

MEN OF THE FORGOTTEN WAR: THE KOREAN WAR AND AMERICAN  
MASCULINITY

by

Elliott D. Sauerwald



A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

Boise State University

August 2023

© 2023

Elliott D. Sauerwald

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

**DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS**

of the thesis submitted by

Elliott D. Sauerwald

Thesis Title: Men of the Forgotten War: The Korean War and American Masculinity

Date of Final Oral Examination: 28 April 2023

The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Elliott Sauerwald, and they evaluated the student's presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

David Walker, Ph.D. Chair, Supervisory Committee

Lisa McClain, Ph.D. Member, Supervisory Committee

Lisa Brady, Ph.D. Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by David Walker, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved by the Graduate College.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Lisa McClain and Dr. Lisa Brady, and my committee chair Dr. David Walker for their hard work and guidance. I appreciate all of your feedback and support through this process.

Thank you to Andrew Harman and everyone at Chapman University's Center for American War Letter Archives. This resource proved invaluable to my research, and the experience was priceless. I hope to return for future research endeavors.

I cannot properly express my gratitude to all of the Korean War veterans who shared their stories in various capacities. Without their perspectives, this thesis would not exist.

I would like to thank my friends and family for all of their support through this journey. Thank you to my friend and mentor Dr. Tracy Tiemeier, for your continued support and belief in me. Thank you to Michael Robinson for your softspoken but steady support of my academic endeavors. Thank you to my father, Daryl Sauerwald, whose love of history helped inspire my own. Thank you to my sister, Ashley Sovilla, for your support, and for giving me a place to stay when things got chaotic in the midst of this undertaking.

And lastly, thank you to my mom, Faith Sovilla, the smartest, toughest, most hard-working person I know, for your unparalleled level of support. My gratitude cannot be put into words, but thank you!



## ABSTRACT

While the Korean War is considered America's "Forgotten War," the conflict offers rich insight into an unexplored facet of 1950s masculine gender constructs. This thesis examines how Korean War servicemen deviated from hegemonic masculinity by failing to live up to civilian society's gender standards, and by unwittingly developing alternative masculinities rooted in their shared wartime experiences. Military masculinity declined after World War II in favor of masculinity centered on nuclear companionate fatherhood. The troops who fought in Korea embodied obsolete masculinity and their service garnered less prestige and public admiration compared to that of their World War II counterparts. Nevertheless, strong homosocial bonds within the military subculture became the basis for the troops' understanding of masculinity. These masculine bonds were centered on shared experiences, suffering, and brotherly loyalty, which led to the erosion of masculine barriers related to race and sexual orientation. This in turn served to challenge the white, heteronormative masculine hegemony of the civilian world, though fell short of eradicating racism and homophobia within the military. This key piece of Korean War history and gender history has been overlooked in academia, and this thesis serves to begin filling this deficit.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: FATHERHOOD AND FANTASY: AMERICAN MASCULINE IDEALS FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II.....	16
CHAPTER THREE: “AS OBSOLETE AS A COUPLE OF B-17s”: PUBLIC OPINION AND MASCULINE OBSOLESCENCE .....	33
CHAPTER 4: HOMOSOCIAL BONDING IN KOREA: MASCULINE CONSTRUCTS ON THE BATTLEFIELD.....	57
CHAPTER 5: “WHAT’S A COMMIE EVER DONE TO BLACK PEOPLE?”: RACE AND MASCULINITY IN KOREA .....	69
CHAPTER 6: A “DIFFERENT BALL OF WAX”: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE KOREAN WAR MILITARY .....	90
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	111



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Korean War is often known as “The Forgotten War,” cementing its place—or lack thereof—in American popular memory as a largely overlooked conflict. Many American veterans of the conflict have expressed bitterness over their country’s seeming amnesia regarding their wartime sacrifices. Outside of the academic world, the Korean War appears to be largely forgotten. Hollywood for example has ignored the war, while films are continually made about Vietnam and the World Wars. Importantly, however, the moniker “The Forgotten War” dates to the war itself, indicating it was forgotten from the outset. And yet, the numerous contemporary opinion pieces admonishing the public for forgetting the war indicate that it was in fact on many Americans’ minds as it was ongoing, which directly contradicts the notion that it was being forgotten. While it is impossible to quantify to what degree the war was forgotten, the perception of forgottenness, abandonment, and unappreciation by the public resonated with many troops. This perception fostered a sense of obsolescence in their role as servicemen and—because masculinity was seen as a major component of military service—this likewise rendered the troops’ masculinity obsolete.

Masculinity in this context is defined as the socially constructed set of gendered characteristics, behaviors, and social roles considered appropriate for men. This is distinguished from biological factors that influence different sex-based characteristics, though, as Joshua Goldstein noted, even these are not wholly fixed but are subject to

variations broader than socially constructed gender roles.<sup>1</sup> Gender norms shift to fit societal needs in a given setting. However, social expectations often fail to include or allow for individuals and social groups whose embodiment of gender reflects various circumstances, experiences, and identities. For example, American troops who served in Korea (1950-1953), were placed in the awkward position of soldiers fighting an undeclared war, during a period in which men were expected to be family men rather than warriors.

Korean War servicemen deviated from hegemonic masculinity by failing to live up to civilian society's gender standards, and by unwittingly developing alternative masculinities rooted in their shared wartime experiences. Military masculinity declined after World War II in favor of nuclear companionate fatherhood, a central component of masculinity in the 1950s. The troops who fought in Korea embodied obsolete masculinity and their service garnered less prestige and public admiration compared to that of their World War II counterparts. Nevertheless, strong homosocial bonds within the military subculture became the basis for the troops' understanding of masculinity. These masculine bonds were centered on shared experiences, suffering, and brotherly loyalty.

This allowed for interracial bonding and the erosion of civilian life racial barriers that privileged white masculinity. A similar process took place related to sexual orientation, with gay and straight men bonding regardless of sexual differences and heterosexual men's hegemonic masculinity in the civilian world. When examined through a gendered lens, the Korean War servicemen's experiences indicate that they developed

---

<sup>1</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 183.

alternative masculinities, which reflected their circumstances that differed from the civilian environment.

Korean War military masculinity is a key element of both gender history and Korean War history that remains untapped by scholars of either subject. Examining gender norms is critical to thoroughly understanding any historical period and setting; the Korean War is no exception. Understanding how American troops were impacted by gendered expectations—and how they did or did not meet them—is critical to a more well-rounded understanding of the war’s history beyond the politics, geo-politics, military strategy, and major personalities at play during the conflict. It is likewise key to a well-rounded understanding of American history. Additionally, examining the troops’ experiences unveils how gender interacted with every aspect of their lives: how they coped with battlefield stress, how they dealt with society’s apparent lack of concern for them, and how they interacted with one another. This also uncovers how the troops (as with troops in any war) constructed a distinct combat-centered culture with its own social structures, and why this is worth examining for its own cultural history. This thesis serves to contribute to gender, American, and Korean War historiography and begin bridging the gap left by the subject of Korean War-era American masculinity.

Andrew Huebner’s study *The Warrior Image* is the only piece of scholarly literature to explicitly suggest that the study of masculinity is relevant to the Korean War, and he only touched on this in passing. He argued that images of World War II veterans depicted the heroic masculine warrior overtly, whereas Korean War photography was more nuanced. Korean War photographers continued to capture toughness, bravery, and masculine confidence, but due to the bleaker circumstances, and lack of clearcut

objectives of the war, photographs also captured images of troops displaying less traditionally militaristic masculine emotions, such as sorrow, fear, agony, and discouragement. Images of crying soldiers became commonplace, and Huebner asserted that the American public valorized their sensitivity and sorrow amidst their desperation.<sup>2</sup> This claim is somewhat lacking, as he provided insufficient evidence speaking to how the public responded to images of troops crying, leaving his assertion unsubstantiated.

Though Huebner's book remains the only work to directly broach this crucial subject, several key works exist that opened the door for a comprehensive examination of American military masculinity during the Korean War. These are organized by category to demonstrate how they invite further exploration. There are two overarching historiographical categories, the first being scholarship pertaining to the Korean War specifically. The second category is scholarship addressing the social construction of gender and the historical development of these constructs. Both categories are expansive and cannot be discussed in full. Included are a sampling of some of the works most relevant to this particular thesis.

Korean War historiography is fairly extensive, but several authors are worth noting for their scholarly significance or for their relevance to the topic of masculinity. Both Allen Millet and Bruce Cumings have produced several works pertaining to the history of the Korean War. Central to both historians' works is Korea's history of internal conflict, which they both asserted to be a central cause of the Korean War, rather than

---

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from World War II to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 2008), 130.

solely external geo-political factors. In *Their War for Korea* for example, Millet argued that the origins of the conflict could potentially be traced back to internal Korean tensions in the 1920s, but at the very least should be attributed in part to the failure of Communist insurrections to prevent the establishment of a United Nations sponsored state.<sup>3</sup> In *The Korean War: A History*, Cumings argued that the Korean War “had its distant gestation” in Japan’s Colonization of Korea in 1910.<sup>4</sup> For example, he noted that colonization fostered conflict between Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese and those who did not.<sup>5</sup> While Cumings and Millet were not focused on issues like masculinity or military culture, they provided key starting points for the study of any component of the Korean War.

Other scholars focused more narrowly on various aspects of American involvement in the Korean War and the social, political, and cultural elements specific to the United States. Steven Casey’s *Selling the Korean War* examined propaganda, censorship, news media, journalism, and the roles of the Truman administration in the Korean War. Casey’s analysis of propaganda and messages to garner public support is particularly relevant to the issue of military masculinity.<sup>6</sup> Public interest impacted the troops’ sense of purpose as soldiers, which in turn impacted their sense of manhood, making Casey’s work useful to the study of Korean War-era masculinity, even while he did not address it explicitly. Larry Blomstedt’s book *Truman, Congress, and Korea*

---

<sup>3</sup> Allen Millet, *Their War for Korea: American, Asian, and European Combatants and Civilians, 1950-1953* (Washington D.C.: Brassey’s Inc., 2002), xxii.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2011), xv-xvi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-5.

similarly examined the political climate in Washington D.C. during the Korean War. His examination of the Truman administration's justification for the war and its efforts to downplay its severity is noteworthy.<sup>7</sup> Similar to Casey, Blomstedt did not directly deal with issues of masculinity but did address the government's effort to minimize the war. This is relevant because it played into the troops' perception that their service was unappreciated, which proved emasculating.

Another important contribution to Korean War historiography is Jeremy P. Maxwell's *Brotherhood in Combat: How African Americans Found Equality in Korea and Vietnam*. While Maxwell did not explicitly address masculinity, racial issues are closely related to issues of gender, and the two often intersect and are both tied to power relations. The first half of the book examined how the newly mandated racial integration within the military played out in Korea. Maxwell addressed the easing of racial tensions on the front lines, as survival necessitated that racial groups co-operate. He argued that this opened the door for bonding across racial lines.<sup>8</sup> Maxwell's book related to the intersectional nature of Korean War masculinity, which should not be overlooked.

While no Korean War scholarship directly addresses masculinity, those addressing the sex trade in Korea and Japan during the Korean War period highlight a key issue that intersects with issues of sex, gender, and power (as well as race). Most of these works have highlighted sexual exchange as part of a power structure that placed the United States in a dominant position. While the roles of American troops figured into

---

<sup>7</sup> Larry Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea: The Politics of America's First Undeclared War* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 57-61.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy P. Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat: How African Americans Found Equality in Korea and Vietnam* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 8.

these arguments, scholars have framed the sexual trade in terms of larger socio-political dynamics. For example, Jeong Min Kim's 2019 article "From Military Supplies to Wartime Commodities" explored prostitution in Korea tied to black-market economics that emerged during the Korean War, fostered by the major influx of U.S. military supplies to the region. Kim argued that this black market embodied American post-World War II global military capitalism, which intersected with a political sexual economy and social life in wartime Korea.<sup>9</sup> Similar and related arguments have been made by other scholars, including Caroline Norma in her 2020 article "The Operation and Impact of the American Military's 'R&R' Programme in Japan During the Korean War," in which she examined American exploitation of Japanese women during the occupation and the Korean War.<sup>10</sup>

The second historiographical category, which pertains to gender, includes works like Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America*, in which he argued that the male experience throughout American history was centered on proving one's masculinity according to societal standards that developed and changed over time.<sup>11</sup> While Kimmel covered American history from the nineteenth century until roughly the present, he dedicated a chapter to the post-World War II period, in which he argued that American men, many of whom lacked direction after returning from World War II, centered their identities in family and fatherhood.<sup>12</sup> According to Kimmel, fatherly masculinity was

---

<sup>9</sup> "Jeong Min Kim, "From Military Supplies to Wartime Commodities: The Black Market for Sex and Goods During the Korean War, 1950-53," *Radical History Review* 113 (January 2019): 13.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Norma, "The Operation and Impact of the American Military's "R&R" Programme in Japan During the Korean War," *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 3 (February 2020): 367.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-163.

believed to safeguard against juvenile delinquency and homosexuality in young men, whereas absent fathers only contributed to these issues.<sup>13</sup> Kimmel linked this to anti-communist beliefs, which held that juvenile delinquency and homosexuality, like communism, represented masculine failure and moral weakness. The father's role in preventing this was thus essential to upholding American values.<sup>14</sup>

Despite fatherhood to anchor their identities, Kimmel argued that men struggled to balance their identities amidst the converse pressures of corporate conformity and nonconformity, what he termed the "Goldilocks Dilemma."<sup>15</sup> With masculine domesticity and conformity now supposedly central to social stability, men turned to film and television for escapist depictions of rugged, individualistic masculinity featured in western and adventure stories.<sup>16</sup>

In *Fatherhood in America*, Robert Griswold similarly argued that fatherhood was central to 1950s American masculinity, though he claimed that American men were generally more content as fathers and corporate breadwinners than Kimmel assessed.

Writing in 1999, a few years after the publication of Kimmel's 1<sup>st</sup> addition of *Manhood in America* (1996), Griswold asserted that fatherhood served to ease masculine anxiety, rather than helping to create it.<sup>17</sup> He observed that this 1950s model of fatherhood first emerged during the 1920s and 30s, when traditionally authoritarian, patriarchal fatherhood receded in favor of fatherly interest in domestic family matters and

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 178-182.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 184-189.



emotional connection to one's children, along with breadwinning.<sup>18</sup>

Taking a different approach, James Gilbert's 2005 book *Men in the Middle*, argued that 1950s masculinity was characterized by a crisis related to conformity, which stemmed from popular academics and social commentators who decried the emasculating nature of "mass culture" and consumerism.<sup>19</sup> Like Kimmel, Gilbert observed that men turned to escapist fantasy to cope with conformity, which he referred to as "spectatorship masculinity," or the viewing of individualist masculinity through a television screen.<sup>20</sup> However, Gilbert concluded that the crisis in masculinity was exaggerated by pundits, and that the majority of American men readily accepted the new, domesticated world and were happy to be fathers—an observation similar to Griswold's overall argument. This was exemplified by the radio and television show *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Ozzie ultimately embraced companionate fatherhood, though still adhered to the gendered division of labor in which he fulfilled the breadwinning role, while his wife was a homemaker.<sup>21</sup>

Notably, however, neither Kimmel, Gilbert nor Griswold considered the Korean War in their studies of 1950s masculinity and fatherhood. Despite Kimmel's illuminating analysis of 1950s American manhood, his only acknowledgement of the Korean War was a brief mention that fears of communist brainwashing increased following the conflict.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 99. Chapters 3 through 7 address the 1920s and 1930s, with chapter 5 specifically dealing with the development of companionate fatherhood ideals.

<sup>19</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2-5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 138-145.

<sup>22</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 175.

However, once his discussion moved to the 1950s, he did not address how men serving in the Korean War dealt with similar or differing experiences to their World War II counterparts in regard to fatherhood. Perhaps the most notable omission of the Korean War came from Gilbert, whose entire book was centered on the period in which the conflict took place. Despite the excellent scholarship addressing 1950s American masculinity, the subject will remain incomplete until the Korean War is properly addressed.

There is a subset of gender scholarship pertaining to critical examinations of how gender interacts with a wartime or military setting. Joshua Goldstein's *War and Gender* laid an important foundation by providing a wide overview of the relationship between war and the war-related roles typically assigned to both male and female participants and bystanders. He also examined how biology, group dynamics, and social influences can work together to form gendered war structures.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, he examined the homosocial group dynamics among troops serving on the frontlines in war.<sup>25</sup> In particular, he argued that masculinity within the military system emphasized qualities such as bravery and discipline, which were essential to maintaining calm under fire, suppressing emotions, and functioning under duress.<sup>26</sup> Military masculinity was also centered on loyalty and dedication to the group, which fostered unit cohesion and motivated men to fight.<sup>27</sup> Goldstein discussed many major twentieth-century conflicts,

---

<sup>23</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 183-184.

<sup>24</sup> Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 183.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-197.

though he offered no exploration of the Korean War.

While Goldstein provided a very broad framework for the study of gender and the military, a number of works examine masculinity during specific wars. Christina Jarvis's book *The Male Body at War* dealt with American masculinity during World War II. Susan Jeffords's *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* and Herman Graham's *The Brothers' Vietnam War* dealt with American masculinity during Vietnam. These studies exemplified models of scholarship examining American wars through a gendered lens. The Korean War has thus far been neglected in this capacity.

Jarvis, who argued that the male body was hypermasculinized to represent America's national strength during World War II, offered a useful comparison to masculinity during the Korean War, due to the two conflicts' close chronological proximity. Her study examined a variety of crucial elements of World War II and American culture, including racial issues, dead, wounded, and maimed male bodies, and the regulation of servicemen's sexuality and sexual activities.<sup>28</sup>

Elements of Jarvis's model are used in this analysis of the Korean War, which shared many of the same issues as World War II. She provided a useful launching point for examining the Cold War and Korean War developments in military masculinity. The end of World War II saw the rise of the Cold War, and certain American values shifted accordingly, including the gradual replacement of military masculinity with fatherly masculinity. However, Jarvis's analytical framework is useful for examining issues such

---

<sup>28</sup> Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004), 4-5.

A crucial next step in Korean War historiography is to examine explicitly the conflict through the lens of gender as a social construct. As the Korean War historiography highlights, issues related to gender, such as race, and the sex trade have been explored by scholars, but not gender in and of itself. Methodologically, examining Korean War veterans as a unique cultural group, with their own particular experiences with and understanding of masculinity, is a step toward filling the historiographical deficit. This requires analyzing the troops' participation in the war, and their interactions and relationships with each other, with the military system, and with the American public. It is also important to understand how institutions such as the military and the American media constructed the war and issues related to masculinity, and how this influenced the troops. Issues such as race, sexual orientation, and male homosocial relationships, played key roles in shaping conceptions of masculinity during the Korean War. There are two main types of primary sources that speak to these issues: personal perspectives and texts produced by the troops and veterans, and texts and imagery produced for a wide public audience that provide context for veterans' testimonies and aid in interpreting them for messages regarding masculinity.

Newspapers, magazines, military documents, propaganda reels, and similar primary sources provide cultural context and insight into social influences on the troops. Editorials and other opinion pieces are particularly important to this method of analysis because public opinion played a significant role in informing the troops' sense of self and purpose as soldiers, which was tied to their masculinity. They also helped to affirm or contest claims made by veterans, such as the notion that the public was not interested in the war. Newspaper articles, for instance, indicated that many Americans grew frustrated

with the war and wanted it to end, which relates to, but does not entirely align with, the notion that they were totally oblivious to or disinterested in the war or the veterans' sacrifices.

The veterans' personal testimonies are the most valuable tools for unpacking how their experiences in Korea shaped their masculinity, though they seldom directly addressed it. Letters, diaries, interviews, memoirs, and other personalized sources reveal how they felt about the war, soldiering, military leadership, their reactions to public opinion, as well as more interpersonal issues like family, relationships, friendships with other troops, and daily life in the war. These issues in turn can be interpreted—with the aid of contextual sources—for what they revealed about the troops' sense of themselves as men, their understanding of masculinity, and how the public's reaction to their service impacted this. These sources, when studied on a large scale and contextualized with information gleaned from other source material, serve as the basis for understanding the general trends regarding masculinity among the thousands of American men who served in Korea. This in turn reveals how these men failed to live up to, and in some instances, broke away from larger American society's understandings of and expectations for how men should fulfill masculinity.

Importantly, both categories of primary sources were subject to certain limitations, namely that they were produced with some degree of opinion and bias. Because these sources were often biased, they are important to explore for what they revealed about the cultural mindset of Americans at the time. For example, many newspaper sources were produced by individuals with strong opinions about the war in Korea, and these should not be interpreted as sources of fact-based information. Some

statistical sources such as polls and surveys were less biased in their reporting, though not without the risk of inaccuracy as well. Most of the polls cited in this thesis pertain to public opinion, so their statistics, even if unbiased themselves, conveyed societal biases.

Sources produced by troops are likewise limited by personal opinions, but also in many cases, they were recorded years after the events in question and are subject to the shortcomings of individual memory. These types of sources offer rich insight into individual experience and expression but should not be considered representative of every Korean War veteran, as experiences varied. However, when examined alongside similar sources, they offer insight into generalized experiences and suggest how the war might have been for other veterans. They should be explored alongside numerous other veteran perspectives for common themes and shared experiences. Finally, while race and sexual orientation are critical components of Korean War masculinity, the available source material for these issues are limited in number or have yet to be recorded. For example, some instances where the direct perspective of racial minorities are limited, less ideal sources, such as white veterans' observations about racial dynamics, are used with the understanding that they lack personal insight into what nonwhite men experienced. As with other source limitations, these are intended to give an overview that suggests certain trends, rather than inflexible facts.

It is crucial to address military masculinity among American troops during the Korean War because it offers insight into the culture created by the men serving together during a significant twentieth-century conflict. Not only does it help reveal how gender and wartime interact, but it also brings to light the Korean War's cultural influence, alongside its recognized geo-political impact. The various cultural components that came

into play to form this specific experience with masculinity are likewise crucial to fully understanding the Korean War and American society in general. Homosocial bonding between troops helped to level the masculine playing field for racial and sexual minorities. While the troops were inadvertently challenging civilian world standards of masculinity, they were also contending with the sense of increasing obsolescence as military masculinity faded from prominence. Following the end of the Second World War, men were increasingly encouraged to root their identities in fatherhood, breadwinning, and corporate work. This is crucial to understanding the baseline for masculine expectations that Korean War troops contended with while they were at war.

## CHAPTER 2: FATHERHOOD AND FANTASY: AMERICAN MASCULINE IDEALS FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II

In the years immediately following World War II, the dominant American masculine ideal shifted away from the military man toward a renewed emphasis on the breadwinning father. Military masculinity fulfilled an important societal need during World War II: the need for men to serve in the military and for the public to support this. In the early Cold War period, societal needs shifted to an ideological battle against communism in which the nuclear family was emphasized as key to the American ideal, and the breadwinning father was central to this.

Expectations for fatherhood during this period emphasized men's increased involvement with their children and family life, which many scholars refer to as "companionate fatherhood." Specifically, the nuclear family represented American ideals of freedom, capitalism, and democracy—seen as the antithesis to Soviet Communism.

Thus, the war in Korea was fought during a period in which the masculine prestige of military service diminished, and fatherhood was the pinnacle of masculinity. This backdrop is essential to consider when placing Korean War veterans' gendered experiences in cultural context. Many felt that their service went unrecognized—a blow to their masculinity. For example, army veteran Sinclair Stickle resented America's failure to honor the sacrifices of his fallen comrades.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Sinclair Stickle, *So They Will Know: A Korean War Memoir* (San Bernadino, 2013), ii-iii.



During the early Cold War and Korean War period (roughly defined here as 1946-1953), messages and imagery about companionate fatherhood were numerous in various cultural mediums. Specifically, social messaging urged men to embody the companionate father, who served as breadwinner, companion, and developmental nurturer to his nuclear family. For example, Old Dutch Cleanser featured an advertisement picturing a mother cleaning the bathtub, while the father wrangled two rambunctious young children.<sup>30</sup> A similar advertisement for Easy Washer-Ironer showed the whole family getting dressed for the day together, with the father tousling the son's hair as he prepared for work.<sup>31</sup>

Historian Robert Griswold traced the origins of 1950s fatherly masculinity to the 1920s and 1930s, when companionate fatherhood superseded the more authoritarian model of fatherhood from the Victorian era. Griswold noted several studies and popular writings from the 1920s and 30s that extolled the benefits of the family-centered father. For example, he cited writers Ernest and Gladys Groves as advocates of companionate fatherhood as key to the emotional development of all family members.<sup>32</sup> He concluded that this model of fatherhood prevailed into the 1960s, but rose to its greatest height in the Korean War period.<sup>33</sup>

Despite continuity, fatherly masculinity during the Korean War period was distinct from masculine norms of the 1920s and 30s, with fatherhood perhaps even more prominent than before World War II. One of most distinguishing factors was how fatherhood was tied to Cold War anti-communist ideals. President Truman exemplified

---

<sup>30</sup> Old Dutch Cleanser, "When Minutes Count," *Ladies Home Journal*, No. 5, V. LXIV, May 1947, 195.

<sup>31</sup> Easy Washer-Ironer, "Washday Reflections," *Ladies Home Journal*, No. 3, V. LXIV, March 1947, 116.

<sup>32</sup> Various writings of Ernest and Gladys Groves, discussed in Robert Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 92.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-103.

the nuclear family's centrality to American values in a speech at a Boy Scouts Jamboree at the start of the Korean War. The *New York Times* quoted Truman's condemnation of communist countries for teaching children "to place the state above the obligations of family life...[and to] despise religion and to believe that God does not exist."<sup>34</sup> Truman's speech epitomized the conflation of family life and religion with anti-communism. Messages such as this reinforced the importance of a man's role as husband and father in early Cold War American culture.

Along with Truman's speech, newspaper advertisements, radio, television, and politicians all promoted messages about the nuclear family, emphasizing the importance of the man's role in the family. One shining example of a popular cultural depiction of fatherhood was the radio sitcom *Father Knows Best*, which followed the Andersons, a nuclear-family who lived in a "white frame house on Maple Street" in the town of Springfield—a picture of the quintessential white middle-class American family embodying the nuclear family ideal.<sup>35</sup> This comedy was rife with gendered messages that reinforced the separate but supposedly complementary roles of the husband and father, Jim, as the breadwinning head of household and the wife and mother, Margaret, as the homemaker and primary caregiver for the children. The Andersons' family dynamic in *Father Knows Best* highlighted Jim's interest in family life and in his children's lives.

This affirmed Michael Kimmel's argument that early Cold War-era notions of masculinity encouraged men to find personal fulfillment through greater involvement

---

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Leviero, "Truman Condemns Red Grip on Youth in Talk to Scouts," in *New York Times* (NY), July 1, 1950, 6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>35</sup> NBC Radio "Smooth Household," *Father Knows Best*, NBC Radio, May 15, 1952, David Von Pein's Old-Time Radio Channel, September 18, 2017, 00:30min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H21S4-CSe0g&t=11s>.

with their children rather than simply acting as financial providers. *Father Knows Best* exemplified the involved nuclear father.<sup>36</sup>

The *Father Knows Best* episode “Bud Quits School” offered a clear example of a father providing guidance and life lessons for his children. When his son, Bud, decided to drop out of school due to an embarrassing interaction with a girl, Jim decided that rather than punish or lecture his son, he would offer him a job, to teach him the difficulties of the working world, with the hopes that Bud would return to school of his own volition.

Because of the comedic nature of the show, Jim’s plan initially went awry as Bud flourished in his new work environment. Ultimately Jim did offer guiding words that “a boy’s place is in school,” and Bud eventually got over his embarrassment and returned.<sup>37</sup> Jim proved that he did know best, explaining to his wife that they just needed to give Bud some time to sort it all out.<sup>38</sup>

The messages about fatherhood depicted in *Father Knows Best* aligned with ideologies and social trends surrounding fatherhood during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Jim’s method for dealing with Bud dropping out of school reflected Robert Griswold’s observation of the shift away from patriarchal, authoritarian model of fatherhood into the 1950s guidance model.<sup>39</sup> A scholarly study conducted in 1952 by Ruch Jacobson Tasch found that fathers during that period did not embody the role of primary disciplinarian, as only seven out of 85 fathers surveyed took on this role, with the

---

<sup>36</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 164.

<sup>37</sup> NBC Radio, “Bud Quits School,” *Father Knows Best*, NBC Radio, October 16, 1952, David Von Pein’s Old-Time Radio Channel, July 4, 2013, 21:09-21:14 min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgLiYIeS3yA>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:08-27:15 min.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 204.

majority claiming to share the role equally with the mother or to defer to her altogether.<sup>40</sup> More significant, however, was a new emphasis on fatherly involvement in child-rearing and domestic life. Robert Griswold argued that this became essential to “middle-class respectability in the postwar world.”<sup>41</sup> Tasch’s study corroborates this, with a majority of fathers surveyed rooting their fatherly identities in the intellectual development of their children but avoiding the more mundane routines of daily care in child-rearing.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Griswold noted that they increased involvement with their children but left the majority of the domestic work to women.<sup>43</sup> This allowed men to retain a separate masculine sphere in the face of increasing male domesticity.

In addition to entertainment programs like *Father Knows Best*, family-centered fatherhood was exemplified in advertising. Seven-Up soft drink company captured the centrality of the father to the nuclear family in their advertising. A Seven-Up advertisement from 1947 pictured a smiling family of four, centered around a toddler, with the father engaged with his children and the mother happily observing their family festivities.<sup>44</sup> Another advertisement from July 1950 depicted a family at the zoo, with the father participating in the merriment.<sup>45</sup> An ad from August 1950 featured a family on a fishing trip, with the father centrally located in the boat with his two sons, while the

---

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Jacobson Tasch, “The Role of the Father in the Family (Father’s Expressed Attitudes and Opinions with Regards to Their Role in Family Life and the Responsibilities, Satisfactions and Perplexities Which Fatherhood Entails),” *Journal of Experimental Education* 2, no. 4 (June 1952): 335-336.

<sup>41</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 187-190.

<sup>42</sup> Tasch, “The Role of the Father in the Family,” 320.

<sup>43</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 194.

<sup>44</sup> “A Family Affair: ‘Fresh up’ with Seven-up,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, No. 1, V. LXIV, January 1947, 165.

<sup>45</sup> “A Family Affair: ‘Fresh up’ with Seven-up,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 16, 1950, G6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

mother and daughter hand them Seven-Up from the dock.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, a Seven-Up ad from 1953 featured a comic strip of a family out bowling, again with the father centrally located, with one cell showing him handing a bowling ball to his son, and another where he smiles at his bowling daughter.<sup>47</sup> These Seven-Up ads from the late 1940s and early 1950s confirm that companies appealed to the emphasis on the nuclear family—with the father playing a central role—to sell their products to the American public. An advertisement from May 1951 invoked fatherly masculinity directly by showing a father and son playing with toys in a sandbox, holding bottles of Seven-Up.<sup>48</sup>

Conversely, Seven-Up ads from the World War II years lacked nuclear family imagery, perhaps due in part to many fathers being away in the military. For example, an ad from December 1944 simply featured a smiling woman holding a Seven-Up bottle.<sup>49</sup> This lacked the gendered messaging from the early Cold War ads. More notably, however, during World War II the company also published ads encouraging Americans to buy war bonds. Such appeals were absent during the Korean War. One Seven-Up war bond featured an elderly couple who chose to buy a war bond “For Our America.”<sup>50</sup> Another featuring two young children implored Americans to buy war bonds because “You’re their [the children’s] Uncle Sam.”<sup>51</sup> These World War II-era advertisements

---

<sup>46</sup> “For All Good Times Together: ‘Fresh up’ with Seven-up,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), August 13, 1950, F6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>47</sup> “‘Fresh Up’ with Seven Up,” in *Evening Star: The Sunday Star* (Washington, D.C.), February 22, 1953. Library of Congress: Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

<sup>48</sup> “The ‘Fresh Up’ Family Drink,” Seven-Up, in *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), May 20, 1951. Library of Congress: Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

<sup>49</sup> “‘Fresh Up’: It Likes You,” Seven-Up, in *Imperial Valley Press* (El Centro, CA), December 31, 1944, 8. Library of Congress: Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

<sup>50</sup> “For Our America,” Seven-Up, in *Imperial Valley Press* (El Centro, CA), August 11, 1943, 6. Library of Congress: Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

<sup>51</sup> “You’re Their Uncle Sam,” Seven-Up, in *Imperial Valley Press* (El Centro, CA), November 10, 1943, 3. Library of Congress: Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

tapped into the social importance of that war to American society, just as the ads following World War II emphasized the importance of the nuclear family imagery—including the father—to society in the early Cold War. Conspicuously absent is any imagery pertaining to the war in Korea, indicating it was not important enough of a social concern to appeal to it in advertising, especially when compared to Seven-Up advertising from World War II.

While most of these examples came from mediums that targeted general, mixed gender audiences, the nuclear father image was featured prominently in women-oriented cultural platforms. A short story published in an early 1947 volume of *Ladies Home Journal*, titled “The Right Word,” told the story of a father attempting to reconnect with his daughter after what he felt was too harsh a reprimand of her behavior. The story’s tagline directly affirms Michael Kimmel’s argument that following World War II, there was a push for men to find fulfillment in their children, beyond their separate workplace sphere: “Sometimes fathers don’t know about little girls. They have to reach out or there’s nothing left but a turned back and two separate worlds.”<sup>52</sup> After grappling with regret and feelings of isolation from his children, he called his daughter from a payphone on his way to work, realizing all he needed to do was put in some effort to connect emotionally with her.<sup>53</sup> That this short story was featured in *Ladies’ Home Journal* indicates that a father’s involvement with his children was a concern for women as well as men.

---

<sup>52</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 171-177. Mildred North Slater, “The Right Word,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, No. 1, V. LXIV, January 1947, 23.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

This type of messaging had gendered implications for men serving in Korea, as exemplified in letter exchanges between Joseph William Sammarco, from Alabama, and his wife, Bobbie, in which she implied that his service in Korea was impeding his ability to fulfill his proper masculine role as husband and father. Their letters, exchanged between April 1950 and August 1951, indicate that they were a young family struggling to make ends meet.<sup>54</sup> Joseph, who served in the 37<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, initially expressed excitement at being back in the military, whereas Bobbie was distressed to hear this news.<sup>55</sup> It appears that he initially intended to join the Marines (though ended up being drafted into the army), a decision Bobby saw as him willingly neglecting his masculine role as provider: “I’m just praying that you’ll change your mind about joining the marines. Believe me darling, I feel that you did your share in the war before. And now you have a family that loves you and they are so very dependent on you, Joey.”<sup>56</sup>

Bobbie expressed great displeasure that her husband, the primary provider for her children, actively chose to go to war rather than meet the needs of his wife and dependents. This apparently plagued Joseph as well, who soon after found religion. His chaplain reached out to Bobbie on his behalf, appealing to her to: “Remember that Joseph has had quite a shock, or a disappointment. He was training himself for a good job, and

---

<sup>54</sup> [Letter From Joseph Sammarco to Bobby Sammarco, Oct 31 1950; Box “1”/Folder “1”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>55</sup> [Letter from Joseph Sammarco to Bobby Sammarco, July 12 1950; Box “1”/Folder “1”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA. [Letter From Bobby Sammarco to Joseph Sammarco, Date Unknown; Box “1”/Folder “1”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>56</sup> [Letter from Bobby Sammarco to Joseph Sammarco, Aug 1, 1950; Box “1”/Folder “1”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

just before he was ready to take that job, he was called upon to serve in the army. His hopes for an income sufficient to support his wife and children was snatched from him.”<sup>57</sup> Another letter, sent sometime before the chaplain’s, indicated that Joseph was concerned about his family’s welfare, as he stated he was sending money.<sup>58</sup> Another from March 1951 indicated that he was concerned that they did not have enough to eat.<sup>59</sup>

While all of the details of what occurred in their relationship are unknown, their letters make it clear that Joseph’s service in Korea deterred him from his familial obligations and he therefore failed to fulfill what was expected of him as a man according to the new American model of masculinity. When contextualized with societal fears of communism, this becomes even more notable: fatherhood was ideologically essential to defeating communism, and going to war to fight communism did not trump his duty as a father. While Joseph is only one man and his experience cannot be taken as wholly representative of all Korean War servicemen, it does indicate that the expectation for men to serve as breadwinners rather than soldiers had real consequences for some. His and his wife’s letters also suggest that some women absorbed societal messages about

---

<sup>57</sup> [Letter from Chaplain John C. Neal to Bobby Sammarco, Oct 10, 1950; Box “1”/Folder “1”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA. The letters indicate that Joseph Sammarco intended at one point to join the Marines, but eventually ended up being drafted into the army. The trajectory of these events was not detailed in the letters.

<sup>58</sup> [Letter from Joseph Sammarco to Bobby Sammarco, Date Unknown; Box “1”/Folder “1”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>59</sup> [Letter from Joseph Sammarco to Bobby Sammarco, March 23, 1951; Box “1”/Folder “2”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.



masculinity and came to expect this of their husbands. The Sammarcos' exchanges highlighted the discrepancy between fatherly obligations and the call to serve in Korea, upholding fatherhood as the masculine priority. Thus, Joseph Sammarco failed to live up to masculine expectations by serving as a soldier in Korea.

While companionate fatherhood was the predominant form of masculinity, men turned to film and men's adventure magazines to experience vicariously more of the more rugged, individualistic masculinity that they had lost access to, a practice that James Gilbert termed "spectator masculinity."<sup>60</sup> Men's popular cultural mediums exemplified this and highlighted the prevalence of war stories in the men's fantasy-adventure genre, though not the Korean War. For example, the January 1951 issue of *Stag* featured an image of men in the water desperately but heroically fighting off hordes of small, evil monkeys, with the description "Mad Monkeys Manned the Lifeboats: A True War Adventure."<sup>61</sup>

Importantly, World War II figured prominently into this vicarious masculine sensationalism, whereas the Korean War was notably absent. The fictional story "Suicide Assault" in *Argosy: The Complete Men's Magazine* followed Mossy, a tank crewmember, assaulting the Siegfried Line during World War II, in which he recalled his great-grandfather's tales from serving with the Confederacy—thus insinuating a masculine legacy of battlefield heroics.<sup>62</sup> As Mossy experienced the brutality of war, he remembered his great-grandfather describing war as "beautiful and awful" to witness,

---

<sup>60</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 23-31. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 177-182.

<sup>61</sup> *Stag* Magazine Cover, Jan 1951, in *Men's Adventure Magazines in Postwar America*, Max Allan Collins and George Hagenauer (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2008), 60.

<sup>62</sup> Clifton Adams, "The War Was Like This: No. 4: Suicide Assault," *Argosy: The Complete Men's Magazine*, July 1950, 38-40.

thus embellishing the romantic nature of war.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, a story in *True* magazine framed one American Airman's story of escaping a German prison camp as an adventure tale. Lee Gordon, the airman, recalled escaping and being recaptured numerous times, disguising himself as a Hitler Youth member, and working with French resistance members. He also described a failed but thrilling attempt to be intimate with a "wicked" woman in the French resistance, who employed martial arts on him in retaliation.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the prevalence of "spectator masculinity," sufficient evidence indicates that men during this period were generally happy to be fathers who enjoyed vicarious fantasy.<sup>65</sup> Griswold cited one report from 1957 that found that the majority of fathers found fatherhood highly rewarding.<sup>66</sup> Tasch's article affirmed this, noting that the majority of men found the companionship element of having children particularly satisfying.<sup>67</sup> The Korean War's notable absence from the men's fantasy-adventure was therefore consistent with the dominance of fatherhood-centric masculinity and the supplementary "spectator masculinity." World War II could serve as fantasy because it fell short of actual military service. Service in Korea detracted from fatherly duties, which explained its general absence from men's magazines.

Military masculinity's general decline was reflected in the toned-down messages

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>64</sup> Lee Gordon and James Winchester, "Maybe My Escape Will Help Some Other Guy," *True*, October 1951, 104-109.

<sup>65</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 190.

<sup>66</sup> Warren R. Moss, "Father Reports: My Baby's Done a Lot for Me," *Parents Magazine* 26 (November 1957), 339-cited in Ibid., 187-190.

<sup>67</sup> Tasch, "The Role of the Father in the Family," 340.

in recruitment efforts. For example, beginning in 1951, Coronet Instructional Films put out a series of films geared toward preparing high school boys for the possibility of being drafted into the military following graduation. The 1951 film “Starting Now (Are You Ready for Service? No. 4)” perfectly encapsulated the bland approach to military service characteristic of the Korean War period. Rather than any explicit messaging about masculinity, the film spoke to the young male audience about how their lives “will be affected by this” and that their life plans should factor in this possibility.<sup>68</sup> The film featured three skinny teenage boys in conversation with the off-camera narrator, advising them to educate themselves about military service. He depicted military life in stark terms, rather than framing it as an adventure; the boys should “think of having no privacy” and “think of going going going until your feet ache and your shoulders sag.”<sup>69</sup> This training film suggested a degree of desperate inevitability, rather than encouraging young men to join the military because it was the manly thing to do.

Conversely, World War II recruiting efforts appealed directly to masculinity and featured somewhat sexualized imagery. For example, one 1942 Navy recruitment poster, designed by McClelland Barclay, featured an image of a well-developed, muscular man holding a large artillery round with gunfire in the background. The accompanying caption stated in bold letters, “Man the Guns, Join the Navy.”<sup>70</sup> The obvious phallic symbolism

---

<sup>68</sup> *Starting Now (Are You Ready for Service? No. 4)*, (1951; Coronet Instructional Films), 52-1:15min. <https://archive.org/details/Starting1951>.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:02-9:20 min.

<sup>70</sup> McClelland Barclay, “Man the Guns, Join the Navy,” Poster, 1942, (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.), <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92510148/>. Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 13, 48-50. Jarvis offered several other examples of similar World War II recruitment imagery, along with an explanation of the recruitment method’s history, particularly in chapters 1 and 2.

of the artillery round aside, the poster used overtly masculine imagery, with a determined, virile, and somewhat sexualized man at its center. On the other hand, the three boys in the Coronet film were young, undeveloped, naïve, and physically and emotionally immature, thus lacking the obvious masculine attributes of the sailor in the World War II poster. The film was impotent compared to the World War II poster.

Not all military-centered media from the Korean War period was as uninviting as the Coronet film, but they nevertheless lacked the masculine flair of the “Man the Guns” poster. For example, during the Korean War, the army created a series of recruitment posters that emphasized the sense of duty and honor involved in serving, sans the bulging muscles and phallic weaponry. The ads instead were text heavy. One poster for example featured a bright-eyed soldier with a rifle slung over his shoulder, and the text stated:

“‘All Right...Let’s Go’: That’s the squad leader’s time-honored command to his men when rest is over and work remains to be done....Now it is the rallying cry of peoples and nations determined to live together under a lawful system providing equal justice to all...powerful and weak alike. But—like all rallying cries—it needed a voice...a man to say it...the American Combat Soldier. He needs your help. He needs others serving alongside him. He needs volunteers. To all of you he says, ‘ ALL RIGHT...LET’S GO.’ And he has earned the right to say it.”<sup>71</sup>

Like the Barclay poster, this was aimed at young men with the intention of enticing them to volunteer for military service but took a less explicitly masculine approach. The Barclay poster skipped over messages about honor and duty, choosing

---

<sup>71</sup> “All Right...Let’s Go” Poster, “The Korean War Era,” U.S. Army Center, Accessed December, 17, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/resmat/korea/intro/recruitment-posters.html#lg=1&slide=0>.

instead to emphasize masculine sexual prowess and overt manliness within the military. While the Korean War poster did imply that combat duty was explicitly a man's domain and thus a manly endeavor, it was not overtly masculine, in that it failed to picture bulging muscles and phallic imagery, obvious symbols of masculinity. The entire series of posters features men who are fully clothed, with no discernable muscularity or sexual prowess.

Nevertheless, the Korean War posters suggested that within the military's subcultural tradition, masculinity was a central tenet of its culture, even while the civilian world drifted away from military masculinity. Therefore, it is to be expected that the military did employ more messaging that connected service to manhood. One poster pictured a soldier preparing for battle, with "The Mark of a Man!" in bold letters, accompanied by text explaining the tradition of American men serving in the army as protectors of freedom.<sup>72</sup> This poster tied manhood to military service more heavily than the "All Right...Let's Go" poster, indicating that some degree of masculine military imagery remained, but lacked the 'sexy' appeal of the World War II poster.<sup>73</sup> To reiterate, masculinity was still part of military cultural identity, but military masculinity no longer represented hegemonic masculinity within larger American society.

---

<sup>72</sup> "The Mark of a Man!" Poster, "The Korean War Era," U.S. Army Center, Accessed December, 17, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/resmat/korea/intro/recruitment-posters.html#lg=1&slide=5>.

<sup>73</sup> The word "sexy" is used quite deliberately here. The muscular sailor in the McClelland Barclay World War II poster boasted obvious masculine appeal, with more than a hint of sexual prowess, whereas the soldiers in the Korean War posters, while handsome, lacked "sexiness."

Anecdotally, these recruitment efforts appeared not to have been particularly successful in inspiring young men to go to Korea with conviction. For those men who did express enthusiasm for military life, their motives reflected desire for adventure, perhaps inspired by the escapist fantasy like those featured in *Argosy* and *True* magazines. For example, army veteran Uzal Ent, of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, cited a desire for adventure as motivation for serving in Korea.<sup>74</sup> Richard Cherry felt that he could compensate for being too young for World War II by fighting in Korea.<sup>75</sup> Both of these examples reflected the escapist adventure fantasy that was characteristic of spectator masculinity. With Cherry, the residual “sexiness” of World War II was a motivating factor (and perhaps he recalled the enticing messaging of that war’s recruitment posters).

However, the personal correspondences of some young men indicate they lacked a sense of adventure regarding service in Korea. In a letter to his girlfriend, Corporal Joseph DeHaan, of Red Lake Falls, Minnesota, expressed his wish to avoid fighting in Korea. On January 26, 1951, he conveyed his unhappiness over being transferred to an infantry unit, fearing that his “luck was running out” and that he would be sent to battle. Likewise, he assured his girlfriend that it was “better to be a live coward than a dead hero.”<sup>76</sup> Private First Class Francis Greechan of Allentown, Pennsylvania, like DeHaan, wished to avoid going to battle, and wrote to his parents that he was “lucky” that due to a

---

<sup>74</sup> Uzal Ent, “Holding the Line, in *No Bugles, No Drums: An Oral History of the Korean War* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Arthur Richard Cherry, “Korean War Veterans Survey Project” (Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA), 1. <sup>76</sup>[Letter from Joseph DeHaan to Dorothy Page, January 26, 1951; Box “3”/Folder “2”], Joseph DeHaan Korean War Correspondence (2015.084.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

vision issue, he was “unfit for duty in Korea.”<sup>77</sup> Albert Flowerday, stationed in Japan, wrote to his friend Eugene Kamprath on March 10, 1952, that he hoped to avoid service in Korea.<sup>78</sup> On March 21, 1952, he proclaimed that there was nothing worth fighting for in Korea.<sup>79</sup> Edward Sautter, stationed at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, similarly expressed to Kamprath, in April 1951, that he hoped to avoid being sent to war in Korea.<sup>80</sup>

The lack of drive seems the natural response to war, given that glorified military masculinity had ceded to nuclear companionate fatherhood. Indeed, when comparing a *Los Angeles Times* article on the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack to one from the days following the North Korean invasion, it is clear that the American population, as well as military personnel, received vastly different messages about the inclination to fight. Whereas it was reported that over 11,000 “recruits flock[ed] in following surprise attack by Japanese on Pearl Harbor and Honolulu,” the start of the Korean War lacked similar proclamations.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the North Koreans did not attack American soil, nor seemed to pose a direct affront to the American people, and thus military service failed to inspire the same appeal to young men. Instead, the focus was on extending the draft, and reassuring the public that “officials denied the

---

<sup>77</sup> [Letter from Francis Greechan to Parents, April 28, 1951; Box “1”/Folder “15”], Francis J. Greechan Post-Second World War and Korean War Correspondence (2016.046.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>78</sup>[Letter From Albert Flowerday to Eugene Kamprath, March 10, 1952; Box “5”/Folder “1”], Eugene J. Kamprath Korean War Correspondence (2018.133.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>79</sup> [Letter From Albert Flowerday to Eugene Kamprath, March 21, 1952; Box “5”/Folder “1”], Eugene J. Kamprath Korean War Correspondence (2018.133.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>80</sup> [Letter From Edward H. Sautter to Eugene Kamprath, April 22, 1951; Box “5”/Folder “1”], Eugene J. Kamprath Korean War Correspondence (2018.133.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

<sup>81</sup> “Navy Discloses Enlistments Total 11,303 in Eight Days,” in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), December 18, 1941, 8. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

nation is mobilizing.”<sup>82</sup> While the draft was a major supplier of troops in World War II as well, the key take away was that the motivation to fight appeared diminished during the Korean War. This news report was characteristic of Korean War reporting, and highlighted the struggle to appease the public that this conflict would not be a large-scale war.

As that hope eroded, the public support for the war likewise deteriorated. With society having already shifted away from the masculinized lionization of military veterans, the decline in public support compounded the troops’ disillusionment with the war in Korea. This was exemplified in the media through negative opinion pieces, which in turn fostered frustration among Korean War servicemen, who interpreted it as the public having abandoned them. When examined through a gendered lens, this indicated a sense of emasculation.

---

<sup>82</sup> Francis B. Warren, “Truman Acts to Bolster Armed Forces: Draft Summons,” in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 8, 1950, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



### CHAPTER THREE: “AS OBSOLETE AS A COUPLE OF B-17s”: PUBLIC OPINION AND MASCULINE OBSOLESCENCE

Public opinion played an important role in shaping Korean War veterans’ sense of themselves as warriors, which informed their sense of masculinity. Many troops perceived that the public simply did not care about them or appreciate their service in Korea. Evidence indicates that the public did become heavily frustrated and disillusioned with the war, which the troops often interpreted as the public abandoning them. This indicated a form of emasculation when examined through the lens of gender, because masculinity and military service were still linked within the military subculture.

Importantly, the negative media reports typically were not critical of the troops themselves, and some writers even expressed concern for the service. This highlighted the power of perception in how the troops interpreted media representation, which perpetuated the sense of obsolescence and forgottenness of Korean War military masculinity.

A basic timeline of events in Korea contextualizes the shift in attitude toward the war. Public opinion, while at first supportive, soured as initial successes were reversed. North Korea invaded South Korean on June 25, 1950, with President Truman committing US forces within days.<sup>83</sup> American troops first encountered North Koreans near Osan on July 5, 1950 and were driven south across the peninsula, finally coming to a stop at the

---

<sup>83</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2011) 9-13.

Naktong River, establishing the Busan (or Pusan) perimeter in August.<sup>84</sup> The United States then built up forces in this region.<sup>85</sup> On July 7, the United Nations authorized the United States to lead a unified UN command in Korea.<sup>86</sup> On September 15, 1950, the

U.S. X Corps successfully invaded Inchon near Seoul, enabling the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the Pusan area to drive north.<sup>87</sup> In October, UN troops crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. China had resolved by that time to enter the war if the UN forces entered North Korea.<sup>88</sup> Generally speaking, the American public was supportive of these UN actions.

Though UN forces had driven north through virtually the entirety of North Korea, the successes were short lived as they encountered major Chinese offensives beginning in late November. The UN forces suffered severe casualties and were driven south beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel beginning in December.<sup>89</sup> This marked the general reversal in public support for the war, with fears about a larger conflict, wasted tax dollars, and various other concerns. By late spring 1951, the war had ground to a stalemate along the Main Line of Resistance at or near the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>90</sup> In June 1951 UN leaders called for peace negotiations, which went on for two years while the combatants continued to bleed troops

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 16-17. The retreat covered hundreds of miles and was halted concerningly close to the Southern coast of the peninsula.

<sup>85</sup> Larry Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea: The Politics of America's First Undeclared War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 61.

<sup>86</sup> Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44.

<sup>87</sup> David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: American and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 167, 306.

<sup>88</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 23-25

<sup>89</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 28-29. Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li, *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>90</sup> Peters and Li, *Voices from the Korean War*, 34.

in trench warfare.<sup>91</sup> This further contributed to public frustrations. An armistice was signed after agreements were finally reached, on July 27, 1953.<sup>92</sup>

Cold War fears of communism and World War III played a role in both the initial public support for the war (or “police action”) and in the eventual decrease in public support following China’s entry. The American entrance into Korea was framed in terms of national security and maintaining peace. Aware of the nation’s war-weariness after World War II, President Truman maintained, according to a 1950 *New York Times* article, that: “the United States was ‘not at war.’ He characterized United States combat operations in Korea as a police action for the United Nations against the unlawful bandit attack on the South Korean Republic.”<sup>93</sup> Another news article indicated that Americans supported the “peacekeeping” mission in Korea, as part of the United Nations doctrine. A *Los Angeles Times* article from July 6, 1950, recognized that “The fighting in Korea is not a unilateral action of the United States, but a police action on behalf of, at the request of and with the approval of the UN Security Council, the purpose of which is to keep peace in the world.”<sup>94</sup> In fact, Truman never officially sought congressional approval to formally declare war.<sup>95</sup> A poll conducted within the first few days of the war showed that

---

<sup>91</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 32, Peters and Li, *Voices From the Korean War*, 35-37.

<sup>92</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 34-35. This serves an extremely brief timeline covering the major course of events. Dates included are for context, and much detail is omitted. There are numerous works detailing and analyzing the Korean War’s timeline, including interpretations of the causes of the war, the geo-politics involved, military decisions, etc. These include, but are not limited to: Larry Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea*. Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War*. Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War*.

<sup>93</sup> Antony Leviero, “U.S. ‘Not at War,’ President Asserts,” *New York Times* (NY), June 30, 1950, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>94</sup> “Korea is a United Nations Action,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 6, 1950, A4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>95</sup> Blomstedt, *Truman, Congress, and Korea*, xii. There is no question that it was indeed a war, with or without congressional declaration. Therefore, it is referred to as a war throughout this thesis, unless quoting or inferring to primary sources.

at least eighty percent of Americans agreed with Truman's decisions to commit air and naval power, as well as ground troops, in support of South Korea.<sup>96</sup> Another poll showed that the public was willing to commit to compulsory war work, similar to opinions about World War II-era economic mobilization.<sup>97</sup>

Strategic efforts to assuage public fears of becoming embroiled in a full-blown war, or a third world war, fostered support from the otherwise reluctant and war-weary public. Both the description of the North Korean attacks as a bandit raid, and of the United States' role as merely a police force, reinforced propagandist messages of "peace" and "[anti]aggression" and maintained the façade that American military actions were not acts of war but were instead peace-keeping missions. A statement made by Truman on June 26, 1950 (reprinted in the *New York Times*), captured this: "In accordance with the resolution of the [United Nations] Security Council, the United States will vigorously support the effort of the Council to terminate this serious breach of the peace... Those responsible for this action of aggression must realize how seriously the Government of the United States views such threats to the peace of the world."<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, language used by news reporters and columnists at the start of the war supported the notion that action in Korea would maintain world peace and preclude the threat of communism and World War III. One article reporting on the United Nations Security Council described how most delegates supported US air, naval, and ground

---

<sup>96</sup> George Gallup, "Citizens Back Korea Moves, Poll Shows," in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 2, 1950, 13. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>97</sup> George Gallup, "Poll Shows Public Ready to Sacrifice," in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 20, 1950, B8. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>98</sup> "Statement by Truman," in *New York Times* (NY), July 27, 1950, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

forces in maintaining “‘international peace’ and reducing the possibility that the fighting would spread.”<sup>99</sup> This implied that the North Korean invasion could lead to World War III if the US did not intervene, and therefore framed US lead action in Korea as maintaining peace, rather than an escalation in fighting. Another article sought to assuage fears that the North Korean attack would lead to World War III and cited Truman’s encouragement not to be alarmed. At the same time, the author argued that this was “an occasion for firmness” and that officials “believed that everything possible must be done to keep the outbreak in Korea from spreading beyond that country.”<sup>100</sup> These articles carefully straddled the line between calling for bold military action and inciting fear of a larger conflict.

The messages denying that the nation was at war impacted the troops’ sense of purpose, and some veterans reflected on this lack of clarity in their writing. For example, in his poem “Combat Iambic,” army veteran William Childress, from Hugo, Oklahoma, described experiencing the devastation of “a distant war which was no war” and that the “General, in rearmost echelon, with fancy unfired pistol near his thigh, barked militant commands and acted out his manly role untouched by fire.”<sup>101</sup> “Combat Iambic” is perhaps most notable because it highlighted one of the key defining issues in the Korean War gendered experience: the lack of war status, which in turn robbed the troops of

---

<sup>99</sup> Thomas J. Hamilton, “Most U.N. Delegates Favor Use of Land Force in Korea,” in *New York Times* (NY), July 1, 1950, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>100</sup> Jay Walz, “Truman Hurries to Capital; Meets Top Aides on Korea,” in *New York Times* (NY), June 26, 1950, 1-10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>101</sup> William Childress, “Combat Iambic,” in *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War*, eds. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 164.

warrior status. Another veteran, William Wantling of East Peoria, Illinois, who served in the Marines, alluded to this as well in “Korea 1953,” stating that Korea was a “strange war that was not a war.”<sup>102</sup> Compared to World War II troops, who were definitively masculine warriors, the troops in Korea lacked this status. Akin to the early media support for committing forces to Korea were the generally favorable reports on the early days of fighting and retreat during the months of July and August 1950, despite the desperate circumstances for the underequipped and unprepared 24<sup>th</sup> division that was rushed to South Korea to head off the enemy.<sup>103</sup> A report from July 6, 1950, the day after the 24<sup>th</sup> division, also known as Task Force Smith, engaged in combat for the first time, described how “our troops gave a good account of themselves by knocking out a number of tanks and halting their initial thrust.”<sup>104</sup> The article admitted that some enemy tanks had broken through and the U.S. troops were forced to withdraw but softened the blow, hailing them as self-sacrificial heroes buying time for a buildup of forces.<sup>105</sup>

The public initially appeared to be optimistic about the outcome of the hostilities. A Gallup Poll printed in the *Los Angeles Times* in July 1950 noted that the majority of Americans expected the war to last only six months to one year, with only 14% believing it would last longer.<sup>106</sup> Letters written to newspaper editors expressing hope and support

---

<sup>102</sup> William Wantling, “Korea 1953,” in *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War*, eds. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 186.

<sup>103</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 16-17.

<sup>104</sup> “Korean Battlefront,” in *The New York Times* (NY), July 6, 1950, 26. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 26. Another article, from July 7, described how 500 Americans (Task Force Smith) “Stopped cold for six hours the best division the Russia-trained Koreans threw at them.” “Reds Hurl 90,000 Men, 150 Tanks into Battle,” in *The Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 7, 1950, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>106</sup> George Gallup, “Public Sees War End in Six Months,” in *The Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 29, 1950, 6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

for the war served to further highlight the general air of public approval in the early months before the September Inchon landing. Halbert Gillette of San Marino, California, believed that Stalin was gravely mistaken to think the North Korean invasion of South Korea would derail American prosperity. He believed that the “short, relatively inexpensive war, such as this Korea affair” would serve as a hard lesson to Stalin that this strategy would fail.<sup>107</sup> Another letter writer appealed to Americans to view the “Korean Crisis as a ‘holy war’” and believed that it was a “test of strength between good ideology and an evil way of life.”<sup>108</sup>

Positive portrayals of the conflict continued with the invasion of Inchon on September 15, 1950. The Inchon landing was generally successful and led to the liberation of Seoul, South Korea’s capital, from the North Koreans, though the fighting was difficult.<sup>109</sup> The amphibious assault was described by the media as going smoothly, with minimal resistance and few American losses, despite difficult conditions. There were said to be few North Koreans in reserve beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>110</sup> One article maintained this positive portrayal by highlighting the North Koreans’ low morale, high North Korean casualties, and how the “North Korean Troops [were] handling their tanks and other equipment ‘very inefficiently.’”<sup>111</sup> Another article highlighted moral

---

<sup>107</sup> Halbert P. Gillette, “Puppet War Mistake?,” in *The Los Angeles Times* (CA), August 28, 1950, A4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>108</sup> Gudrun Friis-Holm, “A ‘Holy War’ Seen,” in *The Los Angeles Times* (CA), September 11, 1950, A4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>109</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 19.

<sup>110</sup> Austin Stevens, “M’Arthur Reports: Says Inchon Operation Proceeds on Schedule with Light Losses,” in *The New York Times* (NY), September 16, 1950. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>111</sup> “Foe’s Morale Low, M’Arthur is Told,” in *The New York Times* (NY), September 18, 1950, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

implications of the actions in Korea, describing how Marine victories in the Inchon region had liberated rice fields being held by the North Koreans and were now being “denied to the enemy and [were] being gained for the civilians.”<sup>112</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, some reporters pushed the belief that the Inchon landing was the beginning of the end of American involvement in Korea. A *New York Times* article from September 24, 1950, intimated that the conflict was concluding and claimed that: “The battle that will determine the course and length of the Korean War started last week.”<sup>113</sup> An article written in October 1950 claimed that “Formal hostilities seem to be drawing toward a close this week as troops of three nations launched an attack in strength across the Thirty-eighth parallel” into North Korea.<sup>114</sup> Articles like these suggested to the public that the US efforts in Korea were going well and success would soon be achieved. This messaging also reinforced the notion that the conflict was limited, rather than a full-scale war.

However, the initial public support, as indicated by the polls and fostered by positive reporting, shifted toward disapproval as the Chinese entered the war in October 1950. UN forces, which had crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel into North Korea and reached the Chinese border only weeks after retaking Seoul, soon suffered great losses and were driven south from their northward gains by the Chinese in December 1950.<sup>115</sup> After the war stabilized along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, the potential for reuniting the two Koreas—which

---

<sup>112</sup> W.H. Lawrence, “Marines Wipe Out Assault at Kimpo,” in *The New York Times* (NY), September 19, 1950, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>113</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, “U.N. Campaign in Korea Enters Decisive Phase,” in *The New York Times* (NY), September 24, 1950, E5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>114</sup> Lindsey Parrott, “U.N.’s War in Korea Enters its Last Phase,” in *The New York Times* (NY), October 15, 1950, E5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>115</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 28-29.



spurred the crossing of the North Korean border—faded and war goals shifted toward negotiating peace settlements, as UN leaders decided against re-crossing into North Korea in March 1950.<sup>116</sup>

The media now reflected the increasingly dismal reality in Korea, with negative letters to the editor and editorials directing criticism toward Truman, his initial decision to commit ground troops, and the conduct of the war. Concerns ranged from fears that the war would escalate, to frustration with the limited war goals, to accusations of warmongering. For example, Mississippian columnist Hazel Brannon Smith expressed in February 1951 her concern that the United States was headed toward a full-scale war with China. She quoted a Mississippi Congressman who argued that the US should “...get out of Asia, bring our boys home...[and] build our own defenses.” Smith vocalized some common concerns about the war, including the potential for an expansion in the war’s scope and the fiscal impact on taxpayers. Rather than continue to burden tax-paying citizens, she argued for focusing efforts on building up American prosperity, which she felt would prove a better security measure against external threats than continued action in Korea.<sup>117</sup>

Others expressed similar sentiments. One *Los Angeles Times* article reported on one man who refused to pay two-thirds of his income taxes, feeling that he should not bear the financial burden for a war he did not support. He allegedly subpoenaed Truman for questioning over the origins of what he believed was an illegal war.<sup>118</sup> Ohio Senator

---

<sup>116</sup> Peters and Li, *Voices from the Korean War*, 28-33.

<sup>117</sup> Hazel Brannon Smith, “Through Hazel Eyes,” in *The Lexington Advertiser* (MS), Vol 113, No. 43 (Feb 8, 1951), 1. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

<sup>118</sup> “Fight Over Korea Taxes: Truman Subpoenaed on War, Lawyer Says, in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 17, 1953, 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

Robert Taft, who tied his discontent with the war to politics and the economy, labeled the war “useless,” argued for the election of a Republican president, and claimed that billions of dollars had been spent unsuccessfully punishing communist aggression.<sup>119</sup>

Some even felt that the war was simply a means of profiteering, to the detriment of the taxpayers, and the troops doing the fighting. For example, Ted Brandt, a Marine who had fought in Korea, expressed that sentiment, stating that there was financial incentive for some to keep the war going and that some justified it because it boosted the economy. He commented sarcastically, “It is a wonderful thing that the little white crosses do not cost as much as M1 rifles. For this would be one blow that our national economy could not stand.”<sup>120</sup> Brandt obviously felt that men were being sacrificed for profit rather than serving as peacekeepers—the supposed intention behind the so-called police action.

Several veterans agreed with Brandt’s and other commentators’ overall sentiment and recalled the brutality they experienced on behalf of falsehoods. Veteran army officer Reg Saner, born in Jacksonville Illinois, highlighted this misleading propaganda in his poetry. In his poem “They Said,” Saner expressed discontent with the war, highlighting a disconnect between the cause of democracy and the cyclical routine of violence in war. “Democracy is at the crossroads/ everyone will be given a gun and a map/ in cases like this there is no need to vote. Our group scored quite well getting each of its villages right except for one but was allowed to try again on a fresh village/ we colored in black and

---

<sup>119</sup> “Taft Brands War in Korea ‘Useless,’” in *The New York Times* (NY), July 27, 1951, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>120</sup> Ted Brandt, “The Korean War,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), November 3, 1952, A5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

then wore our brass star of unit citation almost all the way home.”<sup>121</sup> This highlighted the violent reality of war, juxtaposing it with the cause of safeguarding democracy against the threat of communism. His experience questioned the “peace keeping” nature of the war. Saner’s disillusionment with the war’s purpose was further touched upon in “Flag Memoir,” in which he wrote “my forefinger has traveled seven thousand miles by water to poise over this bit of gunmetal blue and fire at a difference in cloth.”<sup>122</sup> Clearly, in this poem, Saner struggled to reconcile the order to kill men whose only fault was wearing a different military’s uniform. The supposed ideological differences provided little justification for violence, despite societal convictions.

Saner did not directly address gender in his objection to the war, but his poetry invoked a key gendered issue: the lack of purpose, which served to undermine the troops’ masculinity. Any remaining vestiges of military masculinity were tied to a clear sense of purpose in defending their nation. The Korean War era recruitment posters cited in chapter two appealed to masculinity by equating manhood with a sense of honor and duty to protect America against threats to freedom. “The Mark of a Man” poster proclaimed, for example, “American Combat Soldiers...are leaving the *mark of a man* on the history of the free world...put into the field to uphold America’s belief that people can live together in peace and equality.”<sup>123</sup> However, Saner could not see this clear purpose in his

---

<sup>121</sup> Reg Saner, “They Said,” in *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War*, eds. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 182.

<sup>122</sup> Reg Saner, “Flag Memoir,” in *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War*, eds. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 183.

<sup>123</sup> “The Mark of a Man” Poster, “The Korean War Era,” U.S. Army Center, Accessed December, 17, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/resmat/korea/intro/recruitment-posters.html#lg=1&slide=5>.

service.

Navy veteran Keith Wilson invoked a similar message to Saner in his poem “December, 1952.” Wilson suggested that the men serving in Korea were simply pawns for a lie: “A blue United Nations patch on the arm, a new dream. One World. One Nation. One Peace.”<sup>124</sup> The poem described the reality that “stabbing tracers hit a village, the screams of women, children, men die. It is when the bodies are counted man sees the cost of lies...Casualties are statistics for a rising New York Stock Market.”<sup>125</sup> Wilson disputed the legitimacy of the UN’s supposed peacekeeping mission in Korea, noting instead the suffering of people for whom they were supposedly fighting. Like Brandt’s

*Los Angeles Times* opinion piece, he also suggested some Americans profited from the war. Like Saner, Wilson was unable to identify any true honor or legitimacy to the war, which undermined his masculine soldierly purpose.

As some commentators decried injustice and corruption, others chastised the strategy and conduct of the war, as well as the deception behind the initial claims that it was a police action rather than a war. One *Los Angeles Times* article from May 1952 described the war as “not only one of the most expensive wars...it is one of the bloodiest.” The author further argued that “it is yet assumed (by diplomats) to be a police action to suppress a North Korean uprising. Soldiers must die in grim fighting, but must not destroy supply bases of the enemy ” because they could not attack beyond the

---

<sup>124</sup> Keith Wilson, “December, 1952,” in *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War*, eds. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 200.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

Chinese border.<sup>126</sup> Major General William J. Donovan was quoted in the *New York Times* as supporting intervention in Korea, but decrying the label “police action” and the limited war goals centered on an peace negotiations rather than total victory. He stated, “When you engage Communist forces, there is no such thing as a limited war....We are losing it because we try to fight it within limits which do not exist outside of our own wishful ignorance.”<sup>127</sup>

Speaking in the summer of 1951, the recently fired General Douglas MacArthur, former Commander-in-Chief, Far East, chided the Truman administration as “warmongers” for failing to implement a decisive victory strategy and thus prolonging the war. An article in the *Idaho Daily Statesman*, published on June 14, 1951, reported his recent speech in Texas, which received “thunderous ovations” from crowd of 25,000 people, tapped into public fears of a third world war. Quoting MacArthur, the article argued that “the surest way to ensure World [W]ar III [was] to allow the Korean conflict to continue ‘indecisively and indefinitely’” whereas “the only way to prevent World [W]ar III [was] to end the Korean war ‘rapidly and decisively.’”<sup>128</sup> Another article in the same *Idaho Daily Statesman* issue similarly criticized the Truman administration’s indecisive conduct of the war. It affirmed General Albert Wedemeyer’s condemnation of the Truman administration’s strategy that was creating a stalemate. Rather, “The United States must either ‘play this tragic game in Korea to win’ or pull out its troops.”

---

<sup>126</sup> Paul Jordan-Smith, “Books: Diplomats Don’t Fool People on Korean War,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), May 11, 1952, E5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>127</sup> “Korea is a Real War, Gen. Donovan Asserts,” *New York Times* (NY), August 26, 1952, 13. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>128</sup> “General Demands Decisive Action in Korean War, in *The Idaho Daily Statesman* (Boise, ID), June 14, 1951, 1.

The article highlighted the growing discontent with the stalemate strategy, which was unnecessarily sacrificing lives and resources.<sup>129</sup>

By 1951, a major reversal in public opinion towards the war aligned with the shift in media representation. This was exemplified in Gallup polls, many of which were reprinted along with accompanying articles in the *Los Angeles Times*. One article by George Gallup published in November 1952 compared attitudes towards the war from the beginning to the time of publication. The poll showed that in August 1950, twenty percent of interviewees believed the war was a mistake. Following the Chinese entrance into the war, that number rose to thirty percent; in October 1952, it was up to 43%.<sup>130</sup> Another poll from July 1951 highlighted the “overwhelming desire to see the war brought to an end,” with 74% of those polled supporting the peace negotiations.<sup>131</sup> Over half of Americans polled in August of 1951 felt that the Korean War would lead to World War III, even with the peace talks underway.<sup>132</sup> A Gallup Poll from early December 1950 indicated that 55% of the American public feared that World War III had already begun.<sup>133</sup> Letter writer Lowndes Maury of Montana voiced similar concerns to *The People's Voice*, arguing that the truce talks were a “terrible joke” and that “the Third World War is going on...and we have lost it.”<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Stalemate in Korea War Blasted by Wedemeyer,” in *The Idaho Daily Statesman* (Boise, ID), June 14, 1951, 1.

<sup>130</sup> George Gallup, “Gallup Finds War Viewed as Mistake,” in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), November 16, 1952, 21. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>131</sup> George Gallup, “74% Favor Truce Talks, Poll Reveals,” in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 23, 1951, 12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>132</sup> George Gallup, “Nation Still Expects War, Poll Reveals,” in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), August 5, 1951, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>133</sup> George Gallup, “World War III On Now, U.S. People Think,” in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), December 6, 1950, 26. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>134</sup> Lowndes Maury, “The Third World War Has Been Going On,” in *The Peoples Voice* (Helena, MT), June 6, 1952, 4. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

While public opinion on the Korean War moved toward overwhelming disapproval, none of it was directed toward the troops, but rather leadership, war goals, and other factors. However, countless Korean War veterans expressed feeling that the public had abandoned them. Some evidence did exist to demonstrate that the public's disenchantment led to a decline in overall interest. Historian Andrew Huebner pointed out, for example, that *Time* magazine discontinued its weekly update on the war in February 1952.<sup>135</sup>

The troops' perceived the decline in support for the war as the American public abandoning them, which represented a failure to acknowledge their masculinity, considering that their World War II counterparts were hailed as heroes, with masculinity central to their heroic status. Albert Flowerday expressed this in a letter he wrote to his friend Eugene Kamprath when he was stationed at Ft. Riley, Kansas, in October 1951: "It is funny but the soldiers, in fact, all service men are not as well accepted by the civilian population as with World War II."<sup>136</sup>

There was truth to the troops' perception that they were being forgotten. One *New York Times* article, published a few months after the armistice was signed, captured the overall neglect of Korean War Veterans by contrasting them to World War II veterans who were "the toast of the town." The director of Veterans' Service Center in New York, Herbert Brickman, voiced concern that public apathy towards the troops was a result of

---

<sup>135</sup> Andrew Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 126.

<sup>136</sup> [Letter from Albert Flowerday to Eugene Kamprath, October 9, 1951; Box "5"/Folder "5"], Eugene Kamprath Korean War Correspondence (2018.133.w.r.), Center For American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

Korea being officially a police action rather than a war. Because of this, Brickman felt that the veterans returning from Korea were not supported by the various services to which they were entitled.<sup>137</sup>

Many veterans and public commentators expressed similar perceptions of public disinterest in the war, and in the veterans themselves. One 1951 article from *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.) questioned, “How much awareness is there generally of the Korean war? Is it a forgotten war, and has the talk of truce blotted out the story of what his happening to more than 500,000 American boys?” The article went on to argue that “the public doesn’t learn about the individual service of tens of thousands of boys who...do the everyday fighting.”<sup>138</sup> Another article featured in Jacksonville, North Carolina’s *The News and Views*, addressed the same issue in early 1952, commenting that the American public was more concerned with election politics and other closer-to-home issues than with the ongoing war. The article observed that those few still following the war were frustrated with the lack of decisive action. Ultimately, the article sympathized with the “American soldier...holding a nameless hill in a half-forgotten war the folks back home don’t even like to talk about much anymore.”<sup>139</sup>

This disregard for the troops was captured by World War II veteran and Korean War reporter James Michener, who published “The Forgotten Heroes of Korea” in the

---

<sup>137</sup> “Veterans of Korea Held Overlooked: Failure to Use Benefits Blamed on Public Apathy,” in *New York Times* (NY), October 19, 1953, 23. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>138</sup> David Lawrence, “What Our Troops are Up Against,” in *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), December 18, 1951, A15. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

<sup>139</sup> Hal Boyle, “1952 Valentine is U.S. Solider Now in Korea,” in *The News and Views* (Jacksonville, N.C.), February 14, 1952, 5. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.



*Saturday Evening Post* in 1952. Michener, who was embedded with Navy Task Force 77, took a particular interest in the naval pilots as well as all the men fighting in Korea. He opened his article by lamenting that the American people had forgotten the Korean War servicemen's "heroism never surpassed in history," arguing that they were overlooked because "they [were] so few." Furthermore, he implored the American people: "Next time you're fretting about the high cost of living, remember the naval pilots you'll meet here...fighting what critics call 'The Unpopular War.'"<sup>140</sup> Michener went on to tell the stories of these men, recounting their harrowing encounters against the enemy as well as the elements. He mentioned one man who crashed and burned to death; he recalled Commander Grey, who had been shot down five times; and reported on Leonard Cheshire, recently married, who wanted to be a teacher, but who was killed before he could see that dream come to fruition.<sup>141</sup> Because he was there among these pilots, Michener's perspective carried a degree of legitimacy beyond other civilian commentators, because he was immersed in their world and saw their struggles first hand.

While Michener was not overtly gendered in his reporting, he acknowledged Korean War servicemen's lack of status and appreciation by the public, which carried a gendered impact within the context of military gender norms. The lack of recognition indicated that the public failed to lionize the troops as masculine warriors. This was

---

<sup>140</sup> James Michener, "The Forgotten Heroes of Korea," in *Saturday Evening Post*, May 10, 1952, 19. EBSCOhost. Whether or not any war is truly popular is debatable, but Michener's point still stands that Korea was underappreciated by its contemporary audience.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-124.

<sup>142</sup> Loew's Columbia, "M-G-M's Stirring Drama, Actually Filmed Aboard A U.S. Navy Aircraft Carrier!: Men of the Fighting Lady," in *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), June 28, 1954, B9. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.*

captured in the 1954 film *Men of the Fighting Lady*, which was inspired by Michener's article.<sup>142</sup>

This film, like the article, followed a group of navy pilots as they struggled to survive the war and cope with disillusionment and feeling unappreciated by the home front. Many of the chief characters were World War II veterans, which made an interesting comparison of their experiences between the two conflicts. This was specifically expressed in an exchange between characters, where Lieutenant Commander Dodson admonished Lieutenant Commander Grayson's attempts at battlefield heroics:

You make me homesick for 1942. Heh, 1942, we were all heroes then, and we knew what we were fighting for: a pin-up of Betty Grable, a right to boo the Dodgers, and come home to Mom's apple pie. Get with it, Grayson, that was 1942, this is 1952, we're obsolete, as obsolete as a couple of B-17s. The only difference between us is you don't know it. There are no heroes this time, and no Ernie Pyles to write about it. This isn't a war, haven't you heard, this is a police action, and nobody back home wants to read about it.<sup>143</sup>

This scene encapsulated virtually all of the various layers of frustration plaguing the men serving in Korea, centered on the perceived abandonment and lack of appreciation from the home front. Like the famed World War II bomber plane, the B-17, Dodson and Grayson belonged to a bygone era. This highlighted how World War II veterans were lauded as heroes owed a level of unquestionable respect (as noted by the "right to boo the Dodgers"), whereas Dodson believed Korean War veterans were not afforded that honor. He unconsciously tied the quote directly to the sexual aspect of masculinity, with his mention of World War II veterans having earned the right to objectify women, as noted by the pin-up of Betty Grable. This tapped into the notion of

---

<sup>143</sup> *Men of the Fighting Lady*, directed by Andrew Martin (1954; San Diego, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2001), DVD. 0:6:52-0:7:06.

sex as a reward for soldiers, another element of soldierly masculinity that Korean War veterans were apparently denied in Dodson's perspective. World War II veterans had earned various forms of praise that those serving in Korea lacked. As Michener's *Saturday Evening Post* article showcased, men like Dodson and Grayson performed heroic actions similar to their World War II counterparts—a key element of militarized masculinity—but the public failed to appreciate it.

Another key takeaway from Dodson's quote was that the “police action” status, rather than a true “war” status, robbed them of the warrior's masculine prestige in the public eye, especially compared to World War II servicemen. This also highlighted the lack of a clear purpose or objective for which they were sacrificing, heightened by the war's limited victory aims. Another quote from the film highlighted this, from the narrator's (Michener's) point of view. He highlighted the sense of futility felt by the *Fighting Lady's* pilots: “They know there are no answers as to why they are here.

They've been told it's a police action, which makes them cops. And others have told them they're containing a blaze, which makes them firemen. All they know is they're buying time. Now and then paying with a life.”<sup>144</sup> This reinforced both the sense of purposelessness felt by Korean War veterans, and the notion that their status as warriors(as opposed to cops, or firefighters) was questionable. They suffered the way soldiers do, but without the same sense of masculine identity to cling to and give legitimacy to their sacrifices.

Michener also wrote a novel about Korean War naval pilots who struggled to find

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 0:23:45-0:24:25.

purpose in the service that tore them from their established lives as family men. *The Bridges at Toko-ri*, published in 1953, featured Harry Brubaker from Denver, who was a “twenty-nine-year-old civilian who had been called back into the service against his will.”<sup>145</sup> He resented having been forced to leave his family and career for a war that he felt nobody supported.<sup>146</sup> One central theme in both the book was the relative ignorance of the people at home, who neither knew, nor seemed concerned with, what was going on in Korea. Brubaker often vocalized his resentment over this; for instance, when questioned why his wife traveled to Japan to visit him on leave, he explained that, “She couldn’t take America any longer. Watching people go on as if there were no war. We gave up our home, my job, the kids. Nobody else in Denver gave up anything.”<sup>147</sup>

In addition to feeling that the American people did not care about the war, Brubaker was being robbed of his family and his career, the two central components of nuclear fatherly masculinity, which epitomized ideal manhood during the Korean War period. That the majority of American men had not had to give these things up for the war only compounded his bitterness. He noted that some men hated their wives or their jobs, wanted to travel, needed the money the service could provide, or hated communism, but all of them had stayed home.<sup>148</sup> This harkened to Michener’s 1952 article, where he emphasized that the war was carried on by relatively few servicemen, making it easier for Americans to forget.

---

<sup>145</sup> James Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-ri* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1953), 31.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-35.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

Brubaker's experience related to that of Joseph William Sammarco, the soldier discussed in chapter two of this thesis, whose wife resented his military service because it pulled him away from his masculine obligations as a father and breadwinner. While Brubaker's wife did not resent him, being drafted nevertheless forced him to embody outdated masculinity as a military man, when he had already achieved the hegemonic masculine role of white-collar family man. Sammarco was likewise separated from his more socially relevant masculine role.

Ultimately, Brubaker's experience symbolized the emasculating disregard for the troops in Korea by the civilian public, who failed to appreciate military masculinity. This was captured in the description of his final moments, fighting off enemies after he had been forced to crash land:

Harry Brubaker, a twenty-nine-year-old lawyer from Denver, Colorado, was alone in a spot he had never intended to defend in a war he had not understood. In his home town at that very moment the University of Colorado was playing Denver in their traditional basketball game. The stands were crowded with more than 8,000 people and not one of them gave a damn about Korea. In San Francisco a group of men were finishing dinner and because the Korean war was a vulnerable topic, they laid plans to lambaste it from one end of the country to the other, but none of them really cared about the war or sought to comprehend it. And in New York thousands of Americans were crowding into the night clubs where the food was good and the wine expensive, but hardly anywhere in the city except in a few homes whose men were overseas was there even an echo of Korea.<sup>149</sup>

While Michener's writing captured the forgottenness of the war, he injected his own support for the troops, which inadvertently legitimized military masculinity from his personal perspective: In the next paragraph, Brubaker recalled his love for his family, which granted him a sense of moral clarity in his final moments: he was fighting to

---

<sup>149</sup> Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-ri*, 122-123.

defend his nation, and more importantly, his own family, from the dangers of communism: “Harry Brubaker understood in some fragmentary way the purpose of his being in Korea.”<sup>150</sup> This idealization contrasted with the perspectives of veterans like Saner and others whose embodiment of military masculinity lacked any sense of moral clarity or purpose.

There were in fact veterans who felt that their war was honorable, but their frustrations with the forgottenness of the war persisted over time. Veteran Sinclair Stickle, for example, asserted that actions in Korea helped establish freedom in South Korea, which he described in the 2010s as “one of the most politically and economically successful countries in the world.”<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, he voiced great bitterness over the continued absence of the Korean War in American memory. When examining a college American history textbook, he described only finding a single page dedicated to the Korean War. He found there was little mention of the sacrifices made by thousands of American men in Korea. He expressed the necessity to “honor those who otherwise would be forgotten.”<sup>152</sup> Similarly, William Ruehlé, who participated in a Korean War veteran survey questionnaire, responded to a question regarding postwar coverage. He found no evidence of written histories, because “KOREA IS THE FORGOTTEN WAR to the USA. No one ever thinks about Korea except myself.”<sup>153</sup> Ruehlé expressed that his service was his “duty to our country,” despite being drafted, indicating he had no qualms about military service, simply anger over the lack of recognition.

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>151</sup> Sinclair Stickle, *So They Will Know: A Korean War Memoir* (San Bernadino, 2013), ii.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., ii-iii.

<sup>153</sup> William Ruehlé, “Korean War Veterans Survey Project” (Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA), 19.

Another survey respondent, William Funchess, expressed similar sentiment. When asked if he was aware of any public opposition to the war while he was fighting, he responded simply: “No U.S. opposition, but plenty of apathy.”<sup>154</sup> He also felt that there was “poor coverage generally,” of the war while he was serving.<sup>155</sup> Because a soldier’s masculinity was linked to his service, these various testimonies reveal how Korean War servicemen’s masculinity was made obsolete by changing societal definitions of masculinity.

In addition to military masculinity declining in prestige compared to the World War II-era soldier, the lack of public interest in the soldiers was felt acutely by many Korea veterans. The post-World War II man was defined by nuclear fatherhood rather than military service, and the war currently being waged was of seemingly little interest to the American public. Thus, the servicemen’s masculinity within the context of Korean War military service went unrecognized.

However, another key facet of military life that served to validate the troops’ masculinity was the brotherly bond developed between men on the battlefield, which served as the pinnacle of masculinity within their own cultural context. Scholar Joshua Goldstein noted that most combat veterans privileged their comrades over patriotic duty when explaining what they truly fought for. This (historically male) homosocial bond was essential for survival as it motivated troops to continue fighting despite the threat to

---

<sup>154</sup> William Funchess, “Korean War Veterans Survey Project” (Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA), 7.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

their lives.<sup>156</sup> As Korea Veteran Arnold Winter noted, the fear of “failing your buddies” overrode the fear of dying.<sup>157</sup> This loyalty formed the basis of a key masculine construct—alternative to the hegemonic companionate fatherhood model—and was centered on relationships with one’s fellow servicemen.

---

<sup>156</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 195-196.

<sup>157</sup> Arnold Winter, “All Glory Forever, in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 27.



## CHAPTER 4: HOMOSOCIAL BONDING IN KOREA: MASCULINE CONSTRUCTS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Arnold Winter's emphasis on the importance of not failing one's comrades in battle was part of a larger system of homosocial bonding, loyalty, and masculine standards that played a major role in the Korean War servicemen's experience in combat and with masculinity. This was not unique to the Korean War and has been frequently observed in other combat scenarios.<sup>158</sup> However, it played an important role in Korea veterans' experience, thus warranting further discussion regarding masculinity and the Korean War. These men were set apart from civilian society, lacking typical family structures, social norms—and for those in combat zones—basic safety and security, which brought them closer together through shared experience. It was common for troops to form familial bonds with the men in their unit. These bonds created a sense of loyalty to one's fellow soldiers and became the basis by which men framed their own masculinity, as well as holding their comrades to those standards. It appeared that breaking those bonds would represent failed masculinity within the male homosocial environment among comrades.

Winter's story captured the significance of the familial nature of the military unit and highlighted what he perceived as a civilian failure to comprehend battlefield social dynamics. He recalled reading about his unit's actions on a hill near the town of Miryang

---

<sup>158</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194-198.

in an article in *Time* magazine that proclaimed, “All glory forever to the bravest men I ever saw.” However, Winter disputed this description, stating that he charged up the hill at Miryang not out of bravery, but due to fear of disobeying orders and more significantly, “letting your [his] buddies down.” The discrepancy between Winter and the article’s author highlighted the difference between perceptions of battlefield heroics by a military combatant and a civilian. To Winter, the bond between Marines was of the utmost importance, so much so that the fear of “failing your buddies” overrode the fear of dying, and “you don’t want to be the guy to break that bond” of a rifle company.<sup>159</sup>

This spoke to Joshua Goldstein’s assertion that loyalty to one’s combat buddies was the primary motivator for fighting, as opposed to bravery for the sake of patriotic duty, as Winter seemed to think the *Time* article implied. Goldstein noted that most combat veterans privileged their comrades over patriotism when explaining what they fought for. He described this as part of a sense of familial obligation that eased fears of death and helped men overcome reluctance to kill. Importantly, Goldstein argued that this should not be considered exclusive to men and offered examples of women taking part in unit loyalty.<sup>160</sup> However, in the Korean War, as with the majority of combat units in history, American frontline units were exclusively male. Thus, the tightknit bonds between servicemen had a gendered component, as they served as one another’s barometer for masculinity. Winter’s story exemplified this dynamic within his unit.

The homosocial bond between troops fostered the familial dynamic of military

---

<sup>159</sup> Arnold Winter, “All Glory Forever” in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 27.

<sup>160</sup> Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 195-199.

units, particularly smaller units such as the company or platoon. Army veteran George W. Brown, who served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> division during Korea, stated emphatically that the men he served with were “not friends, but brothers.”<sup>161</sup> Leonard Adreon, a navy Corpsman who served in Korea with the Marines, described a comfort in “knowing how Marines helped each other, [in the] spirit of ‘we are all in this together.’”<sup>162</sup> In a letter to his parents, Corpsman Richard “Dick” Chappell described his Marine platoon as “one big happy family.”<sup>163</sup>

The family setting led the men to care for and help one another: The men in Gerald “Jerry” Chappell’s platoon (Dick’s twin brother) all contributed money to help pay for a well-loved sergeant to visit his sick mother.<sup>164</sup> Army veteran Bob Fitzgerald was involuntarily transferred from his original company—the group of men with whom he had trained and bonded—to a new company of men he did not know. He reflected that “In the army the one thing you want to do is stay with your buddies, and I felt like I was getting kicked out of my home and thrown in with a bunch of strangers.”<sup>165</sup> Fitzgerald’s description of his unit as his home denoted a familial environment, whereas the new unit lacked this status. James Brady likened interacting with his former company to visiting an

---

<sup>161</sup> CCSUVHP, “Interview with George Brown, Korean War Veteran,” for Central Connecticut State University Veterans History Project, Youtube Video, 8:55-8:56, June 26, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RciTFJmvq9Y&t=537s>.

<sup>162</sup> Leonard Adreon, *Hilltop Doc: A Marine Corpsman Fighting Through the Mud and Blood of the Korean War* (San Bernadino, 2017), 19.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Chappell to Parents, November 28, 1952, in *Corpsmen: Letters from Korea* eds. Richard Chappell and Gerald Chappell (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2000), 68.

<sup>164</sup> Gerald Chappell to Parents, May 22, 1953, in *Corpsmen: Letters from Korea* eds. Richard Chappell and Gerald Chappell (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2000), 110.

<sup>165</sup> Bob Fitzgerald, “The Long Way Home,” in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 10.

old neighborhood, because there was a sense of familiarity and security among those men.<sup>166</sup>

Curtis Morrow from Michigan, who served in the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, went as far as to assign parental roles to his platoon sergeants, who served as “mothers and fathers to the men under their command,” attending to their needs as well as ensuring they were fulfilling their assigned tasks.<sup>167</sup> This example was particularly noteworthy because it assigned both male and female roles to unit leaders, highlighting how combat troops modified, or defied, typical gender norms. In a sense, Morrow’s sergeants were acting as companionate fathers, with their men acting as surrogate children.

New York City native James Brady, an officer in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, offered the converse perspective: that he felt a sense of fatherly obligation to the men serving under his command. While this placed him in the normative role of father, his men were placed in the role of dependents. He did not look down on them for this, and indicated several times in his memoir that he had great respect for his men, viewing them as professionals responsible for making him who he was as a man.<sup>168</sup>

These all-male familial dynamics were noteworthy because they defied the nuclear family norm; they were away from normative family structures and not necessarily by choice. Men embodied atypical family roles, such as mother, or child, in

---

<sup>166</sup> James Brady, *The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1990), 207.

<sup>167</sup> Curtis Morrow, *What’s a Commie Ever Done to Black People?: A Korean War Memoir of Fighting in the U.S. Army’s Last All Negro Unit* (Jefferson: MacFarland and Company, 1997), 35.

<sup>168</sup> Brady, *The Coldest War*, 110.

the absence of family members. This certainly did not adhere to the expected masculine role. Furthermore, they could not fulfill fatherly duties while away at war, as exemplified by the exchanges between the Sammarcos discussed in chapter 2. Bobbie Sammarco was frustrated and disappointed that her husband William Sammarco was unable to prioritize the key masculine role of family provider due to his service, which left her and their children to cope with the uncertainty of his absence.

Their service and bonded dynamic may not have fulfilled the predominant masculine ideals of the period, but did create alternative masculinities, fostering relative tolerance of differences and personality quirks. James Michener captured this in his novel *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*, particularly with the character known to his friends as “Beer Barrel,” the senior Landing Signals Officer aboard an aircraft carrier. Known to be a raging alcoholic, Beer Barrel’s antics were overlooked because the ship’s pilots trusted him above all others to guide their landings safely back onto the aircraft carrier. Even the admiral tolerated him, knowing the pilots trusted him with their lives in dangerous circumstances.<sup>169</sup> The pilots exemplified their love for him with their Beer Barrel-themed rendition of the twenty-third Psalm, proclaiming that “*The Beer Barrel is my shepherd, I shall not crash.*”<sup>170</sup>

This tolerance in some cases challenged typical gender norms, through the acceptance of atypical gender characteristics. For example, Brady frequently described one of his noncommissioned officers (NCOs), whom he greatly respected and with whom he shared a bunker, as feminine. He described entering the bunker to find Sergeant

---

<sup>169</sup> James A. Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1953), 17-18.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

Princeton “crumbling a cocoa cake into boiled water, fussing and tidying as a bride tidies her little cottage with the roses and white picket fence.”<sup>171</sup> He stated that “Princeton had all his gear neatly stowed, close to hand. Regulars had this knack, like good housewives, tidy and organized.”<sup>172</sup> And again in another chapter he described how “Princeton went on fussing with domestic chores.”<sup>173</sup> Brady clearly viewed Princeton’s antics as feminized “housewife” behavior, but he only ever described Princeton, and other “regulars” (NCOs who had been career Marines, or who enlisted prior to the war) positively and with an air of respect. He was impressed by men like Princeton and was grateful to have regular NCOs under his command.<sup>174</sup>

The men’s common, unique-to-war circumstances fostered these tightknit homosocial bonds and greater acceptance through mutual understanding of their shared experiences. These experiences ranged from the dramatic, such as the horrors of combat, to the seemingly more mundane, but equally impactful, like coping with a lack of day-to-day necessities such as basic hygiene needs. Brady described how experiencing the war environment emotionally bonded him to the men around him. He quickly learned that, as a replacement Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant joining his unit in late November 1951 on the Main Line of Resistance (MLR), his rank did not automatically come with respect from his veteran subordinates.<sup>175</sup> Rather, he earned their acceptance when he led a patrol through

---

<sup>171</sup> Brady, *The Coldest War*, 70.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

no-mans-land and accidentally entered a minefield, resulting in casualties. While he initially felt some guilt over the incident, in the aftermath he “felt in some vague but very real way that [he] belonged with them [his unit] now.” His fellow Marines actually assuaged his guilt, and he described sensing a new level of respect and belonging following that incident.<sup>176</sup>

This exemplified an in-group dynamic in which respect was earned through experiencing the dangers and trauma of war. This incident acted as a masculine rite of passage for Brady, ensuring his status as a warrior—a distinctly male role during the Korean War period in US military history. His suffering and trauma earned him a place within the unique brotherhood of combat troops.

Additionally, veterans described how coping with mundane miseries bonded them as men. Corpsman Leonard Adreon and his comrades bonded during lulls in combat, where they were sometimes afforded hot meals and crude showers, which were considered luxuries within the context of the filthy battlefield conditions. During these periods he and the Marines became more deeply acquainted and played card games.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Brady described the “little hurts and pains that made life hard,” such as dry chapped skin and twisted ankles. They also had “no privacy anywhere; hygiene was a derisory concern.” Because they could not get clean, they simply did not worry about it, but shared cups of coffee, single cigarettes, and tins of lip balm without concern for exchanging germs.<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 76-78.

<sup>177</sup> Adreon, *Hilltop Doc*, 26-28.

<sup>178</sup> Brady, *The Coldest War*, 119-120.

These miseries brought them closer together as men, and they were forced out of circumstance to abandon normative modesty concerns that would have been expected of men in the civilian working world. According to Brady, when they were taken into reserve and allowed to shower, the men openly obsessed over “dingleberries, shit matted anal hair curled into hard little balls.” Abandoning modesty and shame, the men indiscreetly borrowed razors or scalpels to remove them and shared in their fascination with them. They horsed around in the showers, “playing grabass” and engaged in various antics.<sup>179</sup> This was typical among servicemen, especially those who had served on the front-lines. Brady described how much of the war—despite the horrors—was “sheer, boyish fun. You lived outdoors, you were physically active, you shared the boisterous camaraderie of other young men, you shed fat and put on sinew and muscle.”<sup>180</sup> Together they participated in innocent, fun spirited activities like building snowmen, finding some shared joy amidst the terrible circumstances.<sup>181</sup> As Brady described, the battlefield environment fostered the abandonment of typical civilian world expectations for mature men. Childish behavior became normative for adult men and served as a bonding mechanism, despite the seriousness of their circumstances. Thus, their environment fostered alternative standards for masculinity that deviated from civilian world norms.

Along with the more innocent aspects of battlefield life, veterans sometimes formed masculine bonds through the abuse of the enemy dead. This form of bonding

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 111.



epitomized American conquest and masculine dominance over their enemies, who were degraded, dehumanized, and ultimately emasculated. However, it also simply reflected the dehumanizing brutalization American troops personally faced. Veteran Sinclair Stickle observed: “The juxtaposition of humor and terror in a horrible situation made it difficult to distinguish what was normal from the bizarre. Even then, I wondered if we would ever be able to return to normal civilian life if we survived this.”<sup>182</sup> This explained the morbid activities Stickle participated in with his fellow soldiers, such as competing to roll the bodies of Chinese soldiers downhill to the trucks they were to be loaded onto. A friend even rode one of the bodies down the hill “like a sled.”<sup>183</sup> Stickle also admitted that they had stacked the Chinese bodies into a pile to use as picnic benches and ate lunch on them.<sup>184</sup> He described these activities and others like them as inciting genuine laughter and amusement.<sup>185</sup> These stories highlighted the disconnect in normalcy between life in combat versus the civilian or noncombatant world. These activities came about because Stickle’s group had been assigned to clean up the dead, which was in and of itself a departure from normalcy. As he noted, until then, the only dead body he had ever seen was a “well-coiffed body in a coffin at a funeral parlor,” but in Korea he was surrounded by “a carpeted landscape of mutilated corpses.”<sup>186</sup>

While combat troops bonded over shared miseries and held fellow combat troops in high regard, those assigned to rear-echelon roles were often mocked, resented, and

---

<sup>182</sup> Sinclair Stickle, *So They Will Know: A Korean War Memoir* (San Bernadino, 2013), 97-98.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

generally held in contempt.<sup>187</sup> Within the battlefield homosocial community, proving oneself by suffering through combat embodied military masculinity, and thus rear-echelon troops, most of the navy, and other noncombatants failed to achieve masculine status. This was due to the combat troops' shared understanding that only those who had endured the miseries of front-line service had earned legitimate warrior status, and their masculine in-group dynamic excluded those who had managed to avoid the "real" war. Brady and his friends referred to the rear-echelon Marines and commanders mockingly as "pogues", describing them as naïve about the suffering of battle, with unreal expectations of what those on the front-lines could realistically achieve.<sup>188</sup> In one instance, when Brady was taken off of the frontline he encountered a rear-echelon officer who hoarded liquor. He described him with contempt: "A real pogue, fat and sleek, and it wasn't right that a rear-echelon pogue had all that liquor to himself."<sup>189</sup> From Brady's perspective, front-line men had earned the right to liquor and other luxuries because they had proven themselves as men through enduring combat, and he disdained an unworthy man for enjoying unearned privileges.

Brady also expressed animosity towards the navy, because sailors had "creature comforts in which navies everywhere specialize: dry bunks, hot food, showers, and clean clothes."<sup>190</sup> These luxuries, and the avoidance of combat, relegated members of the US navy to the same outgroup as rear-echelon troops. He lacked the same degree of contempt for the army, despite the tradition of animosity between Marines and soldiers. He

---

<sup>187</sup> Rear-echelon units were stationed away from the front-lines, and thus avoided much of the battlefield miseries experienced by combat units.

<sup>188</sup> Brady, *The Coldest War*, 128.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

recognized that army soldiers shared his circumstances and “they were just faces in the snow, faces like ours [the Marines].”<sup>191</sup> Brady even expressed greater compassion and relatability for enemy soldiers than navy sailors because he and the enemy on the front-line understood each other’s misery.<sup>192</sup>

Commanders were often subject to similar scorn, particularly when the troops deemed them out of touch with the front-lines. Martin Russ wrote in his diary about a colonel visiting the front-line “escorted by a fire team.” Russ mockingly described him as leaving “to receive his combat pay and Dingleberry Cluster for valour in action.”<sup>193</sup> Brady depicted “the generals” as having unreasonable expectations of the men, from the safety of “their well-tended quarters behind both lines.”<sup>194</sup> Those serving behind the front-lines represented the antithesis of the combat troops’ masculinity, which was shaped by combat experience. The homosocial bonding process shaped, and was shaped by, the front-line troops’ experience with masculinity on the battlefield.

It should be noted that this homosocial bonding among servicemen, especially those in combat, was not unique to the Korean War. For instance, World War II veterans have described developing a familial closeness with the men in their units. Pacific theater veteran Eugene Sledge, for example, described his Marine company as his family.<sup>195</sup> Likewise, he detailed how their shared experiences with the horrors of war brought them close enough to overlook differences that he felt would have divided them in civilian

---

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>193</sup> Russ, *The Last Parallel: A Marine’s War Journal* (New York: Fromm International, 1999), 95.

Dingleberries appear to have been a frequent topic of conversation among Korean War Marines. <sup>194</sup> Brady, *The Coldest War*, 124.

<sup>195</sup> Eugene Sledge, *With the Old Breed: at Peleliu and Okinawa* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 98.

life.<sup>196</sup> Like the Korean War veterans, he also described the animosity towards members of rear-echelon units.<sup>197</sup>

Homosocial bonding on the battlefield was common to wars in general, but the Korean War's unique circumstances such as the newly implemented racial desegregation process, made this bonding process particularly impactful. The power of battlefield brotherhood coupled with racial integration placed the troops in Korea to challenge white hegemonic masculinity, which was highly prevalent in the American society.

Greater inclusion in the military and combat roles gave men of color a launching point for culturally legitimizing their own masculinity. It also forced white troops to confront inequality.

---

<sup>196</sup> Eugene Sledge, *China Marine: An Infantryman's Life After World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31-32.

<sup>197</sup> Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 283.

## CHAPTER 5: “WHAT’S A COMMIE EVER DONE TO BLACK PEOPLE?”: RACE AND MASCULINITY IN KOREA

Racial dynamics played a significant role in the Korean War, with racism being highly prevalent in American society in the 1950s. Within the context of American conceptions of masculinity, racism fostered the privileging of white men’s masculinity above that of men of color. Images of masculinity featured white men almost exclusively. For example, the family in “Father Knows Best” was clearly a white family. The various advertisements for Seven-Up and other products that tapped into fatherly masculinity all featured white men. Likewise, the central characters featured in men’s escapist fantasy were exclusively white. Military recruitment imagery featured predominantly white men as well.

White exclusivity in masculinity was compounded by racism in American culture that targeted non-white peoples. Various negative racial stereotypes about Asians, historically rooted in American culture, influenced attitudes towards the North Korean and Chinese enemies, and America’s South Korean allies. Entrenched racism also significantly impacted the experiences of American men of color who served in Korea, many of whom experienced racism both from the home front and within the military.

Despite this, due in part to the ongoing desegregation of the armed forces during Korea, there were increased opportunities for racial mixing on the battlefield, which led to homosocial bonding across racial lines. In some cases, this led to greater acceptance and

mutual respect between men of color and white men, which served to challenge preconceived notions of white exclusivity in American masculinity.

Racial prejudice impacted relationships with the enemy, and some historians have claimed this also influenced command decisions. Bruce Cumings, for example, argued that racism led to “disastrous misjudgment” of the enemy’s capabilities. According to Cumings, Commander-in-Chief of United Nations Forces Douglas MacArthur greatly underestimated enemy forces, claiming initially that the North Koreans would be easily defeated with a single division. He soon discovered the extent of the North Koreans’ capability and begged for continual increases in manpower.<sup>198</sup> Racist stereotypes often feminized Asians, implying they were weak, which reinforced the notion that white masculinity was superior. General Ned Almond for example referred to the Chinese as “laundrymen,” alluding to periods in American history when Asian immigrants had few employment options and took work in laundries, a labor typically associated with women.<sup>199</sup>

This description cast the Chinese as subservient to white men, and, because laundry was typically associated with women’s work, they were feminized. It also suggested they were weak and therefore easy to defeat. This highlighted the intersectionality of racism and sexist stereotypes, with femininity considered weak, something that surfaced in attitudes towards South Koreans and American men of color as well. Historian David Halberstam went as far as to argue that Almond’s failure to take

---

<sup>198</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2011), 14-15.

<sup>199</sup> David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 548.

the Chinese seriously led to his poor judgement in commanding the fight against them at the disastrous battle of Chosin Reservoir.<sup>200</sup> Failures in command were arguably more complex than simply reflecting racism, but Cumings and Halberstam correctly highlighted the prevalence of these attitudes within the United States military.

Racism against Asians also reflected the “Yellow Peril” trope of the nineteenth century, in which Americans feared large numbers of Asian immigrants invading American society.<sup>201</sup> Scholar Christina Jarvis observed this in racist depictions of the Japanese during World War II, and it clearly carried over into attitudes towards the North Koreans and Chinese during the Korean War. Cumings pointed to examples from the *New York Times* that described Asians as barbarian hordes and as “the most primitive of peoples.”<sup>202</sup> They were said to have no regard for human life.<sup>203</sup> This last sentiment was perhaps compounded by reports from battles that described the Chinese attack tactics as charging in wave after wave, only to be mown down repeatedly by American troops. Sinclair Stickle recalled these wave charges, describing the Chinese as suicidally fanatic.<sup>204</sup>

Cumings noted that racist language was extremely prevalent among Korean War troops, who used the term “gook” to degrade Koreans, and “chink” for Chinese. He also asserted that this type of language remained prevalent in oral histories even decades after

---

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 548.

<sup>201</sup> Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 124. Chapter 4 of Jarvis’s book provides a more in-depth discussion of the Yellow Peril trope within the context of World War II.

<sup>202</sup> Hanson Baldwin, *New York Times*, July 14, 1950, in Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2011), 15.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>204</sup> Sinclair Stickle, *So They Will Know: A Korean War Memoir* (San Bernardino, 2013), 92.

the war.<sup>205</sup> Veterans certainly used language that played into the “hordes” stereotypes, such as when Bill Glasgow compared the North Koreans to pestilence. He recalled the unpleasant conditions in Korea during late October: “You’d have the mosquitoes and flies and the fleas pestering you all day, and the North Koreans pestering you at night.”<sup>206</sup> While illustrating the misery of life on the front-lines, this description also revealed a level of dehumanization and emasculation of the North Koreans by equating them to pests or vermin.

Jarvis observed similar language used to dehumanize the Japanese during World War II, which made it easier to rationalize hating and killing them. Describing them as animalistic or verminous served to emasculate them by robbing them of human qualities. She distinguished this from earlier models that lumped all Asians together as feminized. Reimagining the Japanese as brutish rather than feminine justified their ability to inflict great damage to the United States’ Navy during the Pearl Harbor attack.<sup>207</sup> Applying Jarvis’s model to the Korean War reveals similar racist dehumanization of the North Koreans, who overcame South Korean resistance to their initial invasion, and the Chinese, who posed a significant threat to United States forces. The feminizing language was of course present, as indicated by General Almond’s “laundrymen” comment, but other forms of dehumanization were prevalent.

Homosocialism also created an out-group view of enemy soldiers that designated that the Chinese rarely retrieved their dead, contrasted with the U.S. Marines who went to

---

<sup>205</sup> Cumings, *The Korean War*, 80-82.

<sup>206</sup> Bill Glasgow, “Breakout,” in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 41.

<sup>207</sup> Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 124-126.



that the Chinese rarely retrieved their dead, contrasted with the U.S. Marines who went to great lengths to recover theirs.<sup>208</sup> Similarly, some veterans witnessed evidence that the North Koreans had committed atrocities by executing American prisoners. Bill Chambers's graves registration company was assigned to dig up mass graves of Americans who had been killed in the Sunchon tunnel massacre, where North Koreans had gunned down numerous American prisoners. This fostered hatred towards the North Koreans, "because those weren't battle deaths. Those was more like wholesale murder."<sup>209</sup> Arnold Winter had encountered signs of Americans who had been executed, which he used to justify his own desire to kill North Koreans attempting to surrender.<sup>210</sup>

Despite the prevalence of racism, some American veterans, like James Brady, described a sense of kinship with their enemies due to their shared circumstances, which indicated that he felt they had achieved some degree of masculine validity as warriors. This was critical because it highlighted the crucial role of combat experience to battlefield homosocialism. From Brady's perspective, his enemies had earned a place among the warriors' in-group. He described relating to them more than he the noncombatants on his side, who were out of touch with the reality of war.

His enemies had met his standard of masculinity because they had experienced life on the battlefield, whereas US navy sailors, commanders, and other noncombatants had avoided it.<sup>211</sup> This contradicted the notion that enemy troops were inferior men,

---

<sup>208</sup> Leonard Adreon, *Hilltop Doc: A Marine Corpsman Fighting Through the Mud and Blood of the Korean War* (San Bernardino, 2017), 45.

<sup>209</sup> Bill Chambers, "Death All Day," in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 48-49.

<sup>210</sup> Arnold Winter, "All Glory Forever," in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 25.

<sup>211</sup> James Brady, *The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1990), 122-124.

further complicating the racial-homosocial dynamic with the Chinese and North Koreans. Recognition of their common suffering fostered compassion and led Leonard Adreon to decry the use of racial slurs. He stated that the term “gook” made him uncomfortable, because only geography separated friend from foe.<sup>212</sup>

Racism and racial stereotypes played an equally important role in shaping the American relationships with one of their most critical allies: the South Koreans, who were depicted as both cowardly and childlike, which served to explain their seeming weakness at being overtaken by the North Koreans. Notably, this was a different form of racist emasculation than that directed towards the North Koreans and Chinese, who were depicted as animalistic, like the Japanese in World War II.

American media sometimes bolstered the notion that South Koreans were cowardly, which served to emasculate them. For example, a *Los Angeles Times* article from July 7, 1950, only a few days into the war, described how American advisors to South Korean troops were “mystified by unordered retreats carried out without permission and in many cases without even making contact with the enemy.”<sup>213</sup> This was contrary to notions of military masculinity, to which bravery was a central tenet.

Many soldiers held less favorable views of their South Korean allies that fed into unmasculine stereotypes. The *Daily Record*, a newspaper from Dunn, North Carolina, printed letters sent from American soldier to his parents, in which he described the alleged cowardice of the South Korean troops. He detailed, in a September 1950 letter, how in one battle, “There weren’t many of us; in fact all

---

<sup>212</sup> Adreon, *Hilltop Doc*, 117.

<sup>213</sup> Jack James, “South Korean Retreated Without Evening Contacting Enemy,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), July 7, 1950, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

the South Koreans ran and left just me and the company commander and two more guys to hold the hill.”<sup>214</sup> Importantly, however, he did also concede that the South Koreans had “gone through hell” and expressed overall sympathy for them, having witnessed victims of rape, murder, starvation, and other cruelties at the hands of the North Koreans.<sup>215</sup> This is key because it depicted the South Koreans as objects of pity and compassion, which appeared to be more prominent than expressions of explicit prejudice towards them.

For example, veteran William Sammarco expressed sorrow for the state of South Korean civilians, particularly the orphaned children, in several letters to his wife, essentially performing as a surrogate companionate father to them. In a letter written on January 18, 1951, he lamented the fact that he could do nothing to help all of the children but gave them what food he could. He connected this concern to his own children, urging his wife to assure there was always plenty for them to eat.<sup>216</sup> Though the thoughts of only one man, this suggests a sense of paternalistic compassion for the South Koreans, with orphans as the central image. This reinforced the notion of American troops’ superior masculinity, as fathers to a supposedly childlike people.

The orphan issue was a key defining element of how American troops, and American society more generally, viewed South Koreans, and this reinforced the centrality of fatherhood to masculinity in American society. *A Saturday Evening Post*

---

<sup>214</sup> Robert Williams in “Godwin Soldier Describes Korea War in Letters Home,” *The Daily Record* (Dunn, N.C.), March 30, 1951, 4. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>216</sup> [Letter From Joseph Sammarco to Bobby Sammarco, Jan 17, 1951; Box “1”/Folder “2”], Joseph William Sammarco Korean War Correspondence (2014.118.w.r.), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

article from December 23, 1950, captured this best: “The most moving thing about our fighting men, whose business is killing, is the tender way they care for pathetic war orphans.”<sup>217</sup> The author argued that caring for these children gave the troops a sense of purpose that was otherwise lacking in Korea.<sup>218</sup> They often took the children as “mascots” replete with American uniforms, ribbons, insignia, and dog tags. They often were “adopted” into American military units, who collected money for them, gave them food even if it meant going without themselves, and in some cases, resolved to bring them back to the United States.<sup>219</sup> The author noted that the relationship between the mascots and the troops was like that of fathers and sons.<sup>220</sup> Not only did these relationships reinforce the centrality of fatherhood to masculinity—even surrogate fatherhood—but it also positioned South Koreans in the role of dependent children, as opposed to mature men. It placed the American troops in a paternalistic role.

The 1951 film *The Steel Helmet* used an orphaned South Korean boy as a stand in all for South Korean people and soldiers. The film opened with a young South Korean boy collecting weapons from the corpses of the main character Sergeant Zack’s unit, after it had been nearly annihilated. While Zack was initially mistrustful of the boy, the two eventually formed a friendship. Zack was shattered when “Short Round,” as the boy had been dubbed, was killed at the end of the film. The film showed Zack initially struggling to respect Short Round, referring to him as a “gook” until the boy tells him he is not a

---

<sup>217</sup> Nora Waln, “Our Softhearted Warriors in Korea,” in *Saturday Evening Post*, December 23, 1950, 28. EBSCOhost.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-67.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

“gook” but a South Korean. Zack caught himself referring to South Koreans with this slur but eventually became highly protective of Short Round and castigated others for using the term or for disrespecting the boy. The rest of the group warmed up to Short Round, forming strong bonds when they overheard him singing the South Korean national anthem to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne,” which symbolized the ability to overcome cultural differences and to find common ground.<sup>221</sup>

While the film used Short Round as a means for promoting unity between South Koreans and Americans and for discouraging racial slurs, it fell short of depicting South Koreans as equals and their soldiers as fully fledged men. The use of a child as the sole representation of South Koreans reinforced the supposedly paternalistic relationship with South Korea. Short Round was not overtly feminized, but because he was a child, he did not embody manhood. The men in the film all came to love Short Round and adopted him as one of their own, giving him American dog tags, just like the men and orphans described in Nora Waln’s *Saturday Evening Post* article. However, there were no other South Korean characters in the film and the use of a boy served to infantilize the South Koreans as courageous but in need of fatherly guidance. Infantilization also served (perhaps unconsciously) as a means of emasculation. While not cowardly, like some depictions of South Koreans claimed, this infantilization contrasted with the fatherly role of American masculinity. Generally, the American depiction of South Koreans was similar, though not identical, to the “little brown brothers” trope that defined Filipinos

---

<sup>221</sup>*The Steel Helmet*, directed by Samuel Fuller (1951; Lippert Pictures), 45:57-46:53 min., Abdullah Mohammed, July 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX9Ud9fTmBw>, 45:57-46:53 min.

and other Asians in the early twentieth century.<sup>222</sup>

The American troops who served alongside South Koreans soldiers offered a different perspective, shaped by the wartime homosocial bonding process. A short story by veteran Eugene Burdick followed Eli, an American soldier, who grew close to South Korean soldier Kee, part of the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) program assigned to Eli's unit. Eli, though at first resentful of Kee's attachment to him, eventually bonded with and depended on his guidance to survive.<sup>223</sup> Veteran Sinclair Stickle served side by side with South Koreans, including a man named Shorty Lee, whom he considered a friend and from whom he learned about Korean culture, including Korean recipes.<sup>224</sup> He also praised the South Korean, or Republic of Korea (ROK) army, stating that by 1953 it was very impressive, and that his unit frequently relied on South Korean backup while on patrols into no man's land.<sup>225</sup> These examples actually contradicted American paternalism by positioning the South Koreans as equal to Americans, who sometimes depended on their guidance and protection.

Veteran Blaine Friedlander trained South Korean troops as part of the Korea Military Advisory Group (KMAG) and witnessed the racism directed at South Koreans. He described how they had a reputation of being cowardly and frequently fled from the enemy. Alleged flight from battle played directly into racist notions that South Koreans were weak or feminine. Friedlander contested this notion, however, arguing that despite

---

<sup>222</sup> Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 135. For further discussion of this trope and related racial issues within the World War II context, see chapter 4 of Jarvis's book.

<sup>223</sup> Eugene Burdick, "Cold Day, Cold Fear," in *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War* eds. W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>224</sup> Stickle, *So They Will Know*, 17.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

their poor training, they had potential as excellent and brave soldiers.<sup>226</sup> He recalled forming many close friendships with South Korean troops and stated that he never witnessed them give up ground to the enemy during battle.<sup>227</sup> Within the context of battle, Friedlander formed bonds with South Koreans, overcoming racist misconceptions about their supposed cowardice, thus, homosocial masculine bonds could foster the erosion of racial stereotypes.

General Van Fleet, who took command of the American Eighth Army in April 1951, wrote an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, in which he disputed the notion that South Korean troops were cowardly. Rather, he praised their fighting ability, bravery, and dedication to combating the communist forces.<sup>228</sup> These examples indicate that, despite prejudices and stereotypes, American troops and South Korean troops were able to form homosocial bonds that helped to dispel race-based misconceptions.

The most significant intersection between racism and masculinity was that within the United States military, which had begun the process of racially integrating but was still rife with racism. While there was some unofficial racial mixing in the Second World War, Korea was unique in that the level of racial mixing was unprecedented. American men of color received mixed receptions from their white comrades, but their experiences reveal that homosocial bonding allowed men to permeate racial barriers more easily than in the civilian world. This was another arena in which male bonds prevailed over racial

---

<sup>226</sup> Blaine Friedlander, "Piece of Cake," in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 199.

<sup>227</sup> Friedlander, "Piece of Cake," 200.

<sup>228</sup> James Van Fleet, "Who Says They Won't Fight?," in *Los Angeles Times* (CA), November 23, 1952, J7-30. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

divides and stereotypes, in some instances redefining masculinity to be more racially inclusive on the battlefield.

Sergeant Albert Snyder of the 31<sup>st</sup> regiment, a white soldier from Maryland, captured the mixture of reactions from white troops when he described how his “assistant platoon sergeant, a bigot” was demoted to assistant squad leader for racist complaints when a black soldier was promoted and assigned to share his bunker on Heartbreak Ridge.<sup>229</sup> While the demoted sergeant’s actions exemplified the intolerance many black men faced, his demotion suggests that his superiors prioritized following orders and unit cohesion at the very least and may have genuinely opposed racial discrimination.

Snyder’s description of his sergeant as bigoted likewise suggested that he did not approve of his sergeant’s actions, although it is important to recognize that his feelings may have evolved by the time the interview was conducted several decades later.

Much of the military racial dynamics during the Korean War can be traced to World War II and earlier, when the military was still segregated and policy was to exclude black men from combat positions, which historian Steve Estes astutely argued served to exclude them from a key wartime rite of passage into manhood.<sup>230</sup> Estes’s claim is convincing, given the centrality of military service to masculinity during World War II. However, black units eventually got the opportunity to serve in combat and were largely successful, thus putting their masculinity on relatively equal footing with white

---

<sup>229</sup> Albert Snyder “A BAR Man’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, ed. Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 137.

<sup>230</sup> Steve Estes, *I Am A Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 12-13.



troops.<sup>231</sup> Following World War II, civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, along with others, utilized black troops' displays of valor to bolster racial equality efforts and formed the Committee Against Jim Crow in the Military Service and Training, which pushed for an end to military segregation. Truman, who needed the black vote in the upcoming election, accepted the committee's demands and signed Executive Order 9981 in 1948, officially mandating military integration.<sup>232</sup> This of course was met with backlash from many white troops. Veteran Harry Summers stated that "when they first started talking about integration, white soldiers were against it... Well of course that's ludicrous. But it wasn't ludicrous in 1950."<sup>233</sup> He went on to describe a black replacement in his unit refusing to drink coffee, because he feared that white troops would resent sharing with him. Summers described this as "a terrible, terrible thing" that his black comrade felt that way.<sup>234</sup>

Men of color faced numerous challenges related to race while serving in Korea that impacted their status as men. Black soldiers were disproportionately court-martialed, mainly for charges of cowardice.<sup>235</sup> Cowardice was considered weak and unmanly, and

---

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>232</sup> Jeremy P. Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat: How African Americans Found Equality in Korean and Vietnam* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 7. Maxwell discussed EO 9981, Randolph and related issues throughout his book. For a further reading on Randolph's role in advocating for racial integration in the armed forces, see David Welky's book *Marching Across the Color Line: A. Philip Randolph and Civil Rights in the World War II Era*.

<sup>233</sup> Harry Summers, "Ridgway," in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 107.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>235</sup> Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from World War II to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 117.

the disparity and discovered that white soldiers fled the battlefield at equal rates to black troops, but were overlooked by the military courts.<sup>237</sup> Black veteran Curtis Morrow corroborated this when he expressed resentment over the fact that soldiers of color were singled out and blamed for desertion, when in fact it was highly common among all soldiers regardless of race.<sup>238</sup> White veteran Sherman Pratt also discussed this, describing how an all-black battalion was the target of these accusations. He stated that, “there was no shortage of units in the Korean War who were accused of bugging out. But of course with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion [of the all black 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment] there was the racial thing. A lot of people wanted to believe that black troops simply couldn’t fight. But the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, it should be remembered, had white officers, and poor leadership on the battlefield can cause a unit to break as much as anything else.”<sup>239</sup>

The military was not completely integrated, but the remaining segregated black units, such as the 24<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment (IR), often showcased the abilities of black men to perform successfully in combat. This allowed them to prove their masculinity according to the alternative gender standards of the battlefield. The 24<sup>th</sup> IR was one of the first units sent to Korea in July 1950 and was successful in taking the town of Yechon back from the North Koreans, gaining the attention of the press. Historian Jeremy

---

<sup>236</sup> Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 266-269. Goldstein provides ample discussion of gendered expectations and warfare, and the common equation of warrior-like bravery with masculinity.

<sup>237</sup> Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 117-119. Huebner detailed Marshall’s trip to Japan and Korea to investigate these charges, and concluded white troops were far more likely to be acquitted of similar accusations, with the majority of officers being white. For further reading, see chapter 3 of *The Warrior Image*.

<sup>238</sup> Morrow, *What’s a Commie Ever Done to Black People?*, 44-45.

<sup>239</sup> Sherman Pratt, “A New Enemy,” in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 67.

Maxwell argued that this helped to promote a sense of racial pride among black Americans and helped challenge negative stereotypes of cowardice.<sup>240</sup> Civil rights advocates like A. Philip Randolph utilized the recognition of black troops in Korea to revive the Double V campaign of World War II that promoted the fight against fascism overseas and racism at home. In Korea, fascism was replaced with communism.

In a letter to the *New York Times*, Randolph strongly denounced communist aggression and expressed support for military action in Korea, arguing that:

“The cynical morality of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism in this late hour should deceive nobody, especially minorities, including Negroes, Jews, Catholics and labor. Already the brethren of the Kremlin have embarked upon a high-powered drive to link up the so-called liberation movement of North Korea for the hapless South Koreans with the long-suffering Scottsboro boy, Haywood Patterson, recently apprehended as a fugitive from Alabama justice, to inflame the passions of the Negroes against the policies of the United States in the Korean struggle.”<sup>241</sup>

Importantly, Randolph tied the fight against communism to the fight for racial equality, denying communist propaganda claims that North Koreans were liberating oppressed South Koreans and would do the same for black Americans. He warned African Americans not to be misled by this message but to support democracy if they wished for equality. Simultaneously, he issued a warning to the larger United States population, that their continued racism would weaken their cause and turn African Americans against it.<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat*, 59. See chapter 3 of Maxwell’s book for more information on segregated black units in Korea.

<sup>241</sup> A. Philip Randolph, “Letters to the Times: Attack on Korea Discussed,” *New York Times* (NY), July 1, 1950, pg. 9. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

When contextualized with masculinity norms of the period, his denunciation of communism, and call for black men to oppose it, served to extend anti-communist manhood to them because anti-communism was depicted as central to masculinity at this time. Though subtle, this interacted with black troops' experience with masculinity as they served in the Korean War.

While black soldiers' successes and the cause of anti-communism were used by the press and civil rights leaders on the home front to bolster the image of black masculinity, these messages did not always resonate with black troops in Korea. Curtis Morrow, of the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment, was one of many black men who felt disenchanted with the fight against communism. Morrow joined up at seventeen and was initially eager to partake in the war.<sup>243</sup> In his memoir, he expressed sorrow and rage over hearing about lynchings taking place back in the United States while he and other black men were risking their lives at the behest of the very society that oppressed them.<sup>244</sup> He also expressed disillusionment in his memoir, in which he recalled asking himself, "What had the commies ever done to us black people?"<sup>245</sup>

Men in Morrow's unit also expressed disillusionment with the war and with the American cause. Morrow recalled his "introduction to the realities of war, as it applied to us black Americans" when he was confronted by his platoon sergeant, Sgt. Bedgood, who criticized Morrow for expressing a sense of patriotism. Bedgood went on to describe his negative experiences living in Mississippi where he was not allowed to vote, was

---

<sup>243</sup> Curtis Morrow, *What's a Commie Ever Done to Black People?*, 1.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

harassed in restaurants, and where “any white person can do anything they like to a black person.” He advised Morrow not to believe propaganda that minimized racism.<sup>246</sup> In another instance, a fellow soldier, from Georgia, shared a similar experience where white people could get away with mistreating black people with no consequences. Another sergeant then reminded Morrow and his companions that they must stick together if they wanted to survive racial hostility in the army.<sup>247</sup>

The masculine homosocial bond in this instance took on a special significance tied to a common racial experience. Not only did they relate to each other through the unique experience of war—as did most men in the combat zone, but these men fought an additional battle against racism.

Instances of racism were numerous and exemplified the dehumanizing efforts to exclude American men of color from the military homosocial brotherhood. In response to a survey question about racial integration, white veteran William Charles Ruehlé stated: “I did not want to sleep next to blacks until I trusted them and [assess] their character and individuals integrity (sic).”<sup>248</sup> Veteran George Brown recalled being the target of anti-black racism by some white troops.<sup>249</sup> Charles J. Smith Jr. stated that as his unit was from the southern United States, there was much racism, and many white troops resented the noncommissioned officers and officers of color. He also felt that there was little trust in

---

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>248</sup> Ruehlé, “Korean War Veterans Survey Project” (Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA), 5.

<sup>249</sup> Central Connecticut State University, George W. Brown Interview, “Veterans History Project,” 37:22min., June 26, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RciTFJmvq9Y&t=256s>.

the remaining segregated black units.<sup>250</sup> Veterans who served under Chinese-American Marine officer Chew-Een Lee described being shocked to find out their leader was Asian. Pat Burris recalled that Lee was referred to as a “laundryman,” and “the Chinaman” by some of the Marines in his unit.<sup>251</sup>

Despite frequent racism, their shared experience of combat led many white men and men of color to form bonds that may not have been possible under different circumstances. Colonel Peter W. Garland Jr. wrote in August 1951, in an article featured in the *Combat Forces Journal*, about commanding an integrated regiment. He stated that the thirty-five black men in his regiment performed well in combat, with two being given battlefield commissions promoting them to officers. A black sergeant was famed in the regiment for his bravery, and Garland believed all of the black men in his regiment were good soldiers.<sup>252</sup> More significantly, he highlighted that the “the integration of white and Negro soldiers without regard to color brings favorable results.”<sup>253</sup>

Garland’s experience showcased a general trend of racial compatibility in combat, would have been somewhat detached from the more intimate interactions between his men, potentially missing instances of racism. This indicated somewhat of a grey area. For

---

<sup>250</sup> Charles H. Smith, “Korean War Veterans Survey Project” (Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA), 5.

<sup>251</sup> Smithsonian Channel, Pat Burris Interview, “How the First Asian American Marine Officer Overcame Racism,” 0:32-0:55min., March 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDjzAIKe1Ms>.

<sup>252</sup> Peter Garland, “Colonel in Korea: A Regimental Commander’s Candid Observations on Tactics, Organization and Discipline,” in *Combat Forces Journal* Vol. 2, no. 1 (August 1951), 15-16.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

example, Bev Scott, a black officer in the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment, recalled that most of the white officers he served with accepted him and that “they were probably better than the average white guy in civilian life.”<sup>254</sup> That his white comrades accepted him and were “better than average” did not necessarily mean they regarded him as an equal. Garland and Scott nevertheless highlighted the potential for men of different racial groups to cooperate as a combat unit, which was a central component of the homosocial brotherhood that formed the basis of the troops’ masculinity.

The testimonies of both men of color and white men corroborate both combat compatibility and the potential for racial harmony. Ronald Burbridge, who served under Chew-Een Lee, described his respect for Lee as a Marine officer and was not bothered by his race.<sup>255</sup> Lee stated that he was simply concerned with earning respect as an effective Marine and leader and that his racial difference did not matter.<sup>256</sup> James McEachin, a black man who served in the army in Korea, expressed great respect for his white lieutenant, calling him “the bravest man I’d ever seen in my entire life.”<sup>257</sup> He also described a “blond-haired boy” who saved his life when he was wounded and most of their unit had been wiped out. Regarding the silver star medal he was awarded, McEachin stated that he did not deserve it, but that his lieutenant (who was killed) and the blond-

---

<sup>254</sup> Bev Scott, “One Man’s War, in *No Bugles, No Drums* ed. Rudy Tomedi (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993), 183.

<sup>255</sup> Smithsonian Channel, Ronald Burbridge interview, “How the First Asian American Marine Officer Overcame Racism,” 2:10-2:15, March 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDjzAIKe1Ms>.

<sup>256</sup> American Veterans Center, Kurt Chew-Een Lee Interview, “Profiles In Valor: Major Kurt Chew-Een Lee,” March 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO6yhP7H4OA>.

<sup>257</sup> American Veterans Center, James McEachin Interview, “Profiles in Valor: James McEachin, Korean War Veteran, James McEachin,” 1:19-1:22, February 7, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-BnnFI5oN4>.

haired boy did.<sup>258</sup> This exemplified the potential for some American troops to overcome racial differences, and develop deep respect for one another in battle, even as men of color endured emasculating discrimination from white comrades.

Curtis Morrow described forming a friendship with a white soldier while recovering from wounds in a hospital where the two bonded over their exhaustion and frustration with the war.<sup>259</sup> Facing the same adverse conditions of war allowed the two men to permeate racial barriers and form masculine brotherly bonds, which may not have been possible in civilian life. As historian Jeremy P. Maxwell argued, many Korean War veterans felt that the war caused the breakdown of racial barricades because the “conflict demanded the need for every man possible and that a Marine [or soldier] was a Marine [or soldier], regardless of color.”<sup>260</sup> This suggested that the battlefield was more conducive to bridging masculine racial gaps than was the civilian world, which highlighted the significance of homosocial bonding between men in combat. At the same time this indicated these bonds were utilitarian in nature, which affirms that this intersectionality was not clearcut and respect and equality in masculinity were shaped by individual troops.

Curtis Morrow’s experience upon returning home suggests that these connections even carried over onto the home front. He became a local hero in his hometown, which

---

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 4:50-5:02.

<sup>259</sup> Curtis Morrow, *What’s a Commie Ever Done to Black People?*, 65-67.

<sup>260</sup> *Afro American* article, October 1950, cited in Jeremy Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 4.



he described as being 75% white.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, when he arrived back in the United States, he went to a bar where he was refused service from a bartender because he was black. The bar was packed with soldiers, most of whom were white. The establishment erupted into a riot in Morrow's defense. The soldiers were outraged that a fellow veteran was denied a drink because of his race.<sup>262</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, veterans upheld each other as the model of masculinity, due to their bonds formed in battle. In particular, the ability to form interracial bonds helped men of color and white men to recognize each other's legitimacy as soldiers and as men. However, racial dynamics were not the only venue in which Korean war troops challenged cultural limitations to masculinity. Homosexual men, who had been considered deviant, were able to break down cultural masculinity barriers in Korea, just as men of color were able to through homosocial bonding on the battlefield.

---

<sup>261</sup> Morrow, *What's a Commie Ever Done to Black People?*, 86-87.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

## CHAPTER 6: A “DIFFERENT BALL OF WAX”: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE KOREAN WAR MILITARY

The experiences of homosexual troops and the treatment of homosexuality by the heterosexual troops serving in the Korean War suggest that there was mixed reception, rather than total intolerance, of non-heteronormative male sexualities in the Korean War military. Homosexuality defied normative standards of masculinity, of which heterosexuality was a prerequisite. Significantly, both the American civilian world and military system increased persecutorial policies targeting homosexuals during the Korean War period, and homophobic sentiment was prevalent in both settings. However, with some gay veterans going as far as to describe the military as a decidedly safe and accepting environment—in contrast to the civilian world—it is clear that the Korean War military environment allowed for the possibility of departure from a solely heteronormative model of masculinity. With heterosexuality key to nuclear family centered masculinity, acceptance of homosexuality indicated that some troops tolerated alternative masculinities. This highlighted another way in which Korean War servicemen defied the prevailing model of masculinity put forth by the dominant American culture and adopted alternatives based on the needs of the battlefield environment.

Troops serving in Korea came from a heavily homophobic civilian environment that saw increased anti-gay persecution after World War II. The Korean War partly coincided with the Cold War Lavender Scare, a mass purge of alleged homosexuals from government and private sector jobs, which was tied to fears that they would reveal

national security secrets and fears about homosexuality contributing to the moral decline of America.<sup>263</sup> A 1953 *Los Angeles Times* article demonstrated the conflation of homosexuality with risks to national security: “A security risk is not necessarily a disloyal employee. This category includes homosexuals, alcoholics, and others with personality quirks that make them careless about government secrets. Former Defense Secretary Lovett lumped most of these groups into one broad classification— ‘Blabbermouths.’”<sup>264</sup> Others were more concerned with the so-called immorality of homosexuality, including an outraged church leader discussed in the *Los Angeles Times*, who questioned why “homosexuals are dismissed not for their sin but for security reasons?”<sup>265</sup>

Overall, the notion that gay employees were security risks was in fact built into the idea that they were immoral. Homosexuals were believed by many to lack self-control, having given in to the temptation of so-called sexual perversion. They therefore lacked the willpower to protect state secrets. As yet another article stated, homosexuals made “easy targets for blackmail by communist agents” because of their supposed moral weaknesses and fears of being exposed.<sup>266</sup>

In other instances, homosexuality was directly conflated with communism, as both were equated to masculine failure. Michael Kimmel quoted Joseph McCarthy as

---

<sup>263</sup> David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4-10. David Johnson provides an in-depth history of the Lavender Scare, its origins, its relationship to McCarthyism and the Red Scare, and its place in Cold War society.

<sup>264</sup> “New U.S. Security Program Mapped,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), Feb 8, 1953, 17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>265</sup> “U.S. Morals Lowest in History, Leader Says,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), Apr 7, 1952, 27, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>266</sup> “Senators Seek Moral Cleanup in Government,” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), May 20, 1950, 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

describing the State Department as “a veritable nest of Communists...homosexuals...and traitors.”<sup>267</sup> This conflation juxtaposed communism with heterosexuality, reinforcing the concept that fathers (thus heterosexual men) were a key part of the nuclear family, along with a female spouse, and the nuclear family was advertised as the antidote to communist immorality.<sup>268</sup>

Alongside the civilian world, the military also ramped up its anti-gay efforts built on policies from World War II, which attempted to filter out homosexual persons through specific physical characteristics, mannerisms, and personality traits.<sup>269</sup> World War II saw first implementation of a pre-induction psychiatric screening process of potential servicemen.<sup>270</sup> This highlighted the stigmatization of homosexuals as psychologically unfit. They were also seen as morally abject, as highlighted by the anti-gay newspaper articles, as well as by military leaders, including Col. William C. Porter, who described them as seductive towards youth.<sup>271</sup>

The World War II-era screening process was a step toward codifying anti-

---

<sup>267</sup> Joseph McCarthy quoted in Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 171.

<sup>268</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 136-137. Belmonte argues that the nuclear family was key to anti-communist imagery during the Cold War.

<sup>269</sup> Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 73-77. Kellie Wilson-Buford, “From Exclusion to Acceptance: A Case of History of Homosexuality in the U.S. Court of Military Appeals,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 60 (2013): 254-258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.744671>. See Chapter 2 of *The Male Body at War* for more background on homophobic discrimination in the military. See Wilson-Buford’s article for a discussion of the anti-homosexual policies following World War II.

<sup>270</sup> Naoko Wake, “The Military, Psychiatry, and ‘Unfit’ Soldiers, 1939-1942,” in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* Vol. 62, no. 4 (October 2007), 465. L: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24632369>. Wake’s article discusses the avenue through which the military turned to psychiatric screening for homosexuality, and the methods employed to process the millions of recruits and draftees across the country during World War II.

<sup>271</sup> William C. Porter Quoted in *Ibid.*, 482.

homosexual military policy, which was then done officially during the Korean War. The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), established in 1951, banned “unnatural” sexual acts in Article 125, which stated: “Any person subject to this code who engages in unnatural carnal copulation with another person of the same or opposite sex or with an animal is guilty of sodomy.”<sup>272</sup> As historian Kellie Wilson-Buford correctly pointed out, this article helped to define procreative heterosexual sex as normative, likening homosexual sex and other non-procreative acts to sexual deviance.<sup>273</sup> The wording of the UCMJ took a definitive stance that non-procreative sex was immoral (as opposed to the psychological stance that homosexual individuals were unwell).

Additionally, Articles 133 and 134 gave military leaders leeway to criminalize any behavior they deemed unfit, including those behaviors that could be deemed characteristic of homosexuality or sexual deviance. For example, Article 133 states: “Any officer, cadet, or midshipman who is convicted of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman shall be punished as a court-martial may direct.”<sup>274</sup> Similarly, Article 134 states: “all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces...shall be taken cognizance of by a general or special or summary court-martial, according to the nature and degree of the offense, and punished at the discretion of such court.”<sup>275</sup> The ambiguous language of these two articles allowed accusers to interpret behaviors at their own discretion. Thus, with implementation of the UCMJ, what behaviors indicated

---

<sup>272</sup> “Uniform Code of Military Justice,” in *The Judge Advocate Journal*, no. 5 (May 1950):44.

<sup>273</sup> Wilson-Buford, *From Exclusion to Acceptance*, 253.

<sup>274</sup> “Uniform Code of Military Justice,” *Judge Advocates Journal*, 45.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

homosexuality became subjective. This could safeguard heteronormativity within the military, which was bolstered by homophobic persecution in the civilian world. These exclusionary policies affirmed that homosexuality represented aberrant masculinity within the military system, along with the civilian world.

Preserving the military as a masculine domain tied into larger homophobic beliefs and trends. Psychologist Christopher Kilmartin argued that homophobia stems from anti-femininity and the fear of gender deviance.<sup>276</sup> Similarly, sociologist Michael Kimmel theorized that homophobia is often generated by male fears of emasculation, because men in American society suffer constant pressure to prove their masculinity.<sup>277</sup>

Homosexuality is often equated with femininity, which threatens heterosexual manhood, and straight men react negatively toward homosexuality to remove any pretense of being associated with femininity.<sup>278</sup> Masculine anxiety was heightened even beyond these concerns during the Korean War era, creating an environment ripe for anti-gay sentiment. Kimmel argued that American men felt a particular need to define a normative manhood and this came from suburban fatherhood. Both homosexuals and communists represented gender failure by failing to embody the nuclear family ideal.<sup>279</sup>

All of these concepts appear to have influenced the men who served in Korea,

---

<sup>276</sup> Christopher Kilmartin, *The Masculine Self*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Cornwell-on-Hudson: Sloan Publishing, 2010), 133.

<sup>277</sup> Michael Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," in *Toward a New Psychology of Gender: A Reader*, ed. Mary M. Gergen and Sara N. Davis, (New York: Routledge: 1997), 235.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. I used present tense here because the equation of male homosexuality with femininity is an ongoing problem, and while it certainly impacted the Korean War period, referring to it as a past-tense issue would be problematic, and would serve to diminish the continued struggle against homophobia as well as anti-femininity.

<sup>279</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 170.

many of whom expressed some degree of homophobia or anti-femininity. For example, in a letter home to his parents, Korea veteran Gerald Chappell mentioned disliking his new lieutenant, describing him as “a little on the feminine side,” and admitted that he and his buddies called him she, her, or Mrs. behind his back.<sup>280</sup> While not overt, Chappell clearly demonstrated discomfort with a man whose gender presentation appeared feminine.

Considering the conflation of non-heteronormative sexualities with masculine failure or femininity, Chappell’s dislike of his lieutenant suggested underlying homophobic unease. Chappell expressed, in another letter, that the lieutenant did not show proper respect for the battlefield, treating it like a “big camping expedition.” He did not offer any succinct examples of the lieutenant’s incompetence, implying his mistrust was rooted in prejudice and was not justified.<sup>281</sup> Rather, he perceived his lieutenant as childlike or immature. This indicated an underdeveloped masculinity, reminiscent of the childlike portrayals of South Koreans).

Gerald Chappell was not the only one to express potentially homophobic sentiments. Homophobic slurs were seemingly common parlance among Korean War veterans, sometimes used in jest rather than as a deliberate means to demean. Curtis Morrow, upon finding out that a fellow soldier managed to get an ideal assignment in Japan, mockingly asked his friend “Whose ass did you kiss, or which faggot in personnel did you have to screw?”<sup>282</sup> Within the context of their conversation, Morrow used this language to express being jealous and impressed by his friend’s savvy in securing a good

---

<sup>280</sup>Gerald Chappell to Parents, October 31, 1952, in *Corpsmen: Letters From Korea* eds. Richard Chappell and Gerald Chappell (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>281</sup> Gerald Chappell to Parents, November 9, 1952, in *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>282</sup> Curtis Morrow, *What’s a Commie Ever Done to Black People?: A Korean War Memoir of Fighting in the U.S. Army’s Last All Negro Unit* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers: 1997), 91.

assignment. Notably, this was not used to directly demean or emasculate a particular person, nor was it an attack on a gay person. Unlike Chappell's comments indicating homophobic prejudice, Morrow used overt homophobic language without a direct target.

Veteran Martin Russ also used homophobic language in his diary, which exemplified the casual use of anti-gay slurs among military men. In one strange passage, when relaying his contempt for his aunt's three dogs, he characterized them as "faggots. Most of their day is spent cruising around that low level of theirs, and despite all the maneuvers it usually works out that Sturgess is drag queen for Osburt."<sup>283</sup> In this quote, Russ likened homosexuality with something worthy of disdain. Though not targeting a person, he used homosexual slurs toward the dogs to convey their pathetic nature. Thus, he likened homosexuality to something he deemed pathetic.

Russ described, in a later entry, an interaction with gay men that highlighted gay stereotypes, though he did not express hatred or violent will towards them. While on leave in Long Beach, California, he arrived in an area in which "a perimeter of homosexuals waited...to encircle the hitchhiking servicemen."<sup>284</sup> Russ willingly accepted a ride from a gay man, who invited him to a "gay party." He accepted but told him that he was straight, and the man apparently promptly kicked him out of the car.<sup>285</sup> Rather than revealing blatant disgust with the gay man, Russ appears to have been relatively comfortable in his company, even while depicting gay men as petty and hypersexual.

Russ's diary entries indicated a more complex attitude toward homosexuality than

---

<sup>283</sup> Martin Russ, *The Last Parallel: A Marine's War Journal* (New York: Fromm International, 1957), 17- 18.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



outright hatred but fell far short of acceptance and understanding. Young men that served in Korea such as Chappell, Morrow, and Russ were products first and foremost of a largely homophobic society that had seen recent extreme escalation in anti-homosexual persecution efforts within the civilian world. However, they were also products of the military subculture, which appeared to have been less overtly homophobic. With limited available source material, it is impossible to fully grasp how the majority of Korean War servicemen felt about homosexuality and masculinity.

Anecdotally however, it appears that, while homophobia was in fact present within the military during the Korean War, homosexual men found a degree of acceptance and safety within this environment, which indicated that heterosexualized standards of masculinity were relaxed. The internet photo blog website “Humans of New York,” once posted a photograph of an elderly man with a walker seated on a park bench, along with a quote describing his Korean War service: “I had a ton of fun during the Korean War. There were 10-15 gay soldiers on the base. As long as we weren’t seen doing anything, they couldn’t discharge us. So we all rented a hotel room once a month, plastered the wall with Playbills from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and had lots of sex.”<sup>286</sup>

Lacking any more detail or context, it is impossible to verify the validity of this description featured in this blog, which belongs in the realm of popular culture rather than being an academically sound source of information. But when considered alongside other gay Korean War veterans’ descriptions of their experience—featured in more

---

<sup>286</sup>“I had a Ton of Fun During the Korean War,” Humans of New York, Accessed December 17, 2022, <https://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/120315224026/i-had-a-ton-of-fun-during-the-korean-war-there>.

legitimate academic sources—the Humans of New York quote raised the question of how friendly or hostile the Korean War era military was toward homosexuals. The man’s description insinuated a sort of “don’t ask, don’t tell” willingness to overlook the homosexual sex activities he and his friends frequently engaged in, as long as it was never brought up explicitly.

Gay veterans William Winn and Ric Mendoza-Gleason, interviewed by historian Steve Estes, both attested to the relative tolerance they experienced in the military during the Korean War. William Winn, a gay man who served in the Navy during the Korean War, described instances of both acceptance as well as persecution. As an officer, he was occasionally responsible for dealing with men accused of homosexuality. In one instance, the shore patrol brought him a man who had kissed another man’s ear and was accused of being gay. Winn managed to get the man out of trouble and believed the incident was “really silly—I think most people would agree,” implying that many fellow sailors would have overlooked the incident. He attributed cases like this to “McCarthy...beginning to rattle the cages in Washington about gay life” and that “this was a crisis all of a sudden.”<sup>287</sup> Most of the gay men he served with were more concerned about being discovered by “McCarthy’s people,” but were not overly concerned about dealing with homophobic comrades. From Winn’s perspective, this was not part of a larger crisis of homophobia within the military. Rather, the stricter measures to persecute homosexual servicemen reflected the recent uptick in anti-gay politics and cultural beliefs that

---

<sup>287</sup> William Winn, “The Lavender Scare: An Interview with William Winn,” in *Ask and Tell: Gay and Lesbian Veterans Speak Out*, ed. Steve Estes, 39-45 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 43.

stemmed from the civilian world.<sup>288</sup>

Notably, historian Kellie Wilson-Buford argued that the establishment of the Court of Military Appeals (CMA) in 1951 safeguarded the right to due process for troops accused of homosexuality, which indicated that the exclusion of homosexuals from military masculinity was not absolute—even on an institutional level. Even as the UCMJ streamlined persecution of homosexuals, the CMA was key to challenging anti-gay policies within the military, as it provided a venue through which the accused could contest their charges. As she described, it was “the very policies that discriminated against alleged homosexual service members [that] generated legal avenues through which gays and lesbians exercised their rights to due process, and ultimately their rights as American citizens embodied in the repeal of the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy” decades later.<sup>289</sup>

Additionally, Wilson-Buford noted that the CMA was given the authority to interpret the UCMJ. This supported her argument that the CMA upheld due process and protection from entrapment and double jeopardy.<sup>290</sup> In particular, the elements of the UCMJ dealing with homosexuality were written in vague language that often lacked clearly defined offenses.<sup>291</sup> As noted previously, vague language was often weaponized against alleged homosexual service members. However, despite the UCMJ’s policy to ban individuals with “latent homosexual tendencies” from serving, it did not specify the

---

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>289</sup> Wilson-Buford, *From Exclusion to Acceptance*, 250.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 255-256.

authority to punish mere homosexual traits, nor did it expressly define what these traits were.<sup>292</sup>

More significantly, Wilson-Buford pointed out that many military officials had begun questioning the need for policies excluding homosexual troops from serving. She cited several court-martial cases, including the 1952 case of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Henry Davisson, who was charged with and confessed to sodomy. However, an army psychiatrist refused to characterize him as sexually deviant, and two Colonels testified to his excellent service and work ethic.<sup>293</sup> In a similar case, a sodomy conviction against a sailor was overturned, when the CMA challenged the sentence by citing a previous case in which the sailor was charged and found innocent of sodomy by the state of California. This case successfully challenged the Navy's policy of excluding alleged homosexuals by upholding double jeopardy protections.<sup>294</sup> These challenges to the exclusion of homosexual troops proved Wilson-Buford's argument that the CMA balanced out the UCMJ's anti-homosexual doctrine. This marked a difference between the military and civilian worlds, because, as David Johnson argued, no accused homosexuals in the civilian world attempted to combat congressional committees that charged them.<sup>295</sup>

The evidence provided by Wilson-Buford indicated that Winn's perspective on the persecution of gay troops was a fair assessment of the military environment. Fellow

---

<sup>292</sup>"Uniform Code of Military Justice," in *The Judge Advocate Journal*, no. 5 (May 1950):44-45. Wilson-Buford, *From Exclusion to Acceptance*, 257.

<sup>293</sup>Davisson Case in Wilson-Buford, *From Exclusion to Acceptance*, 261-262.

<sup>294</sup>Knudson Case in Wilson-Buford, *From Exclusion to Acceptance*, 263.

<sup>295</sup>Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 5.

veteran Ric Mendoza-Gleason, a gay soldier who was stationed in Korea, offered an even more revelatory viewpoint on the military's relationship with homosexuality. He described the military environment as the polar opposite of the intolerant civilian world: "It was a nightmare...in the States...If you were gay here it was over," but "once you got overseas, the commanders looked the other way."<sup>296</sup> He even went as far as to describe the war zone as a "wonderful" environment for the gay troops, who were able to be completely open about who they were. Once he away from the home front, even his "very, very straight" company commander enjoyed the drag shows put on by a handful of gay soldiers under his command.<sup>297</sup> Not only was expression allowed, but homosexual sex was often permitted despite the laws stating otherwise. William Winn recalled that he had several opportunities to engage in sexual activities while in the navy, and was taken on a date with a fellow sailor to a gay bar.<sup>298</sup> According to Mendoza-Gleason, straight soldiers would even proposition the gay troops for sex because they felt it was a safer option than visiting a prostitute, who they feared would give them venereal diseases.<sup>299</sup> This point was particularly noteworthy because it showed that straight-identified men were willing to deviate from gendered expectations of heterosexualized masculinity, given that they were in a more tolerant environment.

Importantly, there were some in the civilian world who challenged the predominant notion that homosexuality was deviant and criminal, thus, the military's relative tolerance of homosexuality and alternative masculinities was not born in a

---

<sup>296</sup>Ric Mendoza-Gleason, "Korea: An Interview with Ric Mendoza-Gleason," in *Ask and Tell: Gay and Lesbian Veterans Speak Out*, ed. Steve Estes, 33-339 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>298</sup> Winn, "The Lavender Scare," 41-42.

<sup>299</sup> Mendoza-Gleason, "Korea," 37.

vacuum. The efforts within the CMA may have reflected the civilian efforts or been motivated by them. The Mattachine Society, established in 1950 for example, advocated for gay rights, and worked to combat police harassment and entrapment of homosexuals.<sup>300</sup> Thus, there were some parallels between gay rights efforts within the civilian world to those within the military justice system. Other outliers, like the scientist Alfred Kinsey, also took efforts to destigmatize homosexuality. His studies and publications challenged popular notions of homosexuality as immoral, as well as earlier scientific claims, like those of Freud, that defined homosexuality in terms of a pathological condition or result of abnormal development.<sup>301</sup> Decrying the concept of a “normal” sexuality, Kinsey’s studies found that men fell along a spectrum of various sexual orientations.<sup>302</sup> Despite the parallels between civilian and military gay rights efforts, further study is warranted to decipher what degree of influence Kinsey and others had on the troops who appeared to willingly accept their gay comrades.

A viable explanation for this relative acceptance of homosexuals is similar to that of increased racial tolerance: the unique dynamic among military men that fostered brotherly bonds and greater acceptance of differences than civilian environments.

Combat and wartime circumstances seemed to have pushed this further than non-combat military environments, as the forced dependence on one another to survive brought men closer together. While both Winn and Mendoza-Gleason felt their comrades

---

<sup>300</sup> Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 162. Rupp details the Mattachine Society and similar groups that emerged during the 1950s, in her history of LGBTQ American identities, relationships, rights, persecution, and communities.

<sup>301</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 82-83. See chapter 4 for Gilbert’s analysis of Kinsey’s writings and their impact on 1950s American society.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-88.

to be relatively tolerant, only Mendoza-Gleason had been in a war zone – whereas Winn was relatively safe in the Navy. Just as Curtis Morrow experienced mutual respect between himself and many of his white officers as they fought together, Mendoza-Gleason cited the battlefield as the environment that fostered the greatest acceptance. As he described: “You would think with the gayness and everything that that would be a problem. I never had an officer that found it to be a problem. And the guys, well, overseas the guys just thought it was another thing like, you know, like your religion, your politics, whatever. ‘Cause overseas is an entirely different ball of wax.”<sup>303</sup> Being overseas in Korea created a more accepting environment, away from the safety of civilian life. While brotherly bonding was not unique to Korean War troops, the heightened cultural persecution of homosexuals during this period made the acceptance of gay troops by their peers incredibly impactful, particularly because it highlighted the creation and relative acceptance of alternative masculinities.

---

<sup>303</sup> Mendoza-Gleason, “Korea,” 38.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Ric Mendoza-Gleason's description of life in the Korean War as "a different ball of wax" highlighted not only his experience as a gay soldier at war, but the drastic disparity between life at war versus life as a civilian. This could be said for any war, and the Coronet filmmakers who produced the 1951 training film: "Starting Now (Are You Ready for Service? No. 4)" clearly sought to prepare young potential draftees, in its drab depiction, for a vastly different cultural environment than the civilian life they were used to. Arguably, however, Coronet did not anticipate that these cultural divergences would provide a safe haven for gay men to evade Lavender Scare persecution, though this was how Mendoza-Gleason perceived the Korean War battlefield. His experience coupled with the Coronet film captured the essence of military masculinity during the Korean War: the mundane, and "forgotten," crossed with the seemingly radical, all of which continues to be underacknowledged by the general public and arguably the academic world as well. This thesis serves as an attempt to begin unraveling this complex issue through the lens of masculinity.

The two overarching issues that contributed to the American troops' relationship to masculinity during the Korean War appeared at first to be disparate; how did masculine obsolescence relate to overcoming cultural limitations to masculinity through homosocial bonding? Upon closer examination, both elements indicated a failure to adhere to the dominant culture's definition of masculinity, which, it should be acknowledged, was



itself not entirely clear cut nor totally consistent. A generalized picture indicated that normative masculinity was embodied by the breadwinning, white, heterosexual family man, busy with a corporate job but involved with his children, who was permitted to vicariously experience rugged, traditionally idealized manhood through escapist fantasy.

A disillusioned thirty-something naval pilot or a teenaged black G.I. did not fit this mold. And yet these men were real, and their experiences were perhaps more authentic representations of men's lived realities than the idealized picture of Jim Anderson, office employee and head of the middle-class family living in the house on Maple Street, with the white picket fence in the town of Springfield, featured in "Father Knows Best." Jim was a fictional ideal, whereas Curtis Morrow lived and breathed, and James Michener's pilots represented real men with whom he interacted.

These men and their Korean War were central to the gendered cultural history of the early 1950s America. The disparity between the "Father Knows Best" ideal and the lived experiences of Korean War men underscored the socially constructed nature of gender, both for the period in question as well as more generally. It also highlighted the Korean War military as an American subculture with its own set of gendered norms that broke from the companionate fatherhood ideal, due to necessity and shifting cultural priorities on the battlefield. Both wars and military communities are rich in gendered history, and are key to gaining a full understanding of American cultural history. The Korean War era was no exception, particularly considering that it has been overlooked in the consideration of masculinity and masculine gender norms.

The continued (but arguably unintentional) disregarding of the Korean War veterans' service impacts their masculinity into the present—the seeming lack of support from the public continues rob them of the key masculine rite of soldierly legitimacy.

Sinclair Stickle, for example, wrote in the 2010s about his anger at his lack of recognition (as noted in Chapter 4). In his memoir, veteran Robert Brownbridge recollected his experience at a veterans' event that perfectly encapsulated this:

“I use the term *forgotten war* purposely here; a hurtful incident occurred in the mid-1990's. I had attended a major California city event intended to honor American veterans who had served in twentieth century wars. Towards the end of the ceremony, the emcee announced: ‘Now will the veterans in the audience who served in this century's wars please stand so we may honor and celebrate you.’ He then named the wars: World War I, World War II, The Viet Nam War, The Iraq War. Everyone who stood received great applause. But I did not stand and was deeply saddened that my Korean War comrades and I had been forgotten. Afterwards, I spoke with the emcee...and asked him why he had left out the Korean War in his earlier request to recognize all veterans. The gentleman was sincerely embarrassed and asked for my forgiveness for his ‘terrible oversight.’”<sup>304</sup>

Brownbridge's sorrow was understandable considering that his service had been so easily overlooked. Notably, however, there have been efforts in recent decades to honor Korean War veterans, such as the creation of the Korean War Veterans' Memorial in Washington D.C. The memorial, approved in 1989, was officially dedicated on the forty-second anniversary of the War's armistice, July 27, 1995.<sup>305</sup> So perhaps the Korean War was finally getting recognition, yet Brownbridge's incident occurred around the time of the memorial's dedication, indicating that the public was still largely oblivious of the

<sup>304</sup> Robert Brownbridge, *Into War with an Empty Gun: A Korean War Story* (CreateSpace Publication, 2012), xii-xiii.

<sup>305</sup> “Korean War Veterans Memorial: The Design Process,” National Parks Service, last modified July 26, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/kowa/learn/historyculture/design.htm>.

conflict. Even more notable, the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial was approved in 1980 and was officially dedicated in 1982.<sup>306</sup> A war that occurred after Korea received a memorial before the Korean War did. Despite its own many controversies, and its veterans coping with their own frustrations with their public reception, the Vietnam War has been remembered to a considerably greater extent in popular culture than the Korean War. Vietnam veterans' military masculinity has arguably been validated to a greater extent.

However, in November 2022, only months ago as this is being written, a major film production about the Korean War was released to theaters. The movie, titled *Devotion*, not only gives overdue recognition to a conflict that has been largely overlooked, but it dives directly into one of the war's most significant issues, racial integration, and interracial friendship—which intersected with masculinity. The film is based on the true story of Jesse Brown (played by Jonathon Majors), the first black naval pilot, and his friend Tom Hudner, a white man and fellow pilot (Glen Powell).<sup>307</sup> What impact this will have on popular recognition of the war is unknown, but it highlights a key element of Korean War masculinity: homosocial bonding and the permeation of racial barriers. This film has the potential to invigorate some degree of cultural remembrance, which would be significant considering how memory, or lack thereof, has figured into Korean War masculinity.

Sadly, other commemoration endeavors in recent years have failed, including the 2010s effort to add a memorial wall to the existing Korean War monument, with the

---

<sup>306</sup>“Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” National Parks Service, last modified April 20, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/vive/learn/historyculture/vvmoverview.htm>.

<sup>307</sup>“Devotion,” accessed December 17, 2022, <https://www.devotion.movie/synopsis/>.

names of those who fell in the war. It has recently come to light, according to the *New York Times*, that this recent addition includes hundreds of errors, such as misspelled names, which are literally carved in stone.<sup>308</sup> With Korean War veterans still living, it remains to be seen how contemporary efforts to commemorate the war will impact historical memory and how it will affect living veterans, and their gendered identities.

The other key component to Korean War masculinity, the creation of alternative masculinities through homosocial bonding, continues to be relevant to modern dialogue surrounding gender history and intersectionality. The most significant element of homosocial bonding during the Korean War was the way in which many of the troops subverted the gendered marginalization and created alternative masculinities by bridging gaps between racial groups and, in some cases, gaps between men of different sexual orientations.

Importantly, the bridging of these gaps did not solve racism or homophobia within the military or the civilian world to which surviving troops eventually returned. The next major war, Vietnam, highlighted both the pervasiveness of racism, despite inroads against it made during the Korean War. Historian Jeremy Maxwell noted that while the military was integrated by the Vietnam War, the military had not fostered racial equality: President Kennedy formed the Gesell committee in 1962 to investigate racial issues in the military, and the committee found that racial discrimination was still a major issue.<sup>309</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup> David Phillips, "A Korean War Wall of Remembrance Set Hundreds of Errors in Stone," January 9, 2023, 1-5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/09/us/korean-war-memorial-wall-names.html>.

<sup>309</sup> Jeremy P. Maxwell, *Brotherhood in Combat: How African Americans Found Equality in Korea and Vietnam* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 101-103.

Despite this, interracial bonding during the Korean War did help break some barriers, because troops deemed survival and masculine bonding in this context to be more important than racial prejudice, once the men saw one another as part of the “band of brothers.”

The same appears to have been the case regarding the acceptance of homosexuals, though more evidence is necessary to gain a fuller perspective. The examples available paint a powerful picture of a significant level gay acceptance within the Korean War military.

As with racism, homophobia within the military persisted, including discriminatory policies. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” compromise of the early 1990s marked a significant, though highly incomplete, step toward challenging anti-gay policies. A 1993 article discussing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” when it was first proposed by Representative Barney Frank, argued that “Frank’s plan falls considerably short of...[the] correct goal of allowing homosexuals to serve openly.”<sup>310</sup> It took another two decades for Congress to vote to repeal the policy, allowing homosexual troops to serve openly.<sup>311</sup> Despite the decades of discriminatory policies that followed, the experiences of some gay troops who served in Korea exemplified servicemen’s ability to serve together successfully, regardless of sexual differences.

For American men serving in the Korean War, masculinity figured into their service as a seemingly rigid but ultimately fluid social construct. The two major

---

<sup>310</sup> “Gays in the Military: Sensible Compromise?: ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t listen, Don’t investigate,’” *Los Angeles Times* (CA), May 26, 1993, OCB10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>311</sup> Carl Hulse, “Senate Ends Military Ban on Gays Serving Openly,” *New York Times* (NY), Dec 19, 2010, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

components that made Korea unique in this regard were the sense of forgottenness by the public and the breakdown of masculine social barriers through homosocial bonding.

These two elements came together through their subversion of America's early Cold War era gender standards. Both elements showcased a failure to live up to—or a defiance of—the breadwinning nuclear father, who was inevitably white, and was implied to be heterosexual. The public's disillusionment and disinterest in the Korean War added to the marginalization of military masculinity. The ability to overcome racial and sexual barriers served to redefine masculinity as more inclusive than in civilian life.

Importantly, this thesis only scratches the surface of an overlooked historical subject, and there is much work yet to be done. My goal was to offer a preliminary look at Korean War masculinity, rather than offer a definitive conclusion. It is my hope to delve further into this enormous topic in future research endeavors.

The list of issues not addressed in this thesis is impossible to name in full, but some potential research avenues include dedicated research on fathers who served in Korea, the impact of veterans' memory on perceptions of masculinity, and comparison between the branches of service, among countless other issues. Further research dedicated to racial and sexual dynamics are also warranted.

As a historical subject, the Korean War conveys the fluidity of gendered norms, which shift depending on circumstances, surroundings, and social interactions. Thus, masculine constructs of the Korean War remain significant historically, as well as relevant to the present day, replete with its own non-static understandings of masculinity and gender more widely.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Primary Sources:

Adreon, Leonard. *Hilltop Doc: A Marine Corpsman Fighting Through the Mud and Blood of the Korean War*. San Bernadino, 2017.

American Veterans Center. "Profiles in Valor: James McEachin, Korean War Veteran."

Youtube Video. February 7, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBnnFI5oN4>.

*Argosy: The Complete Man's Magazine*. No. 1, Vol. 331. July 1950.

Barclay, McClland. "Man the Guns, Join the Navy," Poster, 1942. Library of Congress

Prints and Photographs Division. Washington. D.C.

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92510148/>.

Brady, James. *The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1990.

Brownbridge, Robert. *Into War with an Empty Gun: A Korean War Story*. CreateSpace

Publication, 2012.

Chappell, Richard, and Gerald Chappell. *Corpsmen: Letters from Korea*. Kent: Kent State

University Press, 2000.

Collins, Max Allan and George Hagenauer. *Men's Adventure Magazines in Postwar*

*America*. Los Angeles: Taschen, 2008.

Central Connecticut State University Veterans History Project. "Interview with George Brown, Korean War Veteran." Youtube Video. June 26, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RciTFJmvq9Y&t=537s>.

*Daily Record* Collection. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

DeHaan, Joseph Korean War Correspondence. 2015.084.w.r. Center for American War Letters Archives. Chapman University, CA.

"Devotion." accessed December 17, 2022. <https://www.devotion.movie/synopsis/>.

Eahrhardt, W.D. and Philip K. Jason, eds. *Retrieving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

*Farmville Herald* Collection. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

*Father Knows Best*. NBC Radio.

<https://www.youtube.com/@DVPOldTimeRadio>.

Fuller, Samuel, dir. *The Steel Helmet*. 1951; Lippert Pictures. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX9Ud9fTmBw>.

Garland, Peter "Colonel in Korea: A Regimental Commander's Candid Observations on Tactics, Organization and Discipline." in *Combat Forces Journal* Vol. 2, no. (August 1951):15-16.

Greechan, Francis J Post-Second World War and Korean War Correspondence.

2016.046.w.r. Center for American War Letters Archives.

Chapman University, CA.

"I had a Ton of Fun During the Korean War." Humans of New York, Accessed

December 17, 2022. <https://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/120315224026/i-had-a-ton-of-fun-during-the-korean-war-there>.



*Imperial Valley Press* Collection. Chronicling America: Historian American Newspapers.

*Idaho Statesman* Collection. Access World News.

Kamprath, Eugene Korean War Correspondence. 2018.133.w.r. Center for American War Letters. Chapman University, CA.

*Key West Citizen* Collection. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

“Korean War Era,” U.S. Army Center, Accessed December, 17, 2022,

<https://history.army.mil/html/bookshelves/resmat/korea/intro/recruitment-posters.html#lg=1&slide=0>.

“Korean War Veterans Memorial: The Design Process.” National Parks Service, last modified July 26, 2022.

<https://www.nps.gov/kowa/learn/historyculture/design.htm>.

“Korean War Veterans Survey Project.” Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA.

*Ladies Home Journal*. No 1-5, Vol LXIV (1947).

*Lexington Advertiser* Collection. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

*Los Angeles Times* Collection. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Martin, Andrew, dir. *Men of the Fighting Lady*. 1954; San Diego, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2001. DVD.

Michener, James. *The Bridges at Toko-ri*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1953.

Morrow, Curtis James. *What’s a Commie Every Done to Black People?: A Korean War Memoir of Fighting in the U.S. Army’s Last All Negro Unit*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. 1997.

*News and Views* Collection. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

*People's Voice* Collection. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

Peters, Richard and Xiaobing Li. *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005.

Phillips, David. "A Korean War Wall of Remembrance Set Hundreds of Errors in Stone." January 9, 2023.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/09/us/korean-war-memorial-wall-names.html>.

Russ, Martin. *The Last Parallel: A Marine's War Journal*. New York: Fromm International, 1999.

*New York Times* Collection. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

*Saturday Evening Post* Collection. EBSCOhost.

Sammarco, Joseph William Korean War Correspondence. 2014.118.w.r. Center for American War Letters Archives. Chapman University, CA.

Sledge, Eugene B. *China Marine: An Infantryman's Life After World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Sledge, Eugene B. *With The Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*. Ballantine Books, 1981.

Smithsonian Channel. "How the First Asian American Marine Officer Overcame Racism." Youtube Video. March 5, 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDjzAIKe1Ms>.

*Starting Now (Are You Ready for Service? No. 4)*. Coronet Instructional Films.

1951. <https://archive.org/details/Starting1951>.

Stickle, Sinclair W. *So They Will Know: A Korean War Memoir*. San Bernadino, 2013.

Tasch, Ruth Jacobson. "The Role of the Father in the Family (Father's Expressed Attitudes and Opinions with Regards to Their Role in Family Life and the Responsibilities, Satisfactions and Perplexities Which Fatherhood Entails). *Journal of Experimental Education* 2, no. 4 (June 1952): 319-361.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20153887>.

Tomedi, Rudy, ed. *No Bugles, No Drums*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1993.

*True: The Man's Magazine*. October 1951.

"Uniform Code of Military Justice." in *The Judge Advocate Journal*, no. 5 (May 1950):44-45.

"Vietnam Veterans Memorial." National Parks Service, last modified April 20, 2020.  
<https://www.nps.gov/vive/learn/historyculture/vvmoverview.htm>.

#### Secondary Sources:

Belmonte, Laura. *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Blomstedt, Larry. *Truman, Congress, and Korea: The Politics of America's First Undeclared War*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

Casey, Steven. *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion 1950-1953*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Cummings, Bruce. *The Korean War: A History*. New York: The Modern Library, 2011.

Estes, Steve. *Ask and Tell: Gay and Lesbian Veterans Speak Out*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2007.

Estes, Steve. *I Am A Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2005.

Gilbert, James. *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Goldstein, Joshua. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Graham, Herman. *The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

Griswold, Robert. *Fatherhood in America: A History*. New York: Basic Books, 1993. Halberstam, David. *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*. New York: Hyperion, 2007.

Huebner, Andrew. *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from World War II to the Vietnam Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

Jarvis, Christina. *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, 2004.

Jeffords, Susan. *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

- Kilmartin, Christopher. *The Masculine Self*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Cornwall-on-Hudson: Sloan Publishing, 2010.
- Kim, Jeong Min. "From Military Supplies to Wartime Commodities: The Black Market for Sex and Goods During the Korean War, 1950-53." *Radical History Review* 113 (January 2019): 11-30. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-7160041>.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Kimmel, Michael. "Masculinity as Homophobia," in *Toward a New Psychology of Gender: A Reader*, edited by Mary M. Gergen and Sara N. Davis, 223-242. New York: Routledge: 1997.
- Maxwell, Jeremy. *Brotherhood in Combat: How African Americans Found Equality in Korea and Vietnam*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018.
- Millet, Allen. *Their War For Korea: American, Asian, and European Combatants and Civilians, 1950-1953*. Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2002.
- Norma, Caroline. "The Operation and Impact of the American Military's "R&R" Programme in Japan During the Korean War." *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 3 (February 2020): 365-381. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2020.1721433>.
- Rupp, Leila J. *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Schrecker, Ellen. *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Wake, Naoko. "The Military, Psychiatry, and 'Unfit' Soldiers, 1939-1942." in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* Vol. 62, no. 4 (October 2007): 461

-494. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24632369>.

Welky, David. *Marching Across the Color Line: A. Philip Randolph and Civil Rights in the World War II Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Wilson-Buford, Kellie. "From Exclusion to Acceptance: A Case of History of Homosexuality in the U.S. Court of Military Appeals." *Journal of Homosexuality* 60 (2013): 250-272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.744671>.