World War 1 Films

Top 10 WW1 Films of the Century:

**1.** [**All Quiet on the Western Front**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Vo6)

A tale of two German soldiers on the Western Front, this 1930’s film has lost none of its power or effect over the years and, as a story, an account of the war or an insight into how the battles were viewed, this is a classic. You could hunt out the colour remake starring one of The Waltons, but why skip on an original regularly voted into Top 100 Films of All Time lists and almost always number one for World War One?

**2.** [**The Great War**](http://www.bbcshop.com/invt/dd4745%26bklist%3Dicat%2C4%2C%2C5%2C6024)

If you want education rather than raw entertainment, this 26 part documentary will sate your thirst. The narration is well written and firmly neutral, enabling a series created 40 years ago to cross into through the ages of revisionism almost unscathed. Original footage (there are no tacky reconstructions) is mixed alongside interviews with veterans and quality maps, creating a package which, were it not for World at War, would be the best series of its kind yet made.

**3.** [**Lawrence of Arabia**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Vo7)

Well, I could tell you the plot (British officer Lawrence fighting in Arabia), I could mention Peter O'Toole’s superb performance and I could discuss how the events fitted into World War 1. But, to be honest, this staggeringly beautiful film needs no introduction and it's the desert which dominates. An all time classic, a top ten achievement, a slow-burning masterpiece…you get the idea.

**4.** [**Gallipoli**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Sjl)

This story of two young Australian men and their experiences during the Gallipoli landings has been sadly hijacked by political arguments and national bickering; few reviews get by without the beating of chests or the sniping of critics. But please, try and ignore those: this is a well put together, largely historically accurate and emotional film about a real disaster. Oh, it also stars Mel Gibson...

**5.** [**The First World War in Colour**](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/B0000BXBX8/ref%3Dsr_aps_dvd_1_1/026-3505389-0567647)

I accept that the commentary is poorly written and barely educational, and it's painfully obvious when the same scene is frequently reused: as a standalone documentary on World War One, this is poor. But the "gimmick" of this dvd is the colourised footage: experts and computers have added, what we must trust, are realistic colours...and what a difference! It might seem shallow to admit it, but seeing those same images in colour is much more immediate. Not available in Region 1.

**6.** [**The Lost Battalion**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Sjm)

Based on the true story of two US battalions who became trapped and held their position despite heavy attacks (some of which included their own artillery), this 'made for tv' film uses the loose, hand held camerawork later made famous by Saving Private Ryan. It doesn't give a very broad picture of the war and there are budgetary limitations, but it's much better than other recent 'trench' based efforts.

**7.** [**The Blue Max**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Sjn)

A film of surprises: it's about the often overlooked air war, features German characters (The Blue Max being a medal for German pilots) and stars George Peppard, known to people my age as 'the guy from the A-Team' (but also a quality actor). It’s also an excellent, albeit rather long, movie bristling with cynicism, social tension and stunning aerial combat.

**8.** [**La Grande Illusion**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Vo8)

Most basic plot summaries suggest this is a prison escape film: two French prisoners plot numerous attempts at breaking out of their German camp. But La Grande Illusion (Grand Illusion) is so much more, thanks largely to the dialogue and camerawork. For film buffs, it’s one of the best shot movies ever, and for history buffs the aristocratic morality and society discussed by the prisoners is very revealing: such things were out of date when this was made in the 1930's, let alone now!

**9.** [**Paths of Glory**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Sjp)

Under the direction of a young Stanley Kubrick, Kirk Douglas plays a French Colonel defending three soldiers who, having taken part in a failed attack, are due to be executed as scapegoats. The precise events are fictional but the situation, especially the failed offensive, is believable and the themes of courage, honour and responsibility well handled.

**10.** [**The Big Parade**](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=9/Sjq)

I've placed this last simply because silent films aren't as popular as they should be, but The Big Parade has much to recommend it: love, humour, terror, honesty. What's more, this story of a volunteer soldier slowly confronted by the nature of modern war was filmed in the 1920's and proved, among an audience who lived through the conflict, one of the most financially popular silent films.

**Bibliography for these films:**

*All Quiet on the Western Front (Universal Cinema Classics)*. DVD. Directed by Lewis Milestone. Washington DC: Universal Studios, 1930.

*The Great War: The Complete History of World War I*. DVD. Directed by BBC. null: Koch Vision, 1964.

*Lawrence of Arabia* . DVD. Directed by David Lean. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 1962.

*Gallipoli*. DVD. Directed by Peter Weir. Hollywood: Paramount, 2006.

*World War I in Color*. DVD. Directed by Jonathan Martin. Copenhagen: Athena, 2003.

*The Lost Battalion*. DVD. Directed by Russell Mulcahy. Burbank: A&E Home Video, 2001.

*The Blue Max*. DVD. Directed by John Guillermin. Tucson: 20th Century Fox, 1966.

*La Grande Illusion*. DVD. Directed by Jean Renoir. North Hollywood: Hollywood Select Video, 1937.

*Paths of Glory (The Criterion Collection) [Blu-ray]*. DVD. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. null: Criterion Collection, 1957.

*The Big Parade*. DVD. Directed by King Vidor. null: Irving Thalberg , 1925.

**Tavernier’s Films:**

*Capitaine Conan [VHS]*. DVD. Directed by Bertrand Tavernier. Hollywood: Kino International, 1996.