated emblem’. He continues: ‘... then a hand appeared; slowly the great hand reached towards the flag of the enemy, grasped the hostile banner and dragged it down, and by the same movement, the Stars and Stripes was run up in its place!’⁷

To film this piece of propaganda was quite simple to arrange, as Blackton recalled: ‘Our background was the building next door. We had a flag pole and two 18" flags’.⁸ The camera was operated by Smith and it was Blackton’s hand which apparently appeared in the shot. While it has been suggested that the extant *Raising Old Glory Over Morro Castle* (Vitagraph, 1899) might be the film in question under a different title, I have viewed it and there is no hand that pulls down the flag: the Spanish flag is simply lowered and the US one is

raised in its place, against a painted background of the castle.⁹ It is possible that Blackton's recollection was in error about the hand, but even the film's title does suggest a flag actually being torn down.

Smith called their film an 'intensely patriotic vignette' and recalled that it was a great success.¹⁰ Blackton agreed, stating that they '...sold hundreds of copies of this film'.¹¹ He added that it was their '... very first dramatic picture and it is surprising how much dramatic effect it created. The people went wild'.¹² Ramsaye described this audience reaction:

'Cheers rocked the vaudeville houses and hats were tossed into the orchestra pits when the hand of righteous destiny reached out to tear down the Spanish banner... Hundreds of copies of the subject were sold by Smith and Blackton. And from obscure sources dozens of imitations of it sprang up to meet the market demand.'¹³

While the 'hundreds of copies' is probably exaggeration, the claim of imitation is probably correct, for during the course of 1898 and 1899 several flag films were released which may indeed have been inspired by Smith and Blackton's example.¹⁴ The copycat versions included a Biograph film which showed 'a Jack Tar climbing up a mast, hauling down the Spanish flag in Puerto Rico and replacing it by the Stars and Stripes'.¹⁵ [Fig. 1] This played at Keith's Theater in New York as *What We Are Going to Do in Puerto Rico*, and as it was shown, a reviewer reported, 'the audience vents its enthusiasm in a hearty cheer'. The same film ran for weeks at Keith's in Philadelphia, and the pianist played 'Hot time in the old town tonight' as the US flag triumphed.¹⁶ Amet too made a flag film which, though it simply showed the US flag flying, had the distinction of being in colour, roughly tinted, frame by frame.¹⁷ (The practice of hand colouring films began early in film history, but it was certainly an innovative process in America at this time, no matter how crudely done by Amet.) One title actually preceded the Smith/Blackton version: an Edison film of March 1897, *American and Cuban Flag*, which showed the American and then the Cuba Libre flags one after the other.¹⁸

Flag films of this kind were in a sense reflecting what was happening outside the theatres, for by the early Spring of 1898 America had become swathed in the Stars and Stripes. As one witness put it, 'everywhere over this good, fair land, flags were flying'.¹⁹ When a British writer arrived in New York in April he found the city 'decked out for a carnival', with American flags everywhere, along with war bulletins and bunting.²⁰ Other flag imagery also became current at this time, including the theme of the coming together of the 'Anglo-Saxon races': on this subject, a Biograph film, shown in London as early as February, depicted the company's representative bowing to the camera 'before a background where the English and American flags are tastefully united'.²¹

But Smith and Blackton's, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* was the most significant of all, and was to be a very important film for the pair, not only because it was one of their first, but also because its success marked them as potential winners in the field of film production, and this perceived success led

to a strengthened relationship with the Edison company.²² Moreover, it was seen to bring something new to the screen. Vitagraph's historian writing in the 1920s, claimed that the film was something of a fresh step in filmic narrative and representation, being:

'... the pioneering step away from the old order, and the *very first* moving picture that was a *picture play* and that told a story in the *fluid continuity of pictured pantomime*. ... it was an unprecedented reliance upon the intelligent ability of audiences to understand the significance of picture pantomime ... the first step toward the realization that a new art was in hand.'²³

Blackton had analogous views of the importance of this film, later writing that wherever screened it created huge excitement among audiences, and:

'It was suddenly apparent that these little squares of film possessed the power to arouse public feeling to a tremendous pitch of patriotic and emotional fervor. The motion picture was no longer a pleasing novelty. Intelligently directed, it possessed hitherto undiscovered, potential forces. Its latent drama could stir human emotions to their depths. It was capable of moulding and influencing the minds of people to a degree and to an extent impossible to predict, but even then dimly discernible. To thinking minds, it began to loom large as an overwhelming power for good and evil.'²⁴

While this and the previous quotation might be making rather larger claims for this very brief and basic film than it warrants, *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* was certainly an interesting development in representing abstract ideas – the nation, global power, military success, etc – on screen. Such abstract imagery would be especially important in the early history of the war film, for the simple reason that if the real event could not be filmed, then moving images of emotive national symbols might be just as effective in satisfying the audience.

STAGED RE-ENACTMENTS WITH ACTORS

A year after Méliès' fake films of the Greco-Turkish war appeared, by the time of the Spanish-American War producers seem to have developed tremendous confidence in making re-enacted (fake) films. Certainly the numbers were much greater, as befitted a more significant conflict, with at least two dozen fake films with actors being made about this war by various different producers in France and especially the USA. War fakes became a significant genre at this time, and were possibly seen just as frequently as actuality subjects about the war, or indeed more so, if we are to believe an early exhibitor, William Swanson. He recalled that because of the interest in war films, 1898 was a boom year for himself, and he showed a number of war subjects which mainly consisted of fakes, of both naval and land battles.²⁵

Fakes made in France

A year on from producing the world's first war fakes, Georges Méliès was quickly back at work on this new war, and turned out four films on the theme:

The Blowing up of the 'Maine' in Havana Harbor

The Wreck of the Maine

A View of the Wreck of the 'Maine'

Defending the Fort at Manila

The first three were probably made in April 1898, and the last in May.²⁶ The films were shot on studio sets with actors, though the first may have involved a model. This film, *The Blowing up of the "Maine" in Havana Harbor* appeared in Méliès' French catalogue as *Quais de la Havane (Explosion du Cuirassé le Maine)* with two catalogue numbers, being twice the normal length. This suggests that there were two shots, one perhaps being an actuality view.²⁷ In one venue in the USA the film was characterized as 'illustrating the manner in which the Spaniards blew up our Battleship' (the American exhibitors being in no doubt that the Spanish were responsible for the blast).²⁸ The term 'illustrating' suggests a non-actuality view, and these exhibitors also, interestingly, described it as 'a prearranged picture' – so there was no attempt here to deceive the audience into thinking they would be shown the real thing. The Warwick catalogue also suggested to purchasers that the film was not genuine, stating that it was, 'A faithful portrayal of this deplorable incident of the Spanish-American War'.²⁹

The only one of these Méliès films to survive is *The Wreck of the Maine*, which depicts a scene of the sunken *Maine* at the bottom of the sea – the underwater effect being achieved by filming through an aquarium in which fish were swimming.³⁰ Divers in diving-suits come down a rope-ladder to get to the sea bed (a typical and delightful example of Méliès' humour), and they pull one dead sailor out of the ship. This latter action might have been viewed in America as in poor taste, though it is not clear if the film was shown in the US at the time. This was the most celebrated film of the series, singled out from the others in a French review on 1 May as 'du plus vif intérêt' (of the greatest interest).³¹ Méliès himself later described it as his 'masterpiece' (chef d'oeuvre), noting that fakes like this were how one 'moved the masses'.³² Incidentally, the third film released was entitled *A View of the Wreck of the "Maine"*, but I can find no further details about this, and it may simply have been another version of *The Wreck of the Maine*.

The final film, *Defending the Fort at Manila*, is described in an original French source as follows (my translation): 'The interior of a fort. A big gun fires a salvo at the enemy. Many shells hit the fort and smash the walls. An enemy shell falls on the artillerymen, killing and wounding some of them'.³³ The Warwick catalogue described the film more simply as: 'showing the shelling of Fort and Battleships'. It is interesting that Méliès had chosen in this film to depict a relatively minor aspect of the Manila battle – the shelling by the Americans of shore fortifications – rather than the major action of the battle, the sinking of the Spanish fleet; and also that he had chosen to show the action at the Spanish receiving end, rather than seen from the US ships which

were doing the shelling. This suggests sympathy for the Spanish viewpoint, and probably reflects the general support in France for Spain versus America during this war (which may have been Méliès' view too).

Also in France, the Gaumont company listed a couple of fake war films in their 1899 catalogue, though it is not known if they (Gaumont) also produced them. *Explosion of the Merrimac* (my translation of this and the following) is described as showing 'A Spanish fort in Cuba. Explosion of a ship. Cannonade directed on the shipwrecked men'. This is based on a real incident: an attempt, under heavy Spanish fire, to block the entrance of Santiago harbour by scuttling an old collier, the USS *Merrimac*.³⁴ The other film was *An Incident in the Spanish-American War*, which depicted 'Spanish soldiers surprising rebels in a house during an attack'.³⁵

Fakes made in the USA

Given that this was a popular war in America, and that the US film industry was among the most advanced in the world at this time, it is not surprising that most of the fakes of the war were made in the United States: produced by Amet, Edison, Lubin, Selig, and later, Biograph.

While Edward Amet is better known for his model work (see below), he probably started his war-related moviemaking with live action fakes. The performers in these films were residents from his community and possibly members of his family.³⁶ The films included 'several scenarios of off duty military camp activities', says one film historian, and while the films in question don't survive, there are some stills from these productions, showing 'soldiers' off duty in camp mess and in 'close order drill'.³⁷ [Fig. 3] The scenes supposedly being set in military camps look fairly authentic, with the players in apparently realistic US military attire.

But Amet's other scenes portraying fighting may not have been so true to life, to judge from a production still of his re-enactment, *Battle of San Juan Hill*. This was shot in a flat landscape, with not a hill in sight! The still shows a group of American soldiers firing their rifles from prone positions, with an officer commanding, and some of the film crew including Amet standing nearby, observing the action. The film seems to have involved the soldiers taking casualties, for one of the players later recalled that because of his young age, he was given the role of a 'drummer boy' who was to be killed in the battle.³⁸ The still indeed shows the drummer boy lying on the ground, as if dead. [Fig. 4] Precise production dates of Amet's live action war films are not known.³⁹

The Edison company had filmed actualities of Roosevelt's Rough Riders preparing for the war, and the focus on the Rough Riders continued in a series of fake skirmishes they made in New Jersey. Edison produced some seven films of this type from 1898, many of them directed by James H. White. The titles in question were *Shooting Captured Insurgents; Cuban Ambush; Surrender of General Toral; Sailors Landing under Fire* (all 1898), and the following year the company released *Battle of San Juan Hill; U.S. Infantry Supported by Rough Riders at El Caney; Skirmish of Rough Riders*.⁴⁰ Some

of these were re-enacted with the New Jersey National Guard costumed as American soldiers and – strangely – African-Americans to play the Spaniards, though it seems there were some production disputes with the cast.⁴¹ Some of the films (which survive as paper print versions) are quite impressive for sheer numbers of actors and lively action: in *Battle of San Juan Hill*, for example, as the US soldiers come from behind camera, the air thick with smoke from their rifle fire, one of their number is wounded by enemy fire and is stretchered away. As Charles Musser has covered the story of these fakes so thoroughly in his books, I will not dwell further on them or their details of production. Suffice it to say that they showed plenty of shooting and explosions, with the Americans triumphing. One further, unrelated Edison dramatisation, produced later is worth mentioning: Edwin Porter's dramatisation of the Samson-Schley controversy (1901).⁴²

The Lubin company also made or released fakes about this war (sometimes distributed by the F.M. Prescott company): indeed they were even more prolific in this type of production than Edison, releasing eleven films from June 1898 (in addition to duping footage from other companies). The titles in question were: *Capture of a Spanish Fort near Santiago*; *Battle of Guantanamo*; *Hoisting the American Flag at Cavite, near Manila*; *Fighting near Santiago*; *Execution of the Spanish Spy*; *Spanish Infantry Attacking American Soldiers in Camp*; *After the Battle*; *Charge of the Rough Riders at El Caney*; *Death of Maceo and His Followers*; *Charge at Las Guasimas*; *Repulse of the Spanish Troops at Santiago by the American Forces*. These films were full of action and depicted hand-to-hand fighting. For example, of *Fighting near Santiago* the catalogue stated: 'This is an animated scene, showing a fight, in which the Americans are finally victorious'. The catalogue emphasised the realism of particular films in this group, or stressed that a film adhered to an actual event. For example, *Repulse of the Spanish Troops* is described as 'an exact reproduction of the fight as it occurred'.⁴³

Most of Lubin's re-enactments of battles were staged in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park. One anecdote mentions an attempt to film a reconstruction of an attack by an all-black unit with some three hundred local African Americans. This frightened a family riding in a carriage through the park, and when the police were summoned, the scene was ruined. It is claimed that Lubin also attempted to make a model-based film of the sinking of the *Maine* in the family bathtub, but it was so ineffective that he didn't release the film.⁴⁴

The F.M. Prescott company distributed some of the Lubin films, among some 70-odd Spanish-American War films ('for sale only by us') listed in their 1899 catalogue, and evidently many of them were fakes. They introduced these views in vivid terms:

'In these superior films can be seen the dead and wounded and the dismantled cannon lying on the field of battle. The men are seen struggling for their lives, and the American flag proudly waves over them and can be plainly seen through the dense smoke. The brave American and Cuban soldiers show their valor and superiority in fighting the hated Spaniards. You think you can hear the huge cannon

belch forth their death-dealing missiles, and can really imagine yourself on the field witnessing the actual battle.¹⁴⁵

Selig also released a couple of fakes of this war: a film entitled *Soldiers Firing on Train* in 1899 and, probably later, *Charge at Las Guasimas* (the latter was presumably the Lubin film).⁴⁶ Biograph produced a few battle scenes or re-enactments at Camp Meade in September, but long after Lubin and others had already made films of this kind.⁴⁷

Believability

A year after the war, a certain 'cinematographe expert' was interviewed about films portraying the conflict, and was asked specifically: 'Were they fakes or the real thing?' He replied:

"A little of both. The pictures showing soldiers in action were mostly fakes, but they were very good ones... Real soldiers went through all the motions of firing and charging right there on the ground and now and then one would seem to topple over dead. Such scenes were tremendously realistic."⁴⁸

He was probably referring to the Edison fakes which were indeed filmed with real soldiers. But 'realistic' is not the word that modern spectators would use to describe some of these Edison war fakes: the performances of the soldiers, especially, look 'acted' to a modern eye. But many early spectators had seen few films till then, let alone films of war, and in such circumstances people might not have had the experience to know whether certain films were fakes or not. For example, the soldiers throw up their hands and 'die' in melodramatic style, but this was a conventional way to 'die' in that era, and might have been seen as realistic by some spectators.

One newspaper man urged viewers to use their critical faculties when looking at war films, and to ask themselves about the *plausibility* of these scenes. He scoffed at the gullibility of some audiences in accepting such films as real:

'How any sane person can believe that a motion-picture outfit can be taken on a battlefield and worked directly in front of a lot of riflemen firing directly at the camera, I don't see; but you hear "Oh!" and "Ah!" "Weren't those men *brave*, George, who took that picture at San Juan Hill?" etc. etc., all over the theatre when those interesting but fraudulent pictures are being shown.'⁴⁹

This and similar anecdotes, even if only partially true, do suggest that some viewers of the 1898 fakes were taken in, and the writer was probably being unrealistic in thinking that a logical form of thought such as plausibility would have applied when the more immediate influence on viewers was the showman, who may have been confidently touting these films as 'the real thing'. What is more, films showing such hand-to-hand fighting taken from 'impossible' line-of-fire camera positions were not the only kind of fakes being produced, and some of the model-based fakes were indeed fairly convincing.

STAGED RE-ENACTMENTS WITH SCALE-MODELS

Smith and Blackton's floating photographs

As we have seen, live action fakes with actors had already been made of the Greco-Turkish war, and so the real innovation in war fakery of the Spanish-American War was not acted fakes, but model-based films. Examples of these were made by the team of Smith and Blackton as well as by Edward Amet.⁵⁰ Smith and Blackton's flag film had been in a sense an early example of model or miniature work, made with a small-ish flag which on screen seemed to look larger and more impressive. But their even more significant contribution to the use of models was *The Battle of Manila Bay*, a re-enactment of Dewey's naval victory of 1 May.

This was probably shot in their small studio in New York, in an improvised canvas tank.⁵¹ It is a near certainty that it was made in May, some three weeks after Dewey's victory, because records survive proving that appropriate props and other materials were purchased by Smith/Blackton at that time: entries in their account book or cash ledger for 19 May 1898 reveal that on that date they purchased 'Fireworks – 40 cents', and 'Gunpowder and gypsum(?) – 17 cents'.⁵² Also purchased were two naval books, a photograph, cards, plus photographic chemicals and raw film stock.⁵³

What did they do with these materials? There are a number of accounts of the filming process from Smith, Blackton and others, all of which broadly tally with one another and also make sense of the list of materials just given, suggesting that these accounts are correct in general if not in all details. Smith's account from his autobiography is worth quoting in full:

'At this time street vendors in New York were selling large sturdy photographs of ships of the American and Spanish fleets. We bought a set of each and we cut out the battleships.⁵⁴ On a table, topside down, we placed one of artist Blackton's large canvas-covered frames and filled it with water an inch deep. In order to stand the cutouts of the ships in the water, we nailed them to lengths of wood about an inch square. In this way a little "shelf" was provided behind each ship, and on this shelf we placed pinches of gunpowder – three pinches for each ship – not too many, we felt, for a major sea engagement of this sort. For a background, Blackton daubed a few white clouds on a blue-tinted cardboard. To each of the ships, now sitting placidly in our shallow "bay," we attached a fine thread to enable us to pull the ships past the camera at the proper moment and in the correct order.

We needed someone to blow smoke into the scene, but we couldn't go too far outside our circle if the secret was to be kept. Mrs. Blackton was called in and she volunteered, in this day of nonsmoking womanhood, to smoke a cigarette. A friendly office boy said he would try a cigar. This was fine, as we needed the volume.

A piece of cotton was dipped in alcohol and attached to a wire slender enough to escape the eye of the camera. Blackton, concealed behind the side of the table farthest from the camera, touched off the

mounds of gunpowder with his wire taper – and the battle was on. Mrs. Blackton, smoking and coughing, delivered a fine haze. Jim [Blackton] had worked out a timing arrangement with her so that she blew the smoke into the scene at approximately the moment of explosion.

...

It would be less than the truth to say we were not wildly excited at what we saw on the screen. The smoky overcast and the flashes of fire from the "guns" gave the scene an atmosphere of remarkable realism. The film and the lenses of that day were imperfect enough to conceal the crudities of our miniature, and as the picture ran only two minutes there was not time for anyone to study it critically.⁵⁵

The film survives, and is indeed quite realistic, at least by comparison with some other fakes of this era. An early observer of the film industry, insider Epes W. Sargent, recalled that the film was fairly convincing, and was, he added, 'accepted as genuine by most of the audience'.⁵⁶ It was, like their flag film, a big success, and was exhibited, Smith says, at Pastor's and Proctor's theatres 'to capacity audiences for several weeks'. Blackton recalled that '...crude though it was the audiences cheered wildly when the Spanish fleet jerkily disappeared beneath the waters of the canvas tank'.⁵⁷ Some sources give the title of this film as *The Battle of Santiago Bay*, suggesting that it represents the July victory in Cuba rather than Dewey's 1 May battle, and presumably exhibitors could get away with claiming it portrayed either battle.

Some accounts say that Blackton suffered a mishap during the making of this film. A 1914 article noted that: 'Mr. Blackton had one hand on the powder box when a chance spark ignited the contents... the interior of his hand was burned almost to a cinder'.⁵⁸ A historical article about Vitagraph of similar vintage also describes the accident, and adds that Blackton then told inquiring friends that he had received the wound at the actual battle. Perhaps this is how the partners began to spin their yarns about having gone to film in Cuba?⁵⁹ Both partners later trumpeted their film as pioneering the use of miniatures in cinema.⁶⁰ Blackton, for example, wrote: 'That was the beginning of making the miniature look like the real large thing'.⁶¹ This is a reasonable assessment of their achievement, though it was an achievement shared with Amet, as we shall see. An indication of the importance they attached to this film is in the fact that the making of it was re-enacted for Blackton's *The March of the Movies* (aka *The Film Parade*), a historical film which he made in the early 1930s. Both Blackton and Smith appeared in this film, performing their work with miniatures as they had originally done over thirty years earlier.⁶²

Edward Amet's scale-model ships

The other pioneer to make model-based re-enactments of Spanish-American War naval battles was Edward Amet, but using three-dimensional scale models rather than Smith/Blackton's technique of mounted cut-out photographs. In later years Blackton was keen to denigrate the achievements of this rival producer:

'At this time Amet had a lot of expensive models made of the vessels and photographed them. And when photographed they looked like

models, but ours being photographs of photographs looked like the real thing, except when they jiggled on their wooden blocks.’⁶³

While Blackton is clearly biased, a more impartial writer, Kirk Kekatos, takes the opposite point of view, seeing Amet’s model films as in ‘marked contrast’ to the ‘particularly feeble’ *Battle of Manila Bay*.⁶⁴ Kekatos is surely correct in placing Amet’s films ahead of Smith and Blackton’s in historical significance, in that his were actual models, in anticipation of modern film modelling methods, whereas Smith/Blackton’s use of cut-out photographs was more or less a dead-end in film technique. Kekatos concludes that Amet ‘pioneered the use of automated miniatures in motion pictures, now a commonplace attribute of “special effects” in today’s motion pictures’. One must agree.

Production details of Amet’s films

Amet seems to have started making model films after producing his live action fakes, though I suspect that there may have been some overlap.⁶⁵ He claimed that he began making fakes of the war after being refused permission from the American Government to go to Cuba and film the actual event, though I have found no evidence for such an application or refusal.⁶⁶ Whereas the Vitagraph founders made only two fake films related to the war, and only one with models, Amet was more prolific. Charles Musser lists five naval battle re-enactment films made by him in 1898 (and there might have been others).⁶⁷ The following are the titles given by Musser, together with longer/alternate titles for three of the films taken from a Lyman Howe programme of mid September, and I have numbered the films for clarity (for a more detailed list, see **Box**):⁶⁸

1. *Flagship “New York” Under Way*
2. *Bombardment of Matanzas ; aka The Bombardment of Matanzas by the Flagship “New York” and Monitor “Puritan”*
3. *Firing [a] Broadside at Cabanas ; aka The Flagship New York Bombarding Cabanas Fortress*⁶⁹
4. *Dynamite Cruiser “Vesuvius” ; aka The Dynamite Cruiser, “Vesuvius” [sic] in Action*
5. *Spanish Fleet Destroyed*

Kekatos has described the process of filming these productions (or some of them) in detail. With the help of family and friends Amet constructed a shallow water tank some 18 feet by 24 feet, with a painted backdrop showing a shoreline and mountainous terrain beyond.⁷⁰ [Fig. 5 and 8] The miniature ships, complete with guns, flags, and other fittings, were constructed of sheet metal and built to 1/70 scale, ranging in size from 3½ to 5½ feet long and 2½ to 3 feet high. That is surprisingly large for film models, and indicates the ambition and magnitude of this enterprise.⁷¹ Terry Ramsaye noted that, ‘The models were proportioned to the lens angle to create perspective with great accuracy’.⁷²

The scaled-down ships replicated major American naval vessels, including USS *New York*, *Olympia*, *Puritan*, *Oregon*, *Vesuvius*, *Iowa*, as well as the Spanish ship, HMS *Viscaya*, and they were powered by electricity.⁷³

Camphor-soaked cotton wadding provided the smoke issuing from funnels, and each ship was fitted with working gun turrets, with gunpowder and blasting caps for firing.⁷⁴ During filming, a fan simulated sea waves, and water jets within the tank gave the effect of the ships' prows ploughing against the waves. Amet was an experienced inventor, and clearly his mechanical abilities were invaluable in this work.

Ramsaye wrote a vivid description of the process of filming one naval battle, with Amet giving instructions and operating the camera, and an assistant, William H. Howard ('Billy'), manning an electrical control panel off camera:

"Number One, Billy!" Then the black smoke rolled from the funnels of the ships under forced draught.

"Number two." Another button and the ships were under way with a curling bow wave at the cutwaters.

"Number three." Every ship went into action with shells bursting about, splattering on the armor. A destroyer charged the USS Iowa and a twelve inch rifle lowered and fired point blank. The destroyer lurched under the impact, settled by the stern and sank with a mound of waves rising as the bow went out of sight. So the battle raged.⁷⁵

Amet's films: dates and identification

It seems that there is precious little hard information about exactly when Amet made his model-based fakes of the war, though one can attempt some rough dating based on the events and ships portrayed, and dates of the films' first exhibition. At the start of the Spanish-American War, the flagship *New York* headed the squadron of ships assigned to the Caribbean, and she bombarded Matanzas (on the north shore of Cuba) on 27 April, and Cabañas (on the southern shore, near Santiago) a few days later. The squadron included the *Puritan*, and the *Vesuvius* may also have taken part.⁷⁶ These ships were all represented in Amet's fakes. The Caribbean naval engagements were followed by the sinking of the Spanish fleet at Manila bay on 1 May.⁷⁷ This intense period of US naval action, lasting from 27 April to 1 May, might well have been what inspired Amet to set up his tank and make his models.⁷⁸

A latest date limit for production is established by the fact that one of Amet's films, probably the *Cabanas* or *Matanzas* title, was available by the end of June/early July, because it was described on 2 July in a New York periodical (see below). I suspect therefore, that at least the first four titles that I listed above were filmed in May 1898, and late in May seems most likely, because detailed news of these actions only became available in the middle of the month, and Amet would have needed some time to construct the models, etc. This is roughly the same date that Blackton and Smith were making their *Manila Bay* film.

Amet's model-based fake films were apparently based on war events reported in the news, and he was guided in the design of his ships and settings by pictures published in the illustrated press. So claimed Terry Ramsaye, noting that Amet made the models with military details 'all to fit exactly with the pictures and descriptions in the periodicals'.⁷⁹ Kekatos draws attention to

press illustrations that might have guided the filmmaker: for example, *Harper's Weekly* in its issue of 14 May 1898 carried fifteen pages devoted to events of the Spanish-American War, including 27 illustrations of various notables and military events. Three full page illustrations depicted the naval engagements at Manila Bay, Cabanas and Matanzas, drawn from on-site observation or from naval reports.⁸⁰ These artists' impressions in *Harper's* would have been an invaluable blueprint for Amet to make his models and scenic backgrounds.⁸¹ Incidentally, this cross-fertilisation is another example of the influence of the press on the filming of this war.

There are some problems of film identification. The last film on the list, *Spanish Fleet Destroyed*, is alternatively titled, *Cruiser Vizcaya Under Heavy Fire, Beached And Burned*, and on the face of it, this would seem to represent the Battle of Santiago Bay, 3 July 1898.⁸² Ramsaye certainly thought so, and stated that in making fakes of the war, Amet was 'centering his efforts on the sinking of the Admiral Cervera's fleet at Santiago. In miniature he constructed the Bay of Santiago in a tub', and Ramsaye's vivid description quoted above of Amet's filming a sea battle refers to the Santiago Bay event.⁸³ However I am not so sure Ramsaye was correct in this. It seems to me likely that, rather than Amet setting up his tank and models on a second occasion to film the battle of Santiago Bay in July or later, this film was originally shot to represent the battle of Manila Bay of 1 May, which would mean it would have been shot in May like the other four titles.⁸⁴ Re-titling of Amet's films was widespread – and of early war films in general – and a film of the Manila naval battle could easily be said to represent the Santiago battle. Kekatos, like me, also believes that *Spanish Fleet Destroyed* was originally shot as a re-enactment of the Manila Bay battle. He gives a number of examples where the Amet films were re-titled to represent different events.⁸⁵

Amet's model films were apparently distributed quite widely in 1898 and afterwards. An early exhibitor recalled showing a number of fake war films in 1898, including naval fakes, and noted, 'Most of these naval battles took place on a small lake in Wisconsin'. This is probably a confusion for the word 'Waukegan', Amet's home town in Illinois, where he shot the naval re-enactments.⁸⁶ Another instance is a screening of a film entitled 'the Bombardment of Fort Matanzas', presumably the Amet production, which was a feature attraction in Omaha's Trans-Mississippi Exposition in 1898, where it was advertised prominently on the frontage.⁸⁷ [Fig. 7 and 9]

Believability of Amet's films

Amet's films were both vivid and, to some spectators, realistic, and this raises the general issue of the believability of fake films, which we previously discussed in relation to acted fakes of this war and in the Greco-Turkish war section. A good example of this issue emerged when the showman Lyman Howe screened some war films in the mid-West in September 1898, including at least three of Amet's naval re-enactments. A local pressman seemed convinced that the films were genuine, claiming that they were 'war scenes photographed on the spot'. He stressed, 'the great risk taken in getting these photographs', noting that 'some of them are so thrillingly realistic that the audience broke out in the most enthusiastic applause'. Probably part of the

reason for their believability was that Howe mixed up the fakes with war-related actualities – genuine films of troops embarking for Cuba, camp life, etc which, the press report noted, were also ‘enthusiastically received by the audience’.⁸⁸

Earlier in the year another reviewer described one of the Amet films, probably *Bombardment [or battle] of Matanzas*, [Fig. 6] as if he were describing a genuine film of the battle:

‘This is a most marvelous picture; in the distance can be seen the mountains and shore line where are located the Spanish batteries. The flag ship *New York* and the monitor *Puritan* are in full action pouring tons of iron and steel at the masked batteries on the shore. Volumes of smoke burst from the monster guns, while shot and shell fall thick and fast. Some shells are seen to burst in the air, scattering their deadly missiles in all directions, while others explode in the sea, throwing volumes of water in the air. A final shot from one of the thirteen inch guns of the *Puritan* lands exactly in the centre of the main battery, completely blowing it out of existence.’⁸⁹

This review implies that the film was not just a re-enactment with models, but had been shot during the naval action itself with a telephoto lens: ‘The new TELESCOPIC LENS is a triumph of modern photography. It is possible to obtain accurate pictures at very long range’.⁹⁰ This was not an isolated instance of this claim. One spectator recalled that when a film of the Battle of Manila Bay – quite possibly one of the Amet films – was exhibited in New York, the lecturer told an enthusiastic member of the audience that the battle had been shot from five miles away with ‘a telescopic lens’.⁹¹ Terry Ramsaye confirms that Amet's pictures ‘went out as having been made with a telescopic lens on a camera aboard a dispatch boat at six miles distance from the action’. This suggests a regular pattern of misrepresentation about the alleged lens use, and perhaps Amet’s company had suggested to showmen that they spin this yarn. (The use of a telephoto for filming was claimed during other wars too, as I describe in an Appendix). Perhaps, too, the boast helped to persuade spectators that they were seeing the real battles. Indeed Ramsaye states that ‘the pictures met many a critical eye’, and adds a further anecdote about their perceived realism. When Amet projected the films to a body of officers (at the U.S. Naval Training Station at Lake Bluff, Illinois after the war), Ramsaye tells us the scenes were generally accepted as true-life, but:

There was only one doubting Thomas, an officer who had been aboard the old dynamite ship U.S.S. Vesuvius... This dynamite gunner watched the terrific upheaval caused by one of these bombs.
"I don't see how you could have got that picture – we only operated at night."
"Easy," replied Amet, with one hand on his magniscope projector and the other covering a grin. "You see we used moon-light film."⁹²

Ramsaye follows this dubious anecdote with another, stating that a copy of an Amet fake was bought by the Spanish Government to be placed in the

national archives in Madrid. But in 1943 a Spanish film historian, Carlos Fernández Cuenca, made enquiries of officials connected to the Spanish navy, and no record could be found that such a film was ever acquired.⁹³ Like many early film anecdotes, Ramsaye's stories clearly need to be taken with a pinch of salt, but this should not lessen the central point of this section, that Amet's fakes were probably perceived by some spectators as convincing. The lesson may not have been lost on later filmmakers, in that model work became a central part of filmed special effects, whose central aim – often successful – was to make models resemble the real ships or other large objects. Both Amet and Smith/Blackton's model fakes stand as pioneering examples of such work, and showed that in some circumstances such films could seem almost like the real thing and be highly popular with audiences.

CONCLUSION : STAGING, SYMBOLISM AND THE PRESS

Before the Spanish-American War, the range of film genres had been relatively restricted, and was dominated by 'slices of life' type actualities. During the war, as well as various kinds of actuality films, new genres emerged, based on staged scenes or 'imaginative representations' of the conflict. Staged or faked battles were produced in large numbers, some with actors and some using model ships. The latter were a new genre, invented specifically to re-stage actual events in this war. Also produced for the first time were symbolic or emblematic films, depicting national figures, or showing flags (mainly US) flying. It is striking that such relatively sophisticated forms of representation had emerged so quickly in film history.

One reason for this rapid progress – as for so many apparently 'rapid advances' in early cinema – is doubtless that there were existing models in other media. One key influence (again) was the press, and practices long employed by newspaper and magazine editors provided some guidance for making both symbolic and faked films. As far as the former were concerned, national symbolism was in the air at this time, and was commonly to be seen in the press. For example, *Leslie's Weekly* had potent images of Uncle Sam on its covers in both March and April of 1898: in one case he was brandishing a sword, and in the other standing defiantly before the 'Stars and Stripes', with the caption 'Remember the "Maine"'.⁹⁴ [see illustrations for Chapter 2: Fig. 3] Another manifestation of national symbolism – flags – were (as we have mentioned earlier), to be seen flying all over America in 1898, so the flag films that I have described were in a sense a cinematic version of a national trend.

In terms of re-staging and faking, again the American press provided ready-made models. As far as making re-staged films of actual incidents (mainly scale-model naval re-enactments), the press forbear was the artists' impression which was regularly used to show readers how a current news event might have looked as it happened. As for dramatised films of imaginary incidents on the battlefield, these too might have been based on 'invented stories' in the press. While it was officially frowned upon, there was a tradition of deception and faking in newspapers (notably in the yellow press). Sometimes news stories were partially or totally untrue: for example, many

stories in Hearst's *Journal* about resistance and battles in Cuba were total fabrications.⁹⁵ The alleged quotation from Hearst comes to mind here: 'You furnish the pictures. I'll furnish the war.'

These, therefore, were some of the existing practices of the press which early filmmakers were able to draw on in making staged representations of the war of '98. These innovative films did not come out of nowhere, they emerged from a media world – especially of the press – which already had a quite sophisticated understanding of artificial, abstract, and indeed mendacious, representation. Nevertheless, these filmmakers were innovators in their own right, in creating an impressive variety of iconic and re-staged scenes within only a couple of years of the origin of the movies. Among their particular achievements, I would highlight two.

The model work of Amet was remarkable not only for its sophistication and ambition (the large size of the models and tank are particularly impressive), but also for the skill with which the films were made. That some audiences thought that these were genuine records of the events is surely testimony to Amet's abilities as a filmmaker, and also a pointer to the future power of cinema – through special effects, for example – to create a convincing illusion of reality. Just as significant were the symbolic moving images produced during the war, such as films of nationalist icons like Uncle Sam or of flags – a theme which was developed even further, as we shall see, during the Boer War. These were some of cinema's first allegorical representations, and opened the door for film to do more than merely reproduce everyday life – it could be a vehicle for abstract ideas too.

Important as these advances were, however, it is arguable that the leading cinematic innovators of the war of '98 were the exhibitors, who programmed these and other films with a sophistication and complexity never seen before. Their achievements are covered in the following chapter.

Box:

Edward Amet's films: as exhibited by Lyman Howe, September 1898

With review details from *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 17 September 1898, p. 5.⁹⁶

Film numbers added for clarity.

1. *Flagship "New York" Under Way.*
2. *Bombardment of Matanzas* ; aka *The Bombardment of Matanzas by the Flagship "New York" and Monitor "Puritan"* – ‘... shows the bombardment of Matanzas by the New York and the monitor Puritan. Shot after shot are thrown into the city and the awful possibilities of the modern war vessel are seen in the rapidity with which the shells are sent on their way of destruction.’
3. *Firing [a] Broadside at Cabanas* ; aka *The Flagship New York Bombarding Cabanas Fortress* – ‘... shows the bombardment of Cabanas Fortress by the New York. The vessel steams briskly by the fortress, throwing shell after shell against it. The ship rocks and heaves from the concussion and seems instilled with life, the smoke pouring in volumes from her stacks and the shells flying from her sides. Shells may also be seen coming from the fortress but they fall in the water, the aim of the Spaniards being poor. After the bombardment great holes may be seen in the fort, showing the work of destruction.’
4. *Dynamite Cruiser "Vesuvius"* ; aka *The Dynamite Cruiser, "Vesuvius" [sic] in Action* – ‘The dynamite cruiser Vesuvius in action is one of the best of the series. The vessel looms up in the picture as a small craft, but it is readily seen that she is one of the most destructive war machines yet invented. From her pneumatic guns may be seen coming the terrible charges of guncotton and their effect in tearing away portions of a hill over a mile away creates a deep impression on the audience. One of the shots takes away the whole side of the hill. The ship scarcely makes a quiver while working this awful damage.’
5. *Spanish Fleet Destroyed.*

Notes:

¹ The films were shown with the Vitascope. See Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1964 [orig 1926]), fig. opposite p.236.

² Musser, Edison Motion Pictures: Filmography, film no.240.

³ *Freedom of Cuba* is preserved in the Museum of Modern Art (New York).

⁴ My description is based on that in *Treasures from the Film Archives* and by Kirk J. Kekatos, 'Edward H. Amet and the Spanish-American War Film', *Film History* 14, no.3-4 (2002), p.405-417. One writer, Castonguey lapses into unnecessary jargon in his account of the film, describing Uncle Sam as having 'an overdetermined military phallus', meaning his gun.

⁵ This date is given by Ramsaye, op. cit., p.389. Blackton gives the same date, in stating that, 'It was made the day after the declaration of war with Spain'. See John C. Tibbetts, and J.

Stuart Blackton, eds., *Introduction to the Photoplay : 1929: A Contemporary Account of the Transition to Sound in Film* (Shawnee Mission, Kan.: National Film Society / AMPAS, 1977 [1927]), p.31. A resolution for war was signed by McKinley on 20 April (though officially war was declared by the US on the 25th).

⁶ From the account book of the Commercial Advertising Bureau (forerunner of Vitagraph), Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, UCLA. This source also contains the following details: 25 April: 'Films (Cuban Maguire) – \$87'; 2 May: 'Card hocks(?) and rigs – \$1.05'.

⁷ 'A New Belasco: the Story and Views of a Man Who Has Won Big Success in Motion Pictures', *The Blue Book Magazine* 19, no. 2 (June 1914), p.245-6. Courtney wrote that: 'the whole picture was only about fifty feet long'. William Basil Courtney, 'History of Vitagraph', *Motion Picture News*, 14 and 21 February 1925, p.662.

⁸ John C. Tibbetts, and J. Stuart Blackton, eds., *Introduction to the Photoplay*, op. cit., p.31. Blackton recalled that, 'It was taken in our 10' x 12' studio room'.

⁹ Musser lists this film, *Raising Old Glory over Morro Castle*, as no.647, shot approx 2 January 1899. Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, op. cit.

¹⁰ Richard Alan Nelson, *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 1898-1980* (New York; London: Garland, 1983), p.99-100, quoting from a 1917 court case in which Albert Smith gave evidence.

¹¹ Manuscript of Blackton's 'The World in Motion', p.6-7. In Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, 'Newspaper clippings', UCLA.

¹² John C. Tibbetts, and J. Stuart Blackton, eds., *Introduction to the Photoplay*, op. cit., p.31. Blackton's biographer (and daughter) adds (without giving any sources, probably because this is supposition): 'This film whipped New York theatregoers to a frenzy of patriotism and sent hundreds of young men stampeding to the enlistment offices'. Marian Blackton Trimble, *J. Stuart Blackton : A Personal Biography* (Metuchen ; London: Scarecrow, 1985), p.12.

¹³ Ramsaye, op. cit., p.389. He added that, 'Tearing Down the Spanish Flag was a tremendous success'.

¹⁴ Flag films included: *The American Flag* (1898), *Freedom of Cuba* (Amet, 1898), *Hoisting the American Flag at Cavite, near Manila* (Lubin, 1898), *How the Flag Changed in Cuba* (Lubin, 1898?), *Old Glory and Cuban Flag* (versions 1 and 2) (USA, Edison Mfg. Co., Mar, 1898), *When the Flag Falls* (nd), *Defending the Colors* (no production details, but advertised in *The Phonoscope*, Jan 1899), *What Our Boys Did at Manila* (AMB, 1898).

¹⁵ E. W. Mayo, 'The Making of Moving Pictures', *The Quaker*, Oct 1899, p.476. Mayo noted the brief shelf life of such patriotic, war-time films: 'That picture never failed to rouse enthusiastic cheers wherever it was shown a year ago. Now it is much less effective'. On p.469 several frames are reproduced of 'Photographs from a reel of nine hundred views illustrating a popular change of flags in Puerto Rico'. One assumes that this is the same film referred to on p.476 of the article?

¹⁶ *The Era* 20(?) Aug 1898, p.17. M.J. McCosker, 'Philadelphia and the Genesis of the Motion Picture', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 65 (Oct 1941), p.416. McCosker's informant recalled the film running for weeks and the 'hot time' song being played.

¹⁷ One historian describes the process: '...each stripe on each image was tinted with a line of red, and each field of forty-five stars was covered with a stripe of blue. Naturally this process for making a color picture could only be inaccurate, and the colors danced on the screen, but patriotic Americans were delighted'. Peter J. Talmachoff, 'The Wizard of the West', *Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Quarterly* 8, no.2 (Fall 1969), p.13. A 35-mm clip of this survives in the Theisen Collection at the Seaver Center, Los Angeles County Natural History Museum: E.H. Amet item 110b. There were only 45 stars because when the film was made there were still only 45 states – Utah was the 45th in 1896, and the 46th was to be Oklahoma, added in 1907.

¹⁸ This was remade in March 1898. Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900*, op. cit., films no. 290 and no.529.

¹⁹ William Allen White, 'When Johnny Went Marching Out', *McClure's Magazine* 11 (June 1898), p.199. See image on p.204, showing flags and a public bulletin board of war news. See also Charles H. Brown, *The Correspondents' War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1967), p. 158; Frank Burt Freidel, *The Splendid Little War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 33.

²⁰ J. B. Atkins, *The War in Cuba : The Experiences of an Englishman with the United States Army* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1899), p. 9, 17.

²¹ The representative was Charles Morton, manager of the Palace Theatre, where the film was screened. *The Era* 5 Feb 1898, p.18. Presumably he meant the British flag rather than the 'English'.

²² William Basil Courtney, op. cit., p.662 wrote: 'Smith and Blackton made and distributed direct the prints from this first negative, but presently Edison again took notice of the work of his youthful competitors, borrowed their negatives, and made and sold prints from them on a royalty basis'.

²³ See William Basil Courtney, op. cit., p.662. Courtney adds pompously: 'An elaborate argument could be based on the premise that the only important contribution of the Spanish-American War to the history of the United States lay not in the acquisition of territories and pension lists, but in the impetus it gave to the work of Smith and Blackton in placing the foundation blocks for the motion picture industry'. (p.794) As Blackton himself put it: 'It was a great emotional and financial success and gave Blackton-Smith an idea of what might be done with this new medium of real drama'. MSS of Blackton's 'The World in Motion', p.6-7, in Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, 'Newspaper clippings', UCLA.

²⁴ From 'Hollywood with its hair down', a manuscript version of Blackton's autobiography, p.52, held at AMPAS, J. Stuart Blackton Collection, folder 31. Probably written in the late 1930s. Quoted in David A. Gerstner, *Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2006), p.6.

²⁵ He added, 'You can accept my word for it, however, that none of the pictures depicted were taken within five hundred miles of either Cuba or the Philippines'. William H. Swanson, 'The inception of the "black top"', *MPW* 15 July 1916, p.369. He correctly recalled that the land battles were by Lubin, Selig and Edison, and stated that the naval films were made in Wisconsin, a confusion for Amet's base (see below). Swanson also described placing images about the war outside his show as publicity, and employing an 'outside spieler' with a loud voice.

²⁶ Jacques Malthête suggests that Méliès released five films about the Spanish-American War, including number 143, *Collision et Naufrage en Mer (Collision and Shipwreck at Sea)*, but, despite Mr Malthête's always admirable scholarship, personally I am not persuaded that the latter film was related to this war. See Jacques Malthête, (ed.) 'Les Actualités Reconstituées de Georges Méliès', *Archives*, no. 21, March 1989. My April dating is based on the review for film 147 of 1 May which I cite below, and films 144-6 would presumably have been made before. My May dating for the last film is based on the fact that the Manila battle took place on 1 May, and Méliès would no doubt have made a film version soon afterwards.

²⁷ The French titles of the four films, with their Méliès numbers, were: 144-145 *Quais de la Havane (Explosion du Cuirassé le Maine)*; 146 *Visite de l'Épave du Maine*; 147 *Visite Sous-Marine du "Maine"*, aka *Le Cuirassé "Maine"*; 150 *Combat Naval devant Manille*. In the UK, three of the films were released by Fuerst Brothers, including *Explosion of the Maine*, which was said to be '2 lengths'. The other two titles were *Divers on the Wreck of the Maine* and *Battle of Manila*. See BJP 30 Sep 1898, p.637.

²⁸ Programme of the Searchlight Theatre. Box C139, Searchlight Collection, Library of Congress, MPBRs.

²⁹ This and the following comments come from the Warwick Trading Company catalogue of 1899, p.55-6.

³⁰ The Warwick catalogue description noted the film as '...showing the bottom of the sea with waving sea-weed and live fishes swimming around the diver and the wreck'. Warwick assigned it film number 4147, based on Méliès' own numbering, as was common practice at Warwick.

³¹ A report of Méliès' new films of the *Maine* at the Théâtre Robert Houdin in *l'Orchestre* 1 May 1898. Quoted in Jacques Malthête, (ed.) 'Les actualités reconstituées de Georges Méliès', 1989.

³² 'Et voilà comment on émouvait les foules...' . Georges Méliès, 'A l'aube du cinéma: les souvenirs de Georges Méliès', *l'Image*: 19, 1932, p.14. Amusingly, in the same article Méliès says the *Maine* was a French ship! See also René Jeanne, *Cinéma 1900* (Paris: Flammarion, 1965), p.108-9.

³³ My translation from: 'Intérieur d'un fort. Un canon tire une salve sur l'ennemi. De nombreux obus touchent le fort et fracassent les murs. Un obus ennemi tombe sur les artilleurs en entuant et blessant un certain nombre'. Georges Méliès, and Jacques Malthête, *158 Scénarios*

de films disparus de Georges Méliès (Paris: Association "Les Amis de Georges Méliès", 1986).

³⁴ Film no.130, *Explosion du Merrimac* (se fait en bandes de 20 ou 23 mètres), L. Gaumont et Cie., *Collection Elgé: liste des vues animées*, catalogue no.137, Mai 1899, p.10. In French the description reads: 'Scène d'actualité. Un fortin espagnol à Cuba. Explosion du navire. Canonnade dirigée sur les naufragés'. Thanks to Sabine Lenk for this reference from the Elgé catalogue collection in the École Louis Lumière. In this mission Lt. Hobson had the command and managed to sink the ship, but he and the other 7 volunteers were captured and held as prisoners of war for a short time. Hobson become a national hero as a result of his actions. (NB. this was not the Civil War *Merrimac*).

³⁵ Film no. 135, *Épisode de la guerre hispano-américaine*, described as, 'Scène de combat. Les soldats espagnols surprénant des insurgés dans une maison en font l'attaque'.

³⁶ Chicago film historian, Carey Williams, told the author that Amet got his friends and family to chase up and down in making the Spanish-American War fakes, whereas Kekatos doesn't mention family members.

³⁷ Reproduced in Kekatos, *Film History*, op. cit., p.412. The stills are in the Amet/Spoor Archives at the Lake County Discovery Museum, Wauconda, Illinois 60084.

³⁸ The boy was played by Frank Sherry, and he described the experience in: 'Waukegan vs. Chicago – "Interesting" Actor Recalls', *The Waukegan News*, Sunday, 8 December 1962, p.1-2. Cited in Kekatos, *Film History*, op. cit. The officer was played by Lew Hendee. Amet also filmed other land battles, says Kekatos.

³⁹ War films were apparently screened on one of Amet's Magniscope projectors by the 'Wargraph' company at Chicago's Clark Street Museum, 2 May 1898. Musser, *Emergence*, p.255. 'Wargraph' was a term used for many other shows that screened war films during this period. Kekatos suggests that this Chicago venue exhibited some of Amet's model film(s), though I would suggest that this date of 2 May was too early for his model work to have been completed.

⁴⁰ The first two films of 1898 were shot in the same location. Cameraman F. L. Donoghue, recalling the early days, said that almost all Spanish-American War scenes were manufactured on the 'shores' of New Jersey. See Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film, a Critical History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p.14, from *New York Journal*, 29 Jan 1937. Donoghue calls this *The Campaign In Cuba* series, which included scenes of American sailors *Landing Under Fire* and *The Battle of San Juan Hill* and the ensuing victory, *Our Flag Is There to Stay!* The reason for the variation in titles is not clear.

⁴¹ "'Spaniards' would not fight', *The Phonoscope*, 3, no.4, Apr 1899, p.15. This source states that for the battle of San Juan Hill, made 'recently', the company 'engaged eighteen negroes' to play the Spaniards and an equal number of volunteers from the 2nd Regiment New Jersey National Guard as the US army. Each side was costumed appropriately and taken to the location on Orange Mountain. The 'Spaniards' were paid 75 cents each and given beer 'in order that they might be in fighting trim'. But when ready to film, the photographer found they had fled taking 200 rounds of blank cartridges. The Battle of San Juan Hill was directed by James White, who could be the 'photographer' in question.

⁴² Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon*, p.181-4.

⁴³ *The Phonoscope*, April 1899. Charles Musser, *Emergence*, 257-8. The action in these films is described in 'War films' in F.M. Prescott, *Catalogue of New Films* (NY, 1899). See also 'War films', in *Lubin's Films* – catalogue of January 1903.

⁴⁴ Joseph P. Eckhardt, *The King of the Movies: Film Pioneer Siegmund Lubin* (Madison: Associated University Presses, 1997), p.28-9. His daughter recalled of the park incident that, 'we had to make the whole scene over again and take them way out in the country as it had frightened the whole neighborhood'. Lubin was able to offer forty films of the prelude to war, the war, and the victory celebrations. A photograph of Lubin's Cineograph theatre, 1899, with a sign for 'Battles in Cuba and Manila' appears in Musser, *Emergence*, p.285.

⁴⁵ 'War films' in F.M. Prescott, *Catalogue of New Films* (1899), p.22. On Musser microfilm.

⁴⁶ *Charge at Las Guasimas* may be attributed to Lubin or Selig, appearing in both *Lubin's Films* catalogue, January 1903 and in the 'War in Cuba and the Philippines' section, in the Selig catalogue, 1903.

⁴⁷ *The Last Stand*, no.799; *In the Trenches*, no.802; *Defence of the Flag*, no.804. See Charles Musser, *Emergence*, p.248-50.

⁴⁸ 'Trick pictures: How Strange Effects in Moving Photographs are Produced', *The Phonoscope* 3, no. 7, July 1899, p.7. The expert was one Robert Pitard, about whom I have been unable to find any further details. He argued further that these films 'probably gave a better idea of an engagement than could have been obtained from photos taken during an actual battle'.

⁴⁹ 'The experiences of a newspaper photographer – by one of them', *Photographic Times Bulletin*, May 1905, p.203.

⁵⁰ There may have been another model fake of the Spanish-American War, produced in France. A French film pioneer, Henri Diamant-Berger, later recalled that at the 1900 exposition in Paris there was an exhibit showing a re-enactment of a naval battle, including a model of a ship which was sunk by a small explosion, and mechanical systems to make waves and to replicate shells hitting fortifications. Diamant-Berger stated that the Pathé director Zecca filmed this stand illicitly ('à la sauvette') and two years later this film was released, touted as an exclusive actuality of the Spanish-American war, and hundreds of copies were sold throughout the world. The same film, he says, was successfully released some years later as a record of the Russo-Japanese war. Diamant-Berger is confused about facts, saying that the battle showed the sinking of the *Maine*, whereas the *Maine* was not, of course, sunk in a battle, but in harbour. Like so many recollections this one is garbled, though there were such model exhibits of this war, such as the 'electrorama', as we'll see in the next chapter. See Henri Diamant-Berger, *Il était une fois le cinéma* (Paris: Jean-Claude Simoën, 1977), 42.

⁵¹ Blackton says the naval battle reenactment 'was also done in this little 10' x 12' room. We had a canvas tank': from Tibbetts, p.32. (i.e. in the studio atop the Morse building, New York), though one writer says the tank was 'set up in a Brooklyn back yard'. See Sumner Smith, 'The Camera Lies', *Collier's Weekly* (21 Nov 1925), p.14 etc.

⁵² I could not make out the word when I saw the entry – it looked like 'glycerine', though 'gypsum' (i.e. plaster of Paris) seems more likely. Cash ledger for Commercial Advertising Bureau (forerunner of Vitagraph), Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, UCLA.

⁵³ Charles Musser, 'American Vitagraph, 1897-1901', in *Film before Griffith*, edited by J. L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p.33. Blackton gives the material/film costs of this as \$7.90. See MSS of Blackton's 'The World in Motion', Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, 'Newspaper clippings', UCLA.

⁵⁴ High quality photographs of all the US navy's ships appear in *Our Modern Navy* (Chicago; New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1898). This book was copyrighted in June, and so Smith's recollection that loose photographs were being sold in the streets the previous month seems quite plausible, given that these could be printed even more quickly than a book.

⁵⁵ Albert E. Smith, and Phil A. Koury, *Two Reels and a Crank* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952), p.66-7. He gives the title as *The Battle of Santiago Bay*, and also mentions a thirty-minute-long *Fighting With Our Boys in Cuba* which was also screened. Frames from the latter appear in 'Pioneer newsreels', *Image*, Sep 1953, p.39, but it doesn't look like Cuba, as claimed. In his book, Smith goes on to give more anecdotal material about the filming, while Courtney offers more about the office boy. William Basil Courtney, op. cit., p.793.

⁵⁶ Epes W. Sargent, 'The growth of the industry' 1 Jan 1910, p.17-20. Some wags dubbed these kind of films 'bath tub battles'. It was shown at the Giornate del Cinema Muto festival. For a discussion in Spanish of Smith/Blackton's war fakes, see Guillermo López García, 'Los inicios de la manipulación en el cine como informativo: La invención de la guerra de Cuba de 1898', in *L'origen del Cinema i les Imatges del S. XIX, Seminari Sobre Els Antecedents i Orígens del Cinema* (Girona: Fundació Museu del Cinema, 2001), p.153-5.

⁵⁷ See manuscript of Blackton's 'The World in Motion', Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, 'Newspaper clippings', UCLA. He adds that 'This was the first use of miniatures to simulate large objects in motion'. Also held in this collection at UCLA is a photograph of the filming he mentions (though probably it is the later reconstruction).

⁵⁸ 'A New Belasco: the Story and Views of a Man Who Has Won Big Success in Motion Pictures', *The Blue Book Magazine* 19, no.2 (June 1914), p.246. This article is about Blackton. Epes Sargent in 1910, op. cit., also mentions this accident, though says it was suffered while the two partners were filming a fake of the Windsor fire, not the Manila naval battle, and that it was Smith who was burned. (Sargent says that the first time he met Smith he had a huge bandage on his hand, which Smith said had been burned by an unintended conflagration of gunpowder).

⁵⁹ MPW 8 June 1912, p.908: 'Immediately after the accident, while his hand was swathed in bandages, Mr. Blackton informed enquiring friends that he was recovering from a wound received at the Battle of Santiago Bay'. (Again note the confusion between this and the Manila Bay battle). Significantly, there is no assertion in this article – published little more than a decade after the events – of the partners *actually* going to film in Cuba or South Africa, which suggests that this myth grew up later, probably in Courtney's 1925 history.

⁶⁰ Blackton stated that, 'This was the first use of miniatures to simulate large objects in motion', while Smith wrote: 'Deception though it was then, it was the first miniature and the forerunner of the elaborate "special effects" technique of modern picturemaking'. See MSS of Blackton's 'The World in Motion', Albert Smith Papers, Box 1, 'Newspaper clippings', UCLA. See also Albert E. Smith and Phil A. Koury, op. cit., p.66-8.

⁶¹ John C. Tibbetts, and J. Stuart Blackton, eds., *Introduction to the Photoplay*, op. cit., 1977 [1927]), p.31. Miniatures were of course to be vital in many subsequent Hollywood films.

⁶² Anthony Slide has copies of this film. See endnote in Blackton's contribution to John C. Tibbetts and J. Stuart Blackton, eds., *Introduction to the Photoplay*, op. cit.

⁶³ Ibid., Tibbetts, p.32.

⁶⁴ Kekatos, *Film History*, op. cit. Much of my account is based on Mr Kekatos' article, which I commissioned for *Film History*.

⁶⁵ Kekatos suggests that the model films were made *after* the live action fakes.

⁶⁶ I have found no such application by either Amet or Smith/Blackton, let alone a refusal, from my swift perusal of the hundreds of applications for press correspondent passes for the War. These are to be found in the National Archives at RG 107/E.80 from approximately file no. 2462 onwards.

⁶⁷ Musser, *Emergence* p.256-7. Taken from an advertisement for the films.

⁶⁸ Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures : Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880-1920* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.89, 308-9. There is no attribution of these titles to Amet in this Howe programme, but I am following Kekatos and assuming that Howe's titles are elaborations of the list of Amet's.

⁶⁹ There is a fuzzy frame still from MOMA film library of *Flagship New York Shelling Cabanas*, attributed to Amet, Sep 1897, in the Gordon Hendricks Motion Picture History Papers, NMAH, Series 3: box 1, folder 2: Edward H. Amet.

⁷⁰ The mountains were designed to look like those at Santiago Bay, claimed Earl Theisen in 'Story of the Newsreel', *The International Photographer*, Sep 1933, p.4. Kekatos says Amet was helped by brother Arthur, cousin William and Wilbur Blows. According to Ramsaye, Amet's assistant was William H. Howard – presumably this was the cousin mentioned by Kekatos.

⁷¹ One author says Amet's ship models were very accurately built, with turrets and flags and smoking stacks, shot on a large constructed pond, with a painted backdrop. Peter J. Talmachoff, 'The Wizard of the West', *Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Quarterly* 8, no. 2, Fall 1969, p.13

⁷² Terry Ramsaye, op. cit., p.390.

⁷³ In a letter attributed to Amet, cited by Kekatos, he stated that the operation of the model *USS Oregon* alone required 500 feet of electrical wiring

⁷⁴ Earl Theisen, 'Story of the Newsreel', *The International Photographer* (Sep 1933), p.4 says that the explosions were caused by firecrackers tied to the ships.

⁷⁵ Terry Ramsaye, op. cit., adds, p.390: 'Electrically controlled devices supplied waves, and push buttons controlled the guns and ship movements'.

⁷⁶ Ramsaye, p.391, says of 'old dynamite ship U.S.S. Vesuvius' that it was 'an odd experimental craft armed with three great air guns which tossed high explosive bombs a half dozen miles'.

⁷⁷ Both references from George J. A. O'Toole, *The Spanish War, an American Epic – 1898* (New York: Norton, 1984), p.201.

⁷⁸ As the actions at Matanzas and Cabañas were nearly contemporary events it would make sense that the films of these were also made at about the same time as one another, and the film of the *New York* as well, for this ship gained great renown through the two actions.

⁷⁹ Terry Ramsaye, op. cit., p.390.

⁸⁰ The pictures of actions at Manila Bay, Cabanas and Matanzas were drawn by illustrators Harry Fenn, Charlton T. Chapman and Rufus F. Zogbaum respectively, as special artists to

Harper's Weekly. All this information from Kekatos, *Film History*, op. cit. An illustration of the Matanzas bombardment also appears in *The Graphic*, 28 May, p.652.

⁸¹ I haven't yet made a direct comparison between any of his surviving films and the *Harper's* images to confirm that there was a direct influence. *Firing a Broadside at Cabanas* survives in MOMA, and *Bombardment of Matanzas* is in a stock library and is on display at Lake County Discovery Museum.

⁸² Title from Musser, *Emergence*, p.257.

⁸³ Ramsaye, op. cit., p.390.

⁸⁴ Kekatos states that *Bombardment of Matanzas* was produced in late April 1898, but this date, just after the actual events, would not have given him enough time in my opinion to make models etc.

⁸⁵ Kekatos, *Film History*, op. cit., writes: '...the various moving picture showmen that purchased the 'War Films', changed the titles for easier public recognition of the subject matter. For example, *Spanish Fleet Destroyed* was widely advertised as *Battle of Manila Bay*, as in fact it was the re-enactment of that naval engagement in the Philippine Islands. *Bombardment of Matanzas* which shows the Cruiser USS New York and the monitor USS Puritan shelling the Spanish fortifications at Matanzas, Cuba was often called *Battle of Santiago* and is in fact available as such in video or DVD format, from The Killiam Collection'. *The Battle of Santiago Bay* is also known as *The Sinking of Cervera's Fleet*.

⁸⁶ William H. Swanson, 'The inception of the "black top"', MPW 15 July 1916, p.369.

⁸⁷ A photograph of the exterior of the showplace is reproduced in: Andrea I. Paul, 'Nebraska's Home Movies: the Nebraska Exhibit at the 1904 World's Fair', *Nebraska History* 76, no. 1, Spring 1995, p.22. It is from Nebraska State Historical Society no. T772-8.

⁸⁸ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 17 September 1898, p. 5, quoted by Musser/Nelson, *Howe*, p.308-9. One of the live action fakes is described as follows: "'Defending the flag" is the title of a thrilling scene showing a land battle. Men and officers may be seen shot and falling on all sides. An officer who stands by the side of a cannon grabs the flag and holds it against all, defending himself with pistol and then with sword until all about him are dead and wounded.' This could be Amet's *Battle of San Juan Hill*. This press review stressing the film's realism may have been 'ballyhoo' planted by Howe or his agents for publicity, though to me it sounds like a genuine reaction by the reviewer.

⁸⁹ Ad in *NY Clipper*, 2 July 1898. Quoted in Musser, *Emergence*, p.256 and in Kekatos. The price of the film was \$30.

⁹⁰ The *Clipper* adds, again implying that the film was of the real event: '600 feet of this engagement was taken and it has been cut down to 100 feet, using only the best and most interesting parts'. The film survives, or at any rate a film of this description. Kekatos states that, for their permanent exhibit on Amet, the Lake County Discovery Museum acquired a 10-12 second film clip of *Bombardment of Matanzas* from a stock company which can be accessed via an interactive projection system by museum visitors.

⁹¹ 'Observations by our man about town', MPW 28 Oct 1911, p.278.

⁹² Terry Ramsaye, op. cit.

⁹³ The director of the Museo Naval de Madrid wrote to Cuenca to say that, 'it doesn't seem at all sure that Spain acquired this film'. My translation of: 'no parece cierta la adquisición por España de tal película'. Reported in Román Gubern, 'La Guerra Hispano-Yanqui y los Orígenes del Cine Político', *Historia y Vida* 3, no. 25 (April 1970), p.37-38. George C. Hall has stated that Amet's ship model was so accurate that it was used, it is said, in the prosecution of Admiral Cervera after the war.

⁹⁴ *Leslie's Weekly*, 17 March and 28 April 1898.

⁹⁵ Brown, *The Correspondents' War*, p. 35, 444. And there would doubtless be other examples unrelated to the Cuban issue.

⁹⁶ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, quoted by Musser and Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures*, p.308-9.