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Limited war, limited enthusiasm: Sexuality, disillusionment, survival, and the changing landscape of war culture in Korean War-era comic books and soldier iconography

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"Limited War, Limited Enthusiasm: Sexuality, Disillusionment, Survival, and

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Iconography"

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For Ashley, whose unwavering support allowed me to persevere and complete this project, and my family who always encouraged me to pursue higher education.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how Korean War-era comic books and soldier-produced iconography between 1950 and 1953 reflected the conflict and helped construct ideal soldier masculinities. Differentiating between romantic, soldier-produced, and realist imagery, this thesis argues that comic books—traditionally treated as low-brow children's literature—articulated diverse and sophisticated discussions about the nature of warfare and its impact on manhood. Soldiers and artists reflected a war that came on the heels of World War II, and the disillusionment expressed in these sources reflected a broader cultural conflict between representing World War II sentimentalism and the new, limited war in Korea. This struggle resulted in contradictory presentations of soldiers and masculinity in comic books. In particular, realist narratives explored in chapter three invoked an alternative discussion of war that decoupled manhood from warfare. The anti-war rhetoric used by Entertaining Comics' realist narratives constitutes a new phenomenon during the Korean War, and laid the foundation for subsequent anti-war critiques during the 1960s. Comic books, newspapers, film, and other media anchor this thesis, and allow the following pages to contextualize comic book imagery in broader 1950s war culture.

Introduction

The early 1950s were tumultuous times in politics, domestic life, and international

affairs. Although any historian must be cautious not to attribute too much to these

negative aspects of the 1950s, David Halberstam contends that the 1950s were hardly a

static, placid decade but the foundation of the so-called revolutionary 1960s.[1] Only six

months after Americans rang in the new decade, and five years since World War II, the

United States intervened in another war, this time on the Korean peninsula. The Korean

War resulted from the increasing Soviet-United States tension that arose after the Soviets

developed their own atomic bomb, and China fell to the communist forces of Mao Tse-

Tung. The North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung, with the permission of the Soviet Union,

invaded his southern neighbor. Then, from June 25, 1950, until July 27, 1953, the United

States spearheaded the United Nations "police action" against communist forces on the

peninsula. Amidst the stir of war, men and women also experienced changes in their

domestic roles. After World War II, society expected women to return to the household to

raise children and support their husbands.[2] This differed greatly from the liberated state

of "Rosie the Riveter" women who enjoyed the benefits of full-time employment and,

albeit limited, day care during the war years. For men, social expectations dictated that

they fulfill the paradoxical roles of breadwinner *and* father. That they could not

effectively do both—by society's expectation—defined the position of men in much of

the decade. Sociologist Michael S. Kimmel points out that, for men, the 1950s meant

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[1] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).
[2] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

being "temporary" about themselves, and in constant transition and uncertainty. Men

were restless, always searching for some role to define themselves concretely as men.[3]

Americans also enjoyed comic books, a product of the post-war boom in

production and consumption.[4] During the early 1950s, comic books pervaded American

households across the United States, and constituted reading fare for both children and

adults. The items were bought, borrowed, and sold throughout the country and thus

constitute a largely overlooked historical window into American culture of the period.

Historians often explore film media, such as the westerns and World War II flicks that

were Hollywood's obsession during the 1940s and 1950s.[5] However, Hollywood's

products did not infiltrate into the everyday life of the American home until the television

became mainstream during the late 1950s and early 1960s. During the early 1950s,

Americans considered the television a luxury item, and it did not proliferate in American

households until manufacturers steadily lowered the price.[6] Thus, the average young

American's exposure to moving pictures was confined to Saturday children's matinees,

drive-ins, and evening B-movies that targeted teenage audiences.[7] Comic books also

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[3] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[4] For more on post-war consumer culture, see: Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003).

[5] For example, see: Steven Mintz and Randy R. Roberts, *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2006); Robert Brent Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: MacMillan, 1992).

[6] Stephen M. Gillon, *The American Paradox: A History of the United States Since 1945* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007).

[7] During the early 1950s, movie producers targeted children and adolescents by creating low-budget B-movies that catered specifically to these audiences on Saturday. Children flocked to Saturday matinees of *Tarzan* and *Bomba*, where cheap tickets allowed access and children could sit through multiple screenings. See Blair Davis, *The Battle for the Bs: 1950s Hollywood and the Birth of Low-Budget Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 73-74; Historian Gary Cross argues that Saturday matinees, children's radio, and the comic book combined during the 1950s to form an autonomous child consumption, "Children and the Market: An American Historical Perspective," in *Understanding Children as Consumers*, ed. David Marshall (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 87; *Looking Past the Screen: Case*

proved accessible to children. They could purchase comic books at the local corner store,

especially in urban cities, and the standard ten-cent price allowed children access to

comics with their weekly allowance.[8] Children could purchase comics outside of their

parents' immediate supervision, but might also share these comics with their parents. As

historian Jean-Paul Gabilliet suggests, comic book readership was beholden to a

proximity effect, wherein children introduced the comic into the household and adults

latched onto them for entertainment as well.[9] Aside from the daily newspaper and

magazines, the comic became the most pervasive piece of literature inside of the home,

allowing its ideas and reflections on society to reach a wide audience.[10]

At the same time, comic books and soldier-produced cartoons delved into the

Korean War, and presented the conflict in diverse ways and articulated serious

philosophical discussions about the nature of warfare. Romantic war comic books

constructed an ideal fighting man who was hyper-heterosexual, competent, and fearless

in combat. Soldier publications in the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* distributed humorous

illustrations that also involved the juxtaposition of soldiers with highly sexualized

American and Asian women. These cartoons also functioned as a public forum to subtly

criticize military leadership, contemplate home, and reflect on the death of friends. Other

comics' realistic portrayals of the war replicated an insipient anti-war mood in the United

States and offered an alternative discussion of soldiering and warfare. Entertaining

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Studies in American Film History and Method, eds. Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin (Durham: Duke University Press,2007), 229.

[8] Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*: *A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 200-201; Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[9] Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, 200-201.

[10] William W. Savage, Jr. *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens: Comic Books and America, 1945-1954*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990; Gabilliet, Wright, and Savage—based on production numbers—estimate that some 650 different titles accounted for nearly 60 million individual comics each month.

Comics used *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* to emphasize survival over heroism, home over war, and sorrow over joy to overtly condemn sentimental, romantic attitudes about warfare.

This thesis argues that this Korean War iconography dismantled the idea that warfare "built men" or improved the state of American manliness. The fictional men may have asserted masculinity through the sexualization of women, but the act of being a soldier did not bolster their manhood. Furthermore, they collectively reflect disillusionment with warfare, and established the precursor for far more visceral anti-war protest during the Vietnam War. In the same vein, they did not espouse anti-Communist rhetoric, despite being produced during the height of the Red Scare. They also emphasized the individuality of the soldier over the collective nature of the Armed Forces, and presented soldiers as victims of junior officers, military brass, the domestic front, and politicians. Internal contradictions pervade each genre, however, and sometimes harken back to ideals of bravery, heroism, patriotism, and fidelity. Taken together, their contradictions point toward a much broader conflict in war culture—the conflict between World War II optimism and sentimentalism and Korean War disgruntlement and disillusionment.

The thesis places these illustrations into three distinct and overlapping categories—romantic, soldier-produced, and realistic—to emphasize how they decoupled manhood from war and contained contradictory discussions about the validity of warfare.[11] In romantic visions of war, "battle" did not motivate soldiers to fight. Instead,

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[11] Cultural and intellectual historians employ the term "romantic" in multiple ways. Here, I define romantic as the use of imagination over reason, and the creation of fantastical stories. Specifically, romantic comic books place the soldier front and center as hero and adventurer. The perils of combat— fear, death, and neurosis—are usually subordinated to the adventure of war. This idea reaches far back into

the driving force behind men's desire to fight came from an outside source: women.

Romantic comic books employed an ideal of manhood that reconciled some seeming

contradictions—that soldiers are supposed to be brave and successful, but in this case are

not motivated by battle but by sex. Thus, romantic comics presented an idea that physical

masculinity (in the form of libido) led directly to battle strength. Soldier-produced

imagery defined soldier-masculinity around survival, camaraderie, and sexuality to

explain why men fought. By fantasizing about famous American women, these fictional

soldiers escaped the doldrums of warfare. Romantic war heroes flew into combat to

rescue women and claim sexual rewards. Soldier-produced cartoons presented soldiers

mentally fleeing from combat through sexual fantasy. Entertaining Comics' *Frontline*

Combat and *Two-Fisted Tales* initiated an alternative discussion about the legitimacy of

war. The publications presented unenthusiastic soldiers who were drafted. Soldiers'

survival and laments for home helped them persevere in combat. Comic books were more

than trivial reading fare for children. Comics presented complex interpretations of the

Korean War, and contributed to an ongoing cultural construction of the ideal American

soldier.

This investigation of the contradictory assumptions about manhood and warfare

present in these three genres fits well into broader masculinity scholarship by reinforcing

the idea that popular culture transmits multiple masculinities in any historical moment.

Sociologist Michael Kimmel argues that 1950s culture emphasized a man's need for

toughness and self-defense, while simultaneously stressing restraint and the suppression

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history. For example, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.,
1982), published in 1894 constitutes a romantic appraisal of soldiery. Of course, comic books are fiction.
But, publishers produced fictional presentations of war in comic books that either followed romanticism or
realism. Thus, in realist narratives soldiers constantly endure hardship, not thrilling adventure.

of aggressive acts.[12] Similarly, James Gilbert contends that the 1950s "were never entirely John Wayne's world anymore than it ever belonged to Liberace." He dissuades historians from assuming that a single, prevailing norm of masculinity presided over the decade. While public intellectuals assumed that an essential masculinity existed during the 1950s, Gilbert found that upon closer evaluation the 1950s revealed "not only variety, but the contending shapes of gender that begin to look like the diversity" expressed famously during the 1960s.[13] This analysis of comic books illuminates many gender contradictions. For example, irrationality underpinned definitions of the coward in romantic narratives, but it also motivated soldiers to pursue women. When emotion worked toward socially acceptable ends (i.e. heterosexuality), compulsivity became less of a problem. Realist comic books also contributed to the social construction of the male soldier ideal. Beside John Wayne stood the nameless characters of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* who longed for home, and wrestled with the waning hope of returning home alive. EC presented these laments and fears—condemned as "cowardice" in romantic comics—as normal responses to the exigencies of war.

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[12] Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 151.

[13] James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 8. For more on war culture and gender construction, see: Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); For more on the relationship between men, masculinity, and violence, see: David T. Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

For some idea about alternative masculinities during the 1950s, see: Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Thomas Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America* (New York: New York Times Books, 1978); Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Charlotte: Duke University Press, 1997).

Heather Marie Stur argues that these competing ideas of manhood filtered into the Vietnam War-era, when culture presented male soldiers with the contradicting ideals of the John Wayne gunslinger, the passionate caregiver, and the sexual aggressor. Thus, in the same historical moment, popular culture encouraged violence *and* non-violent compassion in infantrymen. See, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Using comic books as a primary source presents a number of methodological challenges, which include issues of compiling a body of sources. Anyone who seriously studies comic books from the Golden Age (1930 – 1955) must confront the paradoxical abundance and dearth of primary sources. Most archival holdings are spotty at best, and the rarity and expense of comic books prohibits the independent researcher from purchasing them. Thus it is difficult to locate and peruse a complete series from beginning to end. However, there existed so many different publications during the 1950s—historian William Savage estimates some 650 different titles—that one can still find overwhelming numbers of comics.[14]

Presenting another challenge when using comic books as a primary source, audience reception and authorial intent in the production and consumption of these comic books often remains undocumented. Behind-the-scenes information about the creative process is usually unavailable. My investigation of EC's *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* in chapter three constitutes an exception, where I access artists' and creators' voices through previously published interviews. Otherwise, letters to the editors, thought-pieces, author and illustrator interviews are largely non-existent or unavailable for the researcher's use. In lieu of accessing the audience's voice, the longevity of some realist comics, such as EC's *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*, does suggest that their specific message about warfare found purchase in the wider consumer market. The two EC publications enjoyed a longer circulation throughout the Korean War and after (1950-1954), whereas publishers ceased circulation of *Joe Yank*, *Battle Report*, *War Fury*, *Exciting War*, and other romantic comics within a year of initial publication. Perhaps

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[14] William R. Savage, *Comic Books and America*.

EC's realistic, far more explicitly sympathetic depiction of soldiers coupled with its

condemnation of warfare found appeal with an audience that grew increasingly restless

with the conflict. As historian Andrew Huebner argues in *The Warrior Image*, public

support waned for the Korean War as UN forces entered a long stalemate with the

enemy.[15]

The following pages will historicize comic books and cartoon illustrations by

framing them within specific discourses about masculinity, femininity, fear, and the

nature of warfare during the early 1950s. The driving historical question that anchors this

thesis asks what message comic books, in tandem with broader popular culture, delivered

to their audience about the masculine soldier during the 1950s. How did comic books

reflect the Korean War? Did social and political discussions about homosexuality and

warfare influence depictions of masculinity in war comics? Answering these questions

requires that one place these comics in the context of social debates, while also

evaluating them relative to other cultural media such as film, newspapers, and literature.[16]

Chronologically, this thesis investigates war comic books from 1950 to 1954. The

reasons for selecting these specific dates as bookends for the thesis are two-fold. First, it

allows a full consideration of how culture reflected the Korean War as it happened.

Second, the character of comic books underwent transformations after 1954. By 1955,

Congressional inquiries into juvenile delinquency and so-called lurid comic books led to

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[15] 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), 97-132.
[16] My methodological approach is influenced by postmodernism and cultural history. For example, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage, 1982); Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 1988); *The New Cultural History*. Lynn Hunt, ed. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1989); Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995); Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000); Jenkins, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts On an Old Discipline* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

the Comics Code that significantly dampened violent content. As historian Bradford

Wright suggests, many conservative segments of American society latched onto the

liberal psychiatrist and social critic Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1948)

and linked comic book readership directly with juvenile delinquency.[17] Anti-comic

rhetoric focused on the graphic nature of comic books—perceiving gratuitous violence,

wanton sexuality, racism, imperialism, a sympathetic view of criminals, and a gross

mischaracterization of law enforcement. This resulted in the sanitization of comic books

for adolescents. The Comics Code not only transformed the imagery of comic books, but

the dialogue (perceived as anti-war, or pro-communist) also changed markedly. By

focusing on the immediate era before the Comics Code, this thesis establishes a solid

footing for future comparison with war comics published subsequent to the new

stipulations for violence, dialogue, and politicized language.[18]

The Comics Code constrained the creative latitude to produce war stories that

undermined the ideal of the patriotic American soldier just as it did for other comic

genres that critiqued American society and exposed its flaws. Horror and science fiction

fantasy included scathing depictions of the American household, the state of American

youth, and race relations.[19] The rise in juvenile delinquency in the post-war decade

(1945-1955) amplified American fears that the younger generation might not be able to

deliver the nation from harm in a time of crisis. Juvenile delinquents were not fit to

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[17] Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2001); Frederic Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Main Road Books, 1948, rev. 2004).

[18] Bradford Wright, and other historians that use comic books, provide a broad overview of the Comics Code and its ramifications in the market. This thesis complements other historians' works by focusing on a specific subset of comic books in a limited time frame. So far, no historian presents a close reading of pre- and post-Code war comics.

[19] See, *Tales from the Crypt* (Entertaining Comics, 1950-1955); *Crime SuspenStories* (Entertaining Comics, 1952-1955).

maintain a pool of young men the military could mold into competent soldiers. Juvenile delinquency could not produce the brave soldier, but only the unpatriotic, law-breaking coward. However untenable his thesis, Wertham drew a connection between horror and crime comics and the mushrooming growth of juvenile delinquency. His clarion call stoked the public's outrage, particularly among adults concerned with the type of culture now marketed directly to their children. This eventually culminated in Senate hearings and debates that sterilized all comics, including the war comics that presented unpatriotic, depressed American soldiers.

Due to the Comics Code, comic book makers altered the content and depictions of war stories. No longer could comic book makers portray the gruesome death of American soldiers, the futility of war, wanton violence directed against civilians and prisoners of war, nor the formidability of enemy soldiers. Creators now refrained from implicitly questioning the purpose or morality of warfare. A quaint amiability replaced the complex interpretations expressed in pre-Code comics. War was now a gentleman's game—a glamourized sport in which the righteous and honorable always prevailed and dishonesty, excessive violence, and neurosis were the exception rather than the norm.[20] Most war comics produced after the Korean War, then, veered away from cynicism and condemnation. This occurred, not because the Korean War ended, but because the Comics Code imposed strict limitations on the content.

The comic books produced during the Korean War continue a long history of America's fascination with warfare and bloodshed, and the centrality of warfare to the construction of American manhood. Historian Marcus Cunliffe investigated the "martial

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[20] For example, see: *Aces High* (Entertaining Comics, 1955).

spirit" of Americans between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, asserting that "war had been a recurrent, almost endemic element in American history." He argues that in the late eighteenth century, "service in the Revolutionary War was an important formative influence upon the young men who were to furnish the nation's leaders." Thus, military service and warfare provided one basic ingredient of American citizenship and patriotism.[21] By the late nineteenth century, gender politics underpinned the entire Spanish-American conflict. Historian Kristin Hoganson described how American politicians constructed a gendered discourse that suggested American men risked degeneracy and the dissolution of a strong, male American political system by 1898. Participation in warfare would help revitalize waning manhood by creating a fraternal brotherhood of veterans. The iconography deployed by cultural and political elites during the Spanish-American War explicitly argued that men *benefitted* from war. War strengthened manly qualities of chivalry, honor, and leadership.[22] On the eve of the twentieth century, American culture perpetuated the idea that warfare facilitated the creation of manhood.

The cultural connection of warfare and manhood continued two decades later, when American serviceman in Europe witnessed the creation of the *Stars and Stripes* during their tours of duty during World War I. Editors intended for the literature and imagery contained in the *Stars and Stripes* to bolster the morale of American soldiers stationed in France. Meanwhile, wartime propaganda circulating in the United States replicated associations between manhood and warfare. Popular culture and wartime

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[21] Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America,* 1775-1865 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), 65-68.

[22] Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

propaganda argued that World War I gave men an opportunity to prove their manhood and value to society.[23] This home front propaganda directly supported the war effort, and used manhood to stoke patriotism and volunteerism.[24]

By the time of World War II, comic books fully emerged as a cultural medium that worked to influence wartime morale.[25] Historian Jean-Paul Gabilliet suggests that comic books bridge the gap between popular culture (c. 1880 – 1935) and mass culture (c. 1960 – present day).[26] The era of popular culture occurred when leisure activities became normal among working adults due to innovations in transportation, the 40-hour workweek, and increased pay. Subsequent to this period, comic books emerged during an era of "proto-mass culture," in which advertisers and producers targeted an adolescent market. This assisted in the development of consumer culture, anchored on instant gratification and the elevation of leisure activities to a primary end result of work.[27]

World War II ratcheted up the cultural relevance and popularity of comic books. In 1942, comic book publishers put forth twelve million copies a month. By 1946, that number had surpassed sixty million a month.[28] The emergence of notable superheroes like Superman and Captain America helped account for the burgeoning comic book industry. Americans were absolutely fascinated by the antics of fictional superheroes during the war. Eighty percent of the six to seventeen age group consumed comic books,

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[23] Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 100-122.

[24] Michael C. C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 81-84; Alfred E. Cornebise, *The Stars and Stripes: Doughboy Journalism in World War I* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), 37-60, 97-118.

[25] For a useful survey of how comic strips and books during the Great Depression and World War II conveyed complex ideas about the sub-atomic world, see: Ferenc Szasz, *Atomic Comics: Cartoonists Confront the Nuclear War* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2012).

[26] Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men*, xvii. Gabilliet adopts this idea from historian Michael Kammen.

[27] Ibid., xvii.

[28] Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.: American During World War II* (New York: Harlan Davison, 2000), 40-41.

while "one-third of the population aged 18 to 30 years old did the same."[29] Publishers

also reached out to military servicemen stationed in Europe and the Pacific, promoting

special editions of *Superman* and other comic books that shipped overseas.[30] Historian

Allan Winkler contends that during World War II, comic books "reflected common

concerns. Americans continued to be amused by the antics of comic book characters, as

they had been in the past." Specifically, many comic book heroes and heroines

participated in World War II and contributed to the war effort. Wonder Woman and

Captain America, for example, sought to conquer the evils of Nazism and totalitarianism.

Thus, the comic book industry wedded many of its fictional characters to democratic

values and espoused American war aims.[31]

Captain America, in particular, hinged his identity on patriotism and the ability to

defend his country in World War II. *Captain America* began in 1941 and continued

throughout the era covered by this thesis. Fictional hero Steve Rogers, the alter ego of

Captain America, was frail and young. He validated his manhood through his ability to

fight and defend his nation after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor.[32] However, the

Army rejected Rogers due to his poor health and physique. His discouragement led him

to volunteer as a test subject for a scientific "super soldier" program. The program could

either turn him into a super soldier or kill him in the process. The results were positive,

and Captain America's eventual heroics on the battlefield reinforced ideas about

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[29] Ibid., 41.
[30] Ibid., 41.
[31] Ibid., 41.
[32] The original *Captain America Comics* were produced prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Subsequent revisions of Captain America's origin story place the superhero's emergence in the immediate wake of Pearl Harbor. For references to Captain America's origin, see: *Tales of Suspense* 63 (Marvel, 1965); *Captain America* 109 (Marvel, 1969); *Captain America* 255 (Marvel, 1981); *Adventures of Captain America* 1-2 (Marvel, 1991).

American exceptionalism and triumphalism.[33] More importantly, *Captain America* established a direct correlation between manhood, physical strength, and soldiery. His fictional transformation from a feeble boy to a super soldier mirrors an on-going social expectation that the Army or Marine Corps turns boys into men.[34]

Comic book depictions of warfare changed during the immediate post-war era, and especially during the Korean War, as American war culture began to cast a sympathetic light on soldiers while also condemning political justifications for war. Historian Andrew Huebner carefully analyzes the broad shifts in war culture between World War II and the Vietnam War. He argues that during the Korean War, journalists added complexity to the "warrior image" by "showing a greater degree of discouragement, sorrow, agony, and fear." This wrought two lasting effects in America popular culture. First, the depiction of male sorrow "widened the definition of the masculine, American fighter." Rather than the stoic, unemotional hero-soldier, the masculine warrior could now openly express frustration, grief, and guilt. Secondly, journalists covering the Korean War revived, and "amplified," the "image-making practices of World War II." Instead of touting the war effort and remaining wedded to political leadership, journalists revealed the "agonies and ambiguities of combat to

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[33] A number of useful unpublished works exist concerning *Captain America Comics* and its perpetuation of American exceptionalism. For example, see Richard A. Hoss, "The Captain America Conundrum: Issues of Patriotism, Race, and Gender in Captain America Comic Books, 1941-2001," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Auburn University, 2011; Brandi Montana Hodo, "Patriotism to Skepticism: Captain America and the Changing Cultural Landscape," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Alabama, 2011.

[34] During the Vietnam War, Lewis B. Puller, Jr., son of famous World War II General "Chesty" Puller, said he was drawn toward a sign on the U.S. Marine Corps' recruiting office door that read "The Marine Corps Builds Men." Another soldier thought the Vietnam War was a "manhood test, no question about it." See, Lewis B. Puller, Jr., *Fortunate Son: The Healing of a Vietnam Vet* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 36; Mark Baker, *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of Soldiers* (New York: Berkley Books, 1981), 31-34; For more on the on-going correlation between military service and manhood, see: Jon Robert Adams, *Male Armor: The Soldier-Hero in Contemporary American Culture* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 1-4. He suggests that contemporary popular culture continues to perpetuate the idea that warfare shores up American manhood.

audiences that had previously seen lots of smiling soldiers and little of the dead and wounded." Thus, the Korean War established the foundation for the intensified anti-war sentiment and protest during the Vietnam War. In particular, the Korean War established the precedent that journalists could condemn the war, while still supporting the soldiers— a trend that exists in the contemporary wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. Huebner's study exhaustively analyzes the production of images in popular magazines—*Life, Time, Newsweek, New York Times*—and occasionally incorporates film, literature, and music. This thesis's investigation of comic books strengthens Huebner's arguments about the post-war decade. Comic books and soldier-produced imagery replicated the sorrowful, ambiguous representations of war that Huebner found in other media.[35]

Historian William R. Savage also describes the dramatic shift in war imagery between 1945 and 1954. Savage expressed disappointment with the "comic-book version of the Korean conflict [that] left much to be desired." The corpus of Korean War comics, Savage contends, presented American soldiers as neurotic, terrified, and ignorant of war aims. By comparison, World War II comics presented an optimistic portrait of war— soldiers found war a "mere walk-through." While Savage rightly identifies the major shifts in war iconography between World War II and Korea, his dichotomy of "good" versus "bad" war does not square with the ambiguous, nuanced portraits of war found in romantic, soldier-produced, and realist illustrations. On the surface, comic book publishers who adopted romanticism tapped into a cultural and social need to present triumphalist American warfare, given that fictional American forces did not succumb to communist assaults. Embedded in these stories, though, are subtle critiques of the Korean

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[35] Huebner, *The Warrior Image,* 128-131. For his analysis of Korean War literature, see "Kilroy is Back, 1950-1953," 97-131.

War. The soldiers are not motivated by patriotism and camaraderie. Publishers eschew discussion of war aims, and use male sexuality to sidestep around "patriotism" and instead emphasize sexuality and rationality and link these ideas to a soldier's desire to fight and his success in the field.[36]

Comic artists' focus on the individual soldier probably served a pragmatic need to avoid politically controversial war aims in Korea. This contrasts with the superhero genre, popular during World War II, which endorsed American efforts against Nazism and adhered to the good war mentality. The majority of voters responding to a 1951 Gallup Poll found the Korean War "useless."[37] Thirty-three percent of participants responding to a 1952 Gallup Poll agreed that the United States should exit Korea or find some other means to replace American soldiers.[38] The majority of participants in another survey argued that further military operations against China would provoke a "long, costly war."[39] Before the United States fully committed to the war in Korea, Americans already blamed the war for decreasing college enrollment.[40] If comic book makers could not wax poetic about America's overall involvement in Korea, they could focus on the trials and adventures of the individual soldier.

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[36] William R. Savage, *Comic Books and America,* 51-65.

[37] George Gallup, "Vote Agrees Korean War is 'Useless,'" *The Washington Post*, 4 November 1951, B2.

[38] George Gallup, "What Do You, Yourself, Think We Should Do Next in the Korean War?," Gallup Poll (AIPO), November 1952, conducted by Gallup Organization, based on 3,003 personal interviews. Accessed 8 March 2013, Roper Center Public Opinion Archives, http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/ipoll/.

[39] Foreign Affairs Survey, March 1952, conducted by National Opinion Research Center, based on 1,260 personal interviews. When asked in an air and sea campaign against China, "do you think we could bring them to terms quickly, or would that involve us in a long and costly war with China?" fifty-seven percent of participants responded negatively. Access 8 March 2013, Roper Center Public Opinion Archives.

[40] "College Rolls Decline 9.4%: Korea War Effect is Denied," *The Washington Post*, 25 December 1950, 4.

The Korean War differed significantly from World War II, in that the Korean conflict constituted a limited war that carried dubious political and public support, and introduced soldiers to a rotation-based draft system.[41] The changes in war culture mirrored the fundamental shifts in warfare during the Korean conflict. President Harry Truman's decision to intervene in Korea was predicated on the limited goal of pushing North Korean forces back across the 38th parallel into North Korea. American forces invaded North Korea in 1950, and for a short while fought a war for real estate and occupied territory. However, as Chinese and North Korean forces pushed Americans back across the 38th parallel, the last years of the conflict degenerated into a stalemate. American soldiers engaged in a war of attrition—attempting to wear down the other side—and grew frustrated with peace talks. Unlike their World War II forbears, Korean War participants also operated under limited commitments. Infantrymen rotated out of Korea after ninemonths; this inherently centered the individual experience on surviving the nine-month stint in combat. These conditions shaped cultural depictions of the war, mirroring the waning public and soldier support after 1952, illustrating an unenthusiastic soldiery, and inherently criticizing the political *cassus belli* for the Korean War.[42]

While historians continue to publish hundreds of monographs about the Vietnam War, scholars devote far less attention to the preceding Korean War. As historian Melinda Pash rightly notes, historians and the general public "have shown great

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[41] For more on how President Harry Truman "sold" Americans the limited war in Korea, see: Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[42] Melinda Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1-17; Savage, *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954*; *Frontline Combat* (Entertaining Comics, 1950-1953); *Two-Fisted Tales* (Entertaining Comics, 1950-1954).

reluctance to tackle the first hot war of the Cold War."[43] Pash also argues that during the

Korean War newspapers, magazines, and film paid short shrift to the conflict. Instead

these venues continued to draw on World War II for material. This thesis complicates

Pash's by illustrating the fact that the Korean War became a central focus of comic books

between 1950 and 1953. Romantic war comics often replicated the rift between World

War II triumphalism and the new Korean War soldier that held little faith in military

leadership. Simultaneously realistic and solider-produced narratives attempted to

accurately reflect the grim reality of combat in the Korean peninsula and depicted a

depressed, lonely, fatigued soldiery. While film, and other media, paid little attention to

the Korean War, the following pages suggest that not all of popular culture ignored the

Korean War.

The following chapters analyze how romantic, soldier-produced, and realist comic

books and iconography reflected the Korean War. The first chapter analyzes romantic

Korean War comics, and argues that these comic books contained inherent contradictions

about the ideal masculine soldier. On one hand, romantic heroes assuaged social anxieties

about the faltering of American society vis-à-vis communism by appearing heroic,

competent, and successful. On the other hand, the American fighting man's success did

not derive from patriotism, loyalty, or even bravery—common motifs attributed to him

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[43] There are numerous works published about the Korean War. But many of these comprise memoir, autobiography, biography, or popular histories of specific battles. Historians and journalists write frequently about the deadly Chosin Reservoir campaign—where some 15,000 Marines and Army soldiers found themselves cut-off and surrounded by Chinese forces in North Korea. For example, see: Patrick K. O'Donnell, *Give me Tomorrow: The Korean War's Greatest Untold Story—The Epic Stand of the Marines of George Company* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2010); Bob Drury and Tom Clavin, *The Last Stand of Fox Company: A True Story of U.S. Marines in Combat* (New York: Grove Press, 2009); Eric Hammel, *Chosin: Heroic Ordeal of the Korean War* (New York: Pacifica Military History, 2009); Martin Russ, *Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

during World War II. The creators reconciled this contradiction through the male libido, and substituted sexual drive for patriotism and bravery. Thus, the comic book artists often incorporated American women into the narrative to reflect male sexuality. Artists also created these magazines within the larger context of the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare. Joseph McCarthy (Sen-WI) labeled both "commies and queers" as potential subversives residing within the United States. Although the purge of gays from government developed its own momentum apart from McCarthy, he and other senators linked both communists and homosexuals to irrationality. Communists and homosexuals purportedly possessed character flaws that disposed them toward irrational, emotional acts. In the same way, comic book creators distinguished between "heroes" and "cowards," with the former upholding American ideals and the latter representing a degenerated state of American manhood. But what caused cowardice? Drawing on popular discourse about subversives during the time, these artists argued that emotional impulsivity propelled soldiers toward acts of cowardice.

Chapter two examines soldier-produced cartoons in the *Stars and Stripes* that mimicked romantic illustrations of male sexuality, but also presented soldiers' sorrow, disillusionment, frustration, and lament. These primary source materials constitute cartoons and comic strips produced by soldiers and war correspondents operating within the Korean theater. That military men created these illustrations begs the question of whether they authentically replicated the experience of warfare. Did they capture themes of warfare that were absent in realist and romantic war comic books during the time? Military illustrations incorporated far more nuanced depictions of the war, demonstrating how the various issues of chow, camp life, combat, intra-departmental rivalries, and the

home front figured into the soldiers' minds. Aside from depicting the soldiers' struggle with combat in Korea, these cartoons also incorporated women into narratives as both erotic sexual objects and symbols of the home front that emphasized men's desires to return home. *Pacific Stars and Stripes* contained numerous references to Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, and other female celebrities. Cartoons sometimes made direct reference to Marilyn Monroe's nude photographs or fantasized about her body. Articles and columns about the female body, male sexual fantasy, and the objectification of women usually surrounded cartoons within the *Stars and Stripes*. While women featured heavily in World War II military publications, such as *Sad Sack,* they functioned more as maternal figures who chastised male soldiers' lascivious behavior. The sexual imagery of men and women became far more prolific during the Korean War, depicting women's clothing as an incitement of male sexual desire, and blaming women for the subsequent sexual liaisons. In the same way as romantic comics, soldier-produced illustrations and articles sidestepped patriotism, and emphasized sexuality as an escape from warfare. At the same time, military publications contained nascent and subtle discontent with the war effort, correlating with the anti-war depictions found in realist comic books.

While romantic comic books avoided issues of patriotism and political aims in Korea, chapter three considers how realistic Korean War comic books explicitly challenged the legitimacy of U.N. intervention in Korea, and presented a depraved, depressed soldiery. The two most prominent realist narratives during this time were EC's *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*. Within these stories, a man's experience of fear did not emasculate him. Instead, the artists considered fear a normal reaction to the

exigencies of combat. Thus, "manly men" experienced fear, a longing for home, condemned warfare, and sometimes critiqued American war aims. Realism presented combat as the destroyer of men. Soldiers entered war as boys, or men, but nevertheless exited war through death, psychosis, and physical mutilation. Comic creator Harvey Kurtzman used these two magazines as a forum for condemning American imperialism and launching an attack against an American legacy of conquest and injustice against other peoples. These comic books gained far more popularity than most romantic narratives. Both magazines endured throughout the Korean War and for some time afterward. Chapter three links this sustained popularity to the insipient anti-war movement within the United States that gained traction by 1952 and 1953.

<center>**Chapter One**</center>

<center>The Irrational War: Emotional Impulse and the Construction of Heroes and</center>

<center>Cowards in Romantic War Comics.</center>

"Alone, with only a handie-talkie in his hands, Jess Taylor crouched in the middle of the huge Red concentration," opens the narrator in the 1952 Korean War comic *Exciting War.* Jess Taylor puts "himself under the fire of his own guns" to destroy the Red Chinese communists, but also struggles to prove his worth to his comrades. Taylor is lost after a night skirmish with the Chinese in the Korean War. While searching for his unit, Taylor kills several Chinese soldiers. Throughout the narrative other soldiers lambast Taylor as a coward, figuring that he fled from the previous battle. During a subsequent skirmish, Taylor, in an attempt to prove his comrades wrong, sacrifices himself to save the platoon. This episode, titled "Expendable," ends with two soldiers finding Taylor severely wounded. One soldier immediately regrets labeling Taylor a coward, and he fears Taylor will "give [him] a piece of it" when he recovers.[44] As the story opens, Taylor voices doubts about American success against the dense communist forces: "It's hopeless, we can't stop 'em!"[45] His palpable fear—and emotional instinct to flee—draws the ire of other men. Taylor's outburst threatens the stability of the entire platoon. This emotional impulse causes Taylor to become a coward, with a "yellow streak a yard wide."[46] At the same time, his struggle to become "one of the guys" symbolizes the isolating experience of warfare. The title "Expendable" also suggests that

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[44] "Expendable," *Exciting War 5* (Standard Comics, 1952), 12-17.
[45] Ibid, 13.
[46] Ibid., 12-13.

soldiers are merely cogs in the larger machine of war—easily replaceable, of miniscule importance.

Artists produced romantic Korean War comics amidst two concurrent social upheavals in the United States—the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare—and tapped into these social currents to construct a heroic soldier that assuaged social anxieties about male degeneracy and sexuality. While Joseph McCarthy paired "commies and queers" to distinguish subversives in the United States, Korean War comics employed a similar dichotomy between "hero" and "coward" to identify potential threats to U.S. military power abroad.[47] War comics constructed a specific type of hero-soldier that catered toward social anxieties about the faltering of American manhood and soldiery. Publishers specifically responded to social debates about homosexuality, cowardice, and the role of America vis-à-vis its communist enemies by constructing an ideal image of America's fighting man—a hyper-heterosexual, fearless, competent soldier. Publishers used sexuality to replace "bravery" and "success" as motivating factors for fighting. Male sexuality allowed artists to construct cheerful war narratives without tying these stories to patriotism because men's battle strength (and victory) derived from the physical male libido. Secondly, comic creators used irrationality and self-control to distinguish between heroes and cowards. Historian Holly S. Heatley cites the fact that public officials labeled a Communist as a "type of person who had given his will to the Communist Party."

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[47] *Congressional Record* (February 20, 1950) vol. 96, pt. 2, 1953. This records Joseph McCarthy announcing his infamous, and fictitious, list of 205 homosexuals working in the State Department. Also, see Holly S. Heatley, "'Commies and Queers:' Narratives that Supported the Lavender Scare," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas at Arlington, 2007, 1; Although Joseph McCarthy initially raised the alarm about homosexual subversives in the government, the "Lavender Scare" veered away from the Red Scare and gained its own momentum separate from McCarthy. In fact, historian David K. Johnson contends that the Lavender Scare extended well into the mid-1950s, and actually allowed homosexuals to assert greater agency in government through their construction of counter-discourses, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-14, 179-208.

Similarly, public officials perceived a homosexual man as a "type of person who had no control over his sexual desires."[48] In the same vein, the Jess Taylor example illustrates how "cowardice" resulted from undisciplined soldiers who frequently lost control of their emotions on the battlefield Thus, irrationality and weakness underpinned definitions of cowards, communists, and homosexuals.

This chapter traces the contours of a romantic vision of warfare, as expressed in 1950s war comics. Much of this discussion is anchored on two comic book series: *Joe Yank* (1952-1953) and *Battle Report* (1952). To illuminate the connection between these comic books and larger trends in popular culture, the following pages draw on film, newspapers, anecdotal sources, fiction, and popular magazines. While the romantic ideal encapsulates a variety of themes, this chapter investigates two motifs: the heterosexual, physically dominant soldier, and artists' usage of the "coward" as a foil to emphasize the desirable qualities of the "heroic" soldier.

Romantic war comic publishers correlated heterosexuality with physical power and success on the battlefield. This is evident throughout issues of *Joe Yank*.[49] Standard Comics published *Joe Yank* between 1952 and 1954, comprising issues numbered five through fifteen.[50] Standard employed a number of artists to create this brief series, including Ross Andru, John Celardo, Mike Roy, and Alex Toth.[51] The storyline follows

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[48] Heatley, "Commies and Queers," 2-3.

[49] The larger political and social debate about homosexuality in government, and the so-called "lavender scare," could have informed the penchant with heterosexuality, or hyper-sexualized men, in *Joe Yank* comics. For more on sexuality in popular culture, and how it relates to the so-called "crisis" of masculinity during the early 1950s, see: Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Charlotte: Duke University Press, 1997); Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 14-77.

[50] It's common for the first issue of comic book serializations to begin with a number other than one.

[51] Public Domain archive websites provide valuable information on the history of Standard Comics and its employed artists. For example, see: www.comicbookplus.com.

two protagonists. Joe Yank is a typical smart aleck, and a professional slacker. However,
the artists explicitly link Joe's heroism to his hyper-heterosexuality, as his heroic feats are
often inspired by his quest to save a beautiful "doll," or damsel in distress. By
establishing this relationship between Joe and the women in the story, the artists imply
that with heterosexuality comes an innate form of bravery. Sergeant Mike McGurk is a
bombastic boob who is gullible and falls for many of Joe Yank's wily tricks. However,
McGurk is tough and demonstrates physical manifestations of his courage in the
battlefield. While a specific audience is hard to determine for *Joe Yank*, it appears that the
artists catered the content toward adolescents and youth. However, it's likely that *Joe
Yank*'s readership comprised adults as well.[52] Artists created the explicitly heterosexual
male actors in *Joe Yank*, and other romantic war comics, in order to link proper sexuality
to heroism and manliness. The possibility of sexual interaction typically followed the
male soldier rescuing a women from barbarous North Korean and Chinese soldiers.
Romantic Korean War comics incorporated women into the narrative only as mere sexual
objects or domestic housewives. This both reinforced the traditional domestic and sexual
roles of women, and upheld the notion that women were dependent upon chivalrous,
heroic, heterosexual men.

Alex Toth, in particular, was a prominent artist in the comic book world. Throughout his career, Toth worked as an editor for DC Comics (1947-1952), Standard Comics (1952-1954), and Dell Comics (1956-1960). He also penned a comic book series for Disney, based on the television series *Zorro* during the 1960s. Comic book critic Gary Groth described Toth as "among the greatest comic book artists ever . . . an artist's artist, just because of his mastery of the form," in Dennis Hevesi, "Alex Toth. 77, Comic Book Artist, and 'Space Ghost' Animator, Dies." *The New York Times,* June 6, 2006; For more information on Alex Toth, see Jason Gallagher, "Alex Toth," in *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, vol. 2, edited by M. Kenneth Booker (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2010), 644-645.

[52] Jean-Paul Gabilliet presents an interesting argument for adult readership of comics in the 1950s. He suggests that "children and adolescents read comics in a self-directed manner because they made the effort to purchase them, while adults read comics in an opportunistic manner, by virtue of the proximity in the home of young children" who would introduce adults to the reading material. Thus, the growing adult readership of comics correlated positively to a burgeoning demand for comics by the first generation of baby-boomers in the early 1950s. Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men,* 200-201.

Emphases on heterosexuality, physical power, and muscular masculinity are present immediately in the debut issue of *Joe Yank.* A Roger Hirsch bodybuilding advertisement serves as the back cover, and asks the reader if he were not "as sick and tired as I was of being skinny?" This bodybuilding advertisement equates physical prowess with the ability to attract beautiful women. A comic strip incorporated into the advertisement suggests that skinny men risk being cuckolded by stronger adversaries. The "narrow-shouldered, short-winded, weak, half-alive jeered, bullied" wimp cannot wear a bathing suit on the beach without the fear of chastisement by other men. However, through Hirsch's program that same individual can pack on "mighty muscle," return to the beach, and slug his bully. In the advertisement's accompanying comic strip, this act of physical violence impresses the woman—"Darling, that bully won't pick on you again!"—and his strength carries added benefits both on the baseball diamond and at work. Sexuality constitutes the motivating force propelling the "feeble" man's attainment of muscle. His newfound strength allows for demonstrations of physical superiority, and is a means to maintaining his romantic relationship. Thus, men's presumptions about what women likely desire compel them toward bravery, subjugation, and success.[53]

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[53] Roger Hirsch advertisement insert in *Joe Yank* #5 (Standard Comics, 1952), 34. See appendix for image; Interpretations of cultural meaning, in any form of literature, are bolstered by an incorporation of advertisements and the form of publication. Roger Chartier contends that to fully understand meaning one must acknowledge "three poles" of any material: the text, the object that conveys the text, and the act that grasps it. The meaning of a text can change when "the apparatus in which it is to be read has changed." Thus, the object conveying the text comprises all advertisements. See, Roger Chartier, "Texts, Printing, Readings," in *The New Cultural History*, edited by Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 161.

Charles Atlas, the most famous of the bodybuilding moguls, placed advertisements in *Battle Report* 2: "Darn it! I'm tired of being a skinny scarecrow. Charles Atlas says he can make me a new man!"

Also see, Bob Thomas, "What Kind of Men Do Gals Want? Rich? Rugged? Handsome? Meek?," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 280 (3 October, 1952), 9; Journalist Bob Thomas interviewed six contestants from the Miss Universe pageant, and inquired what they sought "in a husband?" Several respondents answered that they preferred brawny, "rugged men," instead of the "pretty boy." Similarly, Miss Hawaii, Elza Edsman opined that she loved "athletic men, also intelligent . . . He should be tall;" Although Thomas's article was published in the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*—a servicemen's journal—the

The creators of *Joe Yank* correlated heroism with heterosexuality, by consistently illustrating interactions between the two male protagonists and a female damsel in distress. The episode "Korean Jackpot" finds Joe and McGurk positioned near an ancient Korean castle. The North Koreans now use this castle as an ammo dump and an entrenched defensive position against American forces. Joe hardly exercises caution, convinced that he must charge into the barricade. His motivation, in this case, is neither driven by military strategy or personal glory. Joe learns that a certain "gorgeous white dame" is imprisoned in the castle, and he is adamant on saving her. Sgt. McGurk reminds Joe that he has "Janes on the brain" and will put himself at risk to save the woman. Joe retorts that his thoughts of "that beautiful doll, and us not with her" override any fear of harm.[54] The enemy presence does not motivate Joe and Mike to fight. Joe's fantasy union with the "beautiful doll" actually leads him to disobey orders, fly into the battle before reinforcements arrive, and kill the enemy. Joe's heterosexuality stands-in for duty and comradeship, while the "doll" object replaces military and political goals.

The creators use Joe's successful foray into the Korean stronghold, and his ability to save the young woman, to demonstrate the fact that a libidinous drive allows men to accomplish amazing feats of strength on the battlefield. Joe, with McGurk trailing in the foreground, storms up the hill. When Joe and McGurk reach the castle, the duo dispatches a number of witless North Koreans without breaking a sweat. Joe arrives in the woman's dire moment of need. He protects her from a potential assault at the hands of a savagely caricatured North Korean. Joe and McGurk, with women in tow, don

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Associated Press contracted the story, and it may have appeared in other local and national newspapers. The article dovetails the message presented in the Roger Hirsch advertisement by reinforcing the idea that women preferred muscular, athletic men to scrawny men.

[54] "Korean Jackpot," *Joe Yank #5* (Standard Comics, 1952), 14-15.

ancient Korean armor and make a successful escape back to American lines. The final

frame pictures Joe and McGurk strutting off the battlefield hand-in-hand with the

"dame": they have hit the "Korean Jackpot!" That Joe and Mike casually strut away from

the battlefield symbolizes their indifference toward military leadership—represented by

the company commanding officer—and the fact that they function more as rogue

mercenaries than dutiful American soldiers.

The 1952 Korean War comic *Soldiers of Fortune* similarly features soldiers

enduring combat to acquire women, and also associates heterosexuality with heroism and

feats of physical strength. Issue five, entitled "Lance Larson: One Man Army," features

the male protagonist rescuing a redheaded damsel in distress from North Koreans. An

episode titled, "Lance Larson: Soldier of Fortune," features Larson travelling to Egypt to

rescue a young woman from the clutches of a Communist group. At one point, Larson

wields a tank-mounted machine gun to annihilate an entire platoon of enemy soldiers. By

dint of brute strength, Larson liberates the young woman from her captivity. An Egyptian

man, whom Larson assisted in the adventure, thanks the "one-man army" for saving

"more than our land . . . now we are warriors worthy of our past." Not only did Lance

Larson's hyper-masculine heroics restore manhood to the Egyptian men, but he is also

deemed worthy of the rescued woman, with whom he exchanges a passionate kiss.[55]

Again, the American "mercenary" soldier Larson remains isolated from the larger

military unit, doggedly attacks the enemy to rescue women, and asserts his masculinity

through sexual drive. Within romantic war comics, the "heterosexual libido" leads to

impulsive action. But, so long as the male libido upholds the norms of sexuality, the

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[55] "Lance Larson: Soldier of Fortune," *Soldiers of Fortune 5* (American Comics Group, 1952), 2-10.

narrators and artists cast it in a positive light. Thus, "heroic" heterosexual protagonists also act irrationality—rushing headlong into battle for the sake of desiring a woman—while "cowards" also experience irrational emotional urges.

More importantly, the last frames of these two episodes uphold several gendered relationships in the stories. The male soldier performs masculinity by rescuing the "damsel in distress." Subsequently, it is imperative that she rewards him through companionship or sexual intercourse. In "Korean Jackpot," Joe Yank's reward is ambiguous and left to the reader's imagination. However, in *Soldiers of Fortune*, Larson is immediately rewarded with a sensual kiss. Secondly, these stories also underscore the cultural idea that women are helpless without the assistance of powerful, strong men. Finally, like the Roger Hirsch advertisement, both comics imply that women desire tough, hard men.[56]

The implication in *Joe Yank* and *Soldiers of Fortune* that soldiers are rewarded with women after victory in the battlefield corresponds to an actual reward system established by the United States Army during the period between World War II and the Korean War. "The First Army broke a significant rule yesterday," begins a *New York Times* article entitled "4 'GI's of Month' Have Girl Escorts": "Four pretty young actresses were in the company of the GI's as they started their week-end in New York as a reward for their outstanding qualities as soldiers."[57] All four soldiers were distinguished veterans of World War II—holding both an outstanding war and peacetime

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[56] "Korean Jackpot," *Joe Yank* 5, (Standard Comics, March 1, 1952), 19-20. This motif is apparent in several other episodes of *Joe Yank*. See, for example, "G.I. Post Office!," *Joe Yank* 7, (August 1, 1952); "Sergeant Glamour!," *Joe Yank* 7, (1952); "Miss Foxhole of 1952," *Joe Yank* 8, (October 1, 1952); "A Good Way to Die!," *Joe Yank* 10, (Standard Comics, February 1, 1953); "General Joe," *Joe Yank* 10 (1953); "Go Get Lulu!," *Joe Yank* 12, (August 1, 1953); "The Battle of the Sexes," *Joe Yank* 12 (1953); "Joe's Protégé," *Joe Yank* 13 (October 1, 1953).

[57] "4 'GI's of Month' Have Girl Escorts," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1949, 10.

record. Army officials specified that winners of the "prize" demonstrated cleanliness,

proper etiquette, and possessed "military bearing." The stipulations of this prize assumed

that soldiers were heterosexual. Thus, Army officials played on male sexuality by using

tantalizing ideas of female escorts to encourage good behavior. And, because *The New

York Times* reported this story, it also contributed to the social construction of the male

heterosexual soldier ideal.

Similarly, white, American women in *Joe Yank* are not actors—with substantial

scripts and actions—but merely serve to reflect Joe and Sgt. McGurk's heterosexuality

and also buoy their morale in the military camp.[58] Another illustrative example from the

Joe Yank series is an episode entitled "General Joe." In this comedic story Private Joe

discovers that his doppelganger is a general in the United States Army. His 'twin' is

interested in researching troop morale during the Korean War, and decides to switch

uniforms with Private Joe. While the real general is off investigating camaraderie

amongst the soldiers, the *new* "General Joe" uses his officer's uniform to steal Sgt.

McGurk's date to the military ball.[59] "General Joe" constitutes another example where

the male protagonists operate through emotional impulse—sexual desire—and exhibit

presumably frowned-upon character traits, such as deception and guile.

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[58] I describe these women as white and American deliberately. There are also Asian women incorporated into the narrative of *Joe Yank*. However, these women are caricatured as the *femme fatale*, or as masculine females. The former occurs when Asian women act as saboteurs, as quick to result to subterfuge and murder as a man. Asian women who fight alongside men in the narrative and are equally adept at using a rifle characterize the latter. For examples of the Asian *femme fatale*, see: "Black Market Mary," *Joe Yank* 5 (March 1, 1952);

For examples of the masculine female, see: "Chosen's Sacred Bull," *Joe Yank* 8 (October 1, 1952); "Hex Champ," *Joe Yank* 8 (1952); "Go Get Lulu," *Joe Yank* 12 (August 1, 1953). Another contemporary comic title, *Battle Report*, contained an episode that featured both types of Asian females, "Mass Murder!," *Battle Report* 1 (Ajax-Farrell, August 1, 1952).

It is not just Asian women that are the *femme fatale,* but white, Russian women also serve as "Commie" spies. For instance, see "Miss Foxhole of 1952," *Joe Yank* 8 (October 1, 1952).

[59]   "General Joe," *Joe Yank* 8 (Standard Comics, October 1, 1952), 27.

The underlying power dynamic between "General" Joe and Sergeant McGurk associates male dominance with an ability to attract women. Sergeant McGurk is unaware that his pal donned an officer's uniform. Joe, meanwhile, struts proudly around the encampment. He discovers the sergeant trying to court an attractive Asian woman. As Joe approaches, the "General's" rank immediately cows McGurk, and his fear of punishment is poignant. "General" Joe makes a compromise with Sgt. McGurk—McGurk will begin digging a latrine, while the General carts his beautiful date off to the military ball. Sgt. McGurk is heart-stricken, and sorrowfully accepts his degrading task. The woman, of course, completely acquiesces to "General" Joe's advances, before discovering he is a fraud. Joe Yank usually suffers from Mike McGurk's assertion of rank privilege in other episodes. Because Private Yank is Sergeant McGurk's subordinate, episodes like "Black Market Mary" feature McGurk prohibiting Yank from fraternization with Asian women. In this episode, Yank dons the general's uniform—an item that substitutes for superior physical strength—to forcibly subordinate McGurk.

In "General Joe," like many others episodes, female characters dramatize the heterosexuality of the male protagonist. The men are vying for the affection of this particular woman, but that woman is attracted to men of higher rank and therefore greater power. The language used in these comics, such as "doll" and "doll puss," and "toots," conveys a notion that women were mere objects, or toys, of men's desires. They were not necessarily humans with rational feelings of their own. The audience only knew the woman insofar as it applied to her physical attraction and willingness to become

affectionate toward the soldier. Like "Korean Jackpot," this episode is a male power

fantasy in which rank and bravery are paramount in one's ability to attract women.[60]

In "The Purple Heart Kid," the authors also juxtapose Joe's heterosexual

masculinity with the effete, possibly homosexual caricatures of French soldiers and a

colonel to suggest that a potential homosexual encounter would force Joe to abandon

even the most beautiful woman. While in a French infirmary, Joe enjoys much needed

rest. But, a North Korean MIG jet descends to strafe the French camp. He recognizes the

telltale noise emanating from the MIG, manhandles a .50 caliber machine gun and rushes

into the line of fire to gun down the North Korean jet. His heroic feat thoroughly

impresses the French soldiers and female nurses. Two nurses immediately rush to Joe's

side to accompany him back toward the infirmary and reward him for saving their lives.

However, in the process an effeminate French colonel intervenes to award Joe a medal. "I

salute you m'sieur! France salutes you!" According to custom, the Colonel leans in to

kiss Joe's cheeks in a sign of friendship. Joe interprets this as a homosexual encounter—

"Hey lemme go! What is this? S-stop kissing me—" and flees back toward the battlefield

with Sergeant McGurk.[61] Joe's homophobia overrides any lingering heterosexual impulse

to accompany the two French nurses.

Films produced during the 1950s echo the motif that men's sexual desire drives

them to demonstrate courage by saving a damsel in distress. The 1956 low budget film

Dakota Incident, directed by Lewis R. Foster, follows a disparate group of stagecoach

passengers as they brave harsh Indian Territory on their way to Wyoming in the late

nineteenth century. Amy Clarke (Linda Darnell) catches the eye of John Banner, the

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[60] Ibid., 27, 31.
[61] "The Purple Heart Kid," *Joe Yank #6*, 16.

protagonist, immediately. Clarke jokingly comments that Banner seems eager for her to remove a stocking, to which Banner responds: "I'd hope to walk off a high cliff if you didn't bother me." Banner would rather die before he was not sexually attracted to a beautiful lady. The movie concludes, like the *Joe Yank* episodes, with the male protagonist successfully defending the woman. In this case, Banner successfully defends Clarke against Dakota Indians. Clarke rewards Banner's courage and heroism with a passionate kiss, and they march into the sunset together.[62]

One can distinguish *Joe Yank, Battle Report*, and other war comics from what historian Gary Willis calls "John Wayne's America," due to the former's focus on sexuality, privation, and isolation of soldiers from the collective group.[63] On the contrary, Wayne represented for many young men the ideal of manhood, wrapped up in the package of a tough, self-sacrificial soldier. His World War II films created a narrative that reveled in America's postwar glory and romanticized the combat zone. They sustained the notion of the "individualist male hero [and] the ideal of the just American war."[64] By the late 1950s, military recruiters adopted the fictional John Wayne as a model of the American soldier. Despite the fact that Wayne didn't serve in the military, General Douglass MacArthur called him "the model of an American soldier," the Veterans of Foreign Wars gave him the "gold medal," and even the Marines awarded Wayne with the

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[62] *Dakota Incident.* DVD. Directed by Lewis R. Foster, Republic Pictures, 1956; also, see *Gun the Man Down*. DVD. Directed by Andrew V. McLaglen, Batjac Productions, 1956.

[63] The comic series *War Heroes* includes a number of John Wayne type heroes. This hero demonstrates physical bravery on the battlefield, wins the respect of his men, and is able to muster morale. See for example, "Showdown for a Shavetail," *War Heroes* 1 (Ace Comics, May 1952). This narrator begins by stating that Lieutenant Peterson's men would "go to hell and back . . . give up their very lives if he'd asked it!" Interestingly, his heroism is also defined by his death—"His record read 'Killed in Action. Buried Temporarily Somewhere in Korea!"

[64] Mintz and Roberts, *Hollywood's America,* 155.

"Iron Mike award."[65] Wayne starred in at least one war comic during the early 1950s,

John Wayne Adventure Comics, which portrayed the western star enlisting in the Marines

to serve in the Korean War. He leads his men to a clear victory, due in most part to his

heroism.[66] Filmmakers and comic book creators perpetuated the military's understanding

that America needed competent, brave men to defend the national interest.

Although much of John Wayne's filmography incorporated the patriotic soldier,

several of John Wayne's 1950s films include a male protagonist who accomplishes heroic

deeds while attempting to save a woman. A movie poster for the 1953 film *Island in the

Sky* read: "He fought every fury of man and mountain to get where his woman was!"[67] In

his 1956 film, *The Conqueror*, the poster proclaimed: "I am Temujin . . . Barbarian . . . I

fight! I love! I conquer! . . . like a Barbarian!"[68] Both story lines were cast within a

military epic: fighter pilots in World War II, and Genghis Khan (Temujin) during the

consolidation of disparate Mongolian tribes. The protagonists in both stories were either

vying for the affection of a woman, or cast in the role of saving the woman from the

enemy. The language used to advertise *The Conqueror* correlates barbarity to a raw form

of masculinity. The barbarian is an individualist, one who loves and fights with a fierce

passion. He is also unhindered by normative cultural expectations and behaviors, because

the definition of barbarian is one who stands outside of 'civilized' culture. This allows

Temujin to have access to a more profound form of love. [69] *The Conqueror* represents

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[65] Willis, *John Wayne's America,* 12-14.

[66] "Link-Up in Korea," *John Wayne Adventure Comics* 12 (Toby Press, December 1951), cited in Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 301, n.6.

[67] *Island in the Sky*. DVD. Directed by William A. Wellman, Warner Brothers' Pictures, 1953.

[68] *The Conqueror*. DVD. Directed by Dick Powell, RKO Radio Pictures, 1958.

[69] Of course, this association of barbarism, rebellion, or anti-conformity with raw sexual passion expressed in *The Conqueror* is part of a growing trend of "rebels" and "bad-boys" in cinema during the 1950s. For example, see: James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. DVD. Directed by Nicholas Ray, Warner

another case where sexual impulse takes precedence over rationality. In fact, the whole act of saving a woman from violent killers—while severely outnumbered—would seem irrational based on an objective cost-reward analysis.

The novel *Shane*, by Jack Schaefer, features the main protagonist defending a homesteader—and especially his beautiful wife—from the vile whims of a greedy, capitalist rancher.[70] Reviewers lauded the book as standard reading fare for men. Al Chase, writing for the *Chicago Sunday Tribute,* opined that *Shane* represented "a story of a powerful but pathetic man, a dangerous figure whose tragic past apparently casts a strange shadow over his restless present." Readers who typically "scoffed at westerns" would enjoy this work, argued Chase.[71] Similarly, Edmund Fuller, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, said *Shane* was "as clean as a hound's tooth . . . and manly as all hell."[72] Schaefer sets the novel in the nineteenth century frontier of Wyoming, and follows a traditional western motif: poor homesteaders are threatened by corporate greed (i.e. agricultural capital), and an individualist, wayward hero arrives to thwart the expansion of corrupt power. The antagonist is Luke Fletcher, a covetous industrialist that pushes homesteaders off the land. The author juxtaposes Shane with Joe Starrett, the

Brothers' Pictures, 1955; and Marlon Brandon in *The Wild One*. DVD. Directed by Laslo Benedek, Stanley Kramer Productions, 1954.

[70] Director George Stevens adapted *Shane* to a popular 1953 film of the same name. *Shane.* DVD. Directed by George Stevens, Paramount Pictures Corporation, 1953. The film enjoyed immense popularity, and catapulted Alan Ladd (Shane) into stardom. *The Washington Post* identified *Shane* as "Alan Ladd's biggest moneymaker," in 1953, Louella Parsons, "Alan Ladd Talks Shop with Van [Heflin]," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, December 1, 1955, 34; In a review of the film Richard L. Coe, writing for *The Washington Post* argued that Shane "is a major picture of 1953. You'll want to see it." "Though impression of the story strikes almost poetic chords in the leisurely and precise style of the director," says Coe: "their handling and tone . . . are fresh as the dew of Jackson Hole, where the picture was filmed." Richard L. Coe, "'Shane,' at Warner is a Major Film," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, May 29, 1953, 15. Similarly Louella Parsons at *The Washington Post* called *Shane* "the best Western in many a year." Parsons, "Spencer Tracey Gets His Spurs," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, April 26, 1954, 16.

[71] Al Chase, "A Tragic Western of Same Dignity as 'Virginian,'" *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, November 13, 1949, part 4, 22.

[72] Edmund Fuller, "Out West in '89," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, December 3, 1949, 58.

besieged homesteader and father of the narrator, Bob. Shane is contemplative, controlled, dangerous, an individualist, and dutiful. He derives his self-respect from his transient relationship with Joe, and his ability to protect Joe's family.[73]

A bar fight between Shane and five thugs hired by Luke Fletcher encapsulates the complex relationship between Shane, Joe, and Joe's wife, Marian. Joe assists Shane in the melee, and Marian discovers a sense of pride in both her husband's and Shane's feat of strength against the men in the saloon. Specifically, she is fascinated when Joe picks up Curly (a large-framed man) over his head and throws him across the room like a "bag of potatoes."[74] But, more importantly Shane's fearlessness inadvertently wins Marian's affection. Reviewer Edmund Fuller opines that "even Marian succumbs to the power of Shane (in spirit only, I hasten to add)."[75] The narrator tells us that Marian, at least inwardly, is torn between her love for her husband, Joe, and her fascination with, and attraction toward, Shane. Marian perceives Shane as "something deadly" and "at the same time something charming."[76] Joe tells Marian not to "fret" because "I'm man enough to know a better [man] when his trail meets mine. Whatever happens will be all right."[77] Whereas Joe Yank and Mike McGurk endure combat expressly in service to sexual desires, Jack Schaeffer does not explicitly describe Shane's actions resulting from sexual compulsion.

Why is Shane the better man? This is partly because Shane, not Joe, thwarts the avaricious capitalist power and saves the Starrett homestead. Shane honors his commitments to strangers, even if those obligations endanger his life. Finally, Shane is

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[73] Jack Schaefer, *Shane* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954).
[74] Ibid., 140.
[75] Fuller, "Out West in '89," 58.
[76] Ibid., 58.
[77] Schaefer, *Shane*, 143.

not constrained by social norms of behavior—he is a man of no past, and a man who belongs nowhere—and can take brash, violent action. In the same vein as *Joe Yank,* this story sustains the cultural idea that women are compulsively attracted to men who demonstrate physical ability. The story sustains expected sexual norms of 1950s society. But Marian also bases her attraction to Shane on his affection for her son, Bob. The relationship between Shane and Bob, then, is modeled after cultural ideals about fatherhood during a time of hysteria surrounding juvenile delinquency.

The salient association of heterosexuality, bravery, and soldiery correlates to larger social and political debates of the early 1950s. *Joe Yank* is a product of its time. Naoko Shibusawa argues that government investigators legitimated their 1950s purge of homosexuals from government by labeling them a security risk. The State Department developed a moral framework that defined "Capitalist-moral-integrity-West" by its opposite, "Communist-perverse-subversive-East." For investigators, America's role as a moral beacon in the world did not allow for homosexuality, and this fact drove the "Lavender Scare," or the persecution of homosexuals in government. This is why, suggests Shibusawa, Representative Arthur L. Miller found it appropriate to address the "homosexual problem" in the context of a Congressional economic aid forum in 1950.[78]

In a larger sense, public figures in the early 1950s linked homosexuality with histories of imperial decline. This type of language indicated that public officials thought of America in terms of an imperial life cycle of "declining" and "falling" and "death."[79]

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[78] Naoko Shibusawa, "The Lavender Scare and Empire: Rethinking Cold War Antigay Politics," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 4 (2012). For more on the lavender scare, see: Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America*; David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

[79] Shibusawa, "The Lavender Scare."

Representative Arthur L. Miller adopted a Christian framework for understanding

homosexuality in an address before the House, stating that homosexuals led to the demise

of Biblical Sodom, and that acts of "sodomy" represented an affront to American national

interest.[80] The persecution of homosexuals in government corresponded to widespread

fears amongst Americans of national and cultural decline. For example, *The Washington

Post* reported that between 1948 and 1952, Americans were primarily concerned about

"war, or the threat of war" and its impact on the future of the United States.[81] In 1951,

Life produced an article entitled "How a Democracy Died," which drew parallels between

the Cold War and the 27-year war between Athens and Sparta. Writer Robert Campbell

compared the United States to Athens, with both countries enjoying "great democracy"

and freedom. Campbell described Sparta as an early USSR—a "police state; compact,

powerful, mobilized within and insulated against the outer world."[82] He also taps into the

political discourses surrounding morality, promiscuity, and sexual perversion, as he

attributes Athens' demise to "criminal timidity . . . sudden treason . . . and heedless self-

indulgence."[83] These texts filtered into the public through various cultural media, and

each cautioned Americans against immorality and excess.

In this context, it is apparent that *Joe Yank* reflected both the heterosexual

fearlessness demanded by public officials, and the strength and moral transparency

desired by the American public. For example, *New York Times* columnist Henry Steel

Commager articulated Americans' need to trust their public servants. Commager argued

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[80] Arthur L. Miller, "How Safe is America?," Expansion of Remarks in the House of Representatives, May 15, 1950, in *Appendix to the Congressional Record,* A3660-A3362, Microfilm Collection, James Madison University, Carrier Library, Reel #310, vol. 96, parts 15-16.
[81] George Gallup, "Korean War Paramount in U.S. Mind," *The Washington Post*, 14 December 1952, B5.
[82] Robert Campbell, "How a Democracy Died," *Life*, January 1, 1951, 89.
[83] Ibid., 93.

that "we [Americans] are no longer willing to take the honesty and integrity of our civil servants for granted, but demand a hundred per cent guarantee of purity—moral, intellectual and political."[84] Joe and Mike's transparent character reflected this cultural need for honesty, and to *know* the qualities of a leader. One could trust both Joe and Mike to defeat Communism, and the characters were explicitly heterosexual and fearless. While Joe Yank and Joe in *Battle Report* both employ deception in an attempt to acquire a female romantic object, this deception is largely benign because it upholds cultural expectations of gender roles and sexuality. The duo presented in *Joe Yank* are able to thwart communist plans, protect women who haplessly find themselves in trouble, and remain jovial despite the depravity of warfare. Joe and Mike's merry attitude corresponds with Commager's definition of an essential American character in which "The American is optimistic, takes for granted that his is the best of all countries, the happiest and most virtuous of all societies."[85] In a time when America became embroiled in McCarthyism, the "Lavender Scare," and fear of nuclear holocaust, Yank and McGurk provided an escape. The men strive for something beyond themselves, and whether that is a woman, treasure, or winning a battle, the men are optimistic. [86]

Irrationality and impulsive emotional behavior not only undergirded public officials' definitions of the homosexual and communist in the early 1950s, but also shaped artists' conceptions of the coward in Korean War comics. Nebraska representative Arthur L. Miller, in an address entitled "How Safe is America?" before the House of

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[84] Henry Steele Commager, "The Challenge to the American Character: The National Temper and 'Way of Life' are being Affected by Unaccustomed Stresses. Challenge to Our Character," *The New York Times* 26 November, 1950, SM5.

[85] Henry Steel Commager, "Analysis of the American Character: The Rise to World Leadership of the United States Raises Important Questions about us," *The New York Times*, 2 January 1949, SM5.

[86] This conforms to the traditional romantic hero pointed out by George Boas, "The Romantic Self: An Historical Sketch," *Studies in Romanticism 4*, no. 1 (1964), 14. "Whether for a woman or a blue flower, [the hero] is [in] a search for something beyond oneself."

Representatives, emphasized that homosexuality sprung from sexual maladjustment, and

an uncontrollable emotional urge to commit homosexual acts. Miller suggested that "the

cycle of [a homosexual's] desires follow the cycle closely patterned to the menstrual

period of women."[87] He then identified a period of "3 or 4 days," corresponding with a

woman's menstruation, during which time a homosexual's "instincts broke down and

[drove] the individual into abnormal fields of sexual practice." For Miller, homosexuality

represented a pathological disease that doctors could prevent with prophylactic "sedatives

and other treatments."[88] Emotional instability controlled the homosexual in all aspects of

life. The homosexual usually lost control of his emotions when placed in proximity to

other men—especially within the Army, where "many of the homosexuals failed to

survive the rigors of warfare and the constant intimate association with men."[89] Miller

drew a connection between homosexuals, pyromaniacs, and kleptomaniacs in that all

three individuals experienced uncontrollable urges to commit socially deviant behaviors.

   If homosexuality resulted from impulsive, irrational behavior, then cowardice

similarly sprung from uncontrollable emotions. Shibusawa argues that during the

Lavender Scare, politicians drew on Sigmund Freud to define the homosexual as

developmentally abnormal. In his 1913 work *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud

contended that contemporary "savages" presented a "well-preserved picture of an early

stage of our own development."[90] The subtitle of the work, *Some Points of Agreement*

between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics, highlights Freud's contention that

neurotics and social deviants held to a less developed stage of the human condition. His

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[87] Miller, How Safe is America?," *Congressional Records*, May 15, 1950, A3660-3662.
[88] Ibid., A3661.
[89] Ibid., A3661.
[90] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics,* revised edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1952), 1.

idea that neurosis, or abnormal behavior represented a regression to primitive instincts, allowed Freud to argue that homosexuality derived from the "arrest of sexual development."[91] For Freud, and the politicians who adopted his theory of sexual regression, homosexuality indicated developmental retardation. When politicians perpetuated Sigmund Freud's theory of sexual regression, they connected homosexuality with femininity, childhood, and an innate propensity toward fear that provoked flight and cowardice. Thus, as historian Naoko Shibusawa notes, homosexuals were "cast as the opposite of stoic, rationalized, straight men."[92] In the same way *Joe Yank* implicitly associates heterosexuality with an instinctual form of bravery and fearlessness. For the perpetuation of American culture, American society needed to produce less of the former and more of the latter.

The use of "coward" in the public sphere during the early 1950s often conjured images of irrational, weak men who could not control themselves on the battlefield. General Patton's castigation of Private Charles H. Kuhl in 1943 reinforced the idea that cowardice resulted from emotional fragility. Patton derided Kuhl as a "yellow" soldier during the North African Campaign. The *New York Times* quoted Kuhl, in a letter to his wife, as saying: "General Patton slapped my face yesterday and kicked me in the pants and cussed me." Commanding officers believed Kuhl feigned illness to shirk his combat duties in Sicily.[93] After World War II, Columbia University embarked on the Conservation of Human Resources (CHR) project—an attempt to identify manpower

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[91] Quoted in Shibusawa, "The Lavender Scare," 746. Also, see Sigmund Freud, "Letter to an American Mother," *American Journal of Psychiatry 107* (1951): 787.

[92] Shibusawa, "The Lavender Scare," 746. She argues that 1950s senators took Freud's theories as objective scientific evidence. They also combined Freud's connection between homosexuals, neurotics, and primitives with Walter B. Canon's idea of the "flight or fight" response in animals. See, Walter B. Cannon, *Bodily Changes in Pain Hunger Fear and Rage* (New York, 1915).

[93] "Indiana Family Cites Son's Letter Telling of Slap and Kick Administered by Patton," *The New York Times*, 24 November 1943, 6.

wastage in the military and potential cowards. Leaders hoped the CHR would also improve the military's use of the mentally deficient. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower lobbied to create the CHR, and the program received $500,000 of funding from government and private sources. By 1950, researchers indicated the impossibility of identifying "which men would break down in service." However, researchers agreed that the military should definitely refuse "psychotics, hardened criminals, overt homosexuals, and those whose intelligence level and emotional security were . . . low."[94] Public officials already defined homosexuals by their supposed lack of emotional restraint, and preliminary results from the CHR broadened the concept of irrationality to include psychotics, criminals, and the mentally deficient. At the same time, the CHR correlated these ideas directly to potential cowardice in the military—identifying the fact that the potential for emotional breakdown in stressful combat situations derived, in part, from impulsive emotionality.

Drawing on the public discourse of irrationality and cowardice, the romantic portrayal of war in comic books, film, and music, cast soldiers in a stark hero-coward dichotomy that targeted weak, "cowards" and yellow-bellies as threats to U.S. success in the Cold War. In this motif, the hero is often defined by his death on the battlefield. The coward is one who flees when presented with an opportunity to die honorably in combat. This follows a traditional strategy employed by nineteenth century romanticists. Rhetorician James D. Wilson suggests that the romantic "hero is irrevocably bound to his social order . . . his heroism has been conferred by a culture that recognizes his contribution and places positive value on it."[95] In these Korean War comics, fictional

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[94] Lucy Freeman, "Manpower Waste is Termed Danger: Study at Columbia Seeks Ways to Improve Armed Forces' Use of Human Resources," *The New York Times*, 13 December 1950, 20.

[95] James D. Wilson, *The Romantic Heroic Ideal* (Baton Rogue, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 14-17.

heroes embodied character traits such as fearlessness, courage, honor, integrity, and duty. The ultimate act of self-sacrifice, in war, is one's death in combat. This act fulfills these characteristics in a profound way, because to die for one's country is to attain honor and fulfill one's duty.[96]

The debut issue of *Battle Report* fits this mold and sets a somber tone for combat, a mood that artists did not follow in subsequent issues. In fact, this comic is particularly illustrative of the hero/coward dichotomy because the protagonist fails to meet the expectations of a hero. The first episode, "The Terrible Decision!," begins by telling the audience that:

> In the infantry it's only a question of time! You just slog on and on until you get it! The fear crawls in your mind like yellow worms, and the fear of being afraid is the worst of all! Then one day you reach it—your breaking point! Sometimes you get lucky and have a choice – you can die like a hero or live like a coward! Joe Gates, BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] man, had to make his own terrible decision . . .[97]

The imagery reinforces the idea of human mortality in warfare. Joe fires his BAR into a crowd of North Korean soldiers charging his position. He crouches, alone, amidst the bodies of his comrades, with one corpse still bleeding from a bullet wound to the head. Joe's decision is "terrible" because it is a no-win situation. He can stay and continue to futilely fire into an overwhelming number of enemy soldiers. Or, he can retreat and be forever branded a coward.

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[96] Similar to *Joe Yank*, the protagonists in *Battle Report* are usually unharmed by combat. This is another aspect of romanticism in war comics. For example, see "One-Man Mop-Up," *Battle Report* 2 (Ajax-Farrell, October 1952); "The Gas House Gang," *Battle Report* 2 (1952) begins with the protagonist deriding a North Korean "as scrappy as your little Jap cousins were on Guam!"

[97] "The Terrible Decision!," *Battle Report* 1 (August 1, 1952), 1; Similarly, "Show Them How to Die," *This is War* 5 (Standard Comics, July 1952) describes the protagonist, Sheppard, as "not afraid to demonstrate the glory of sacrifice!," 1. Sheppard suffers from poor vision, and his accidental fall on a grenade causes his death. Another soldier ponders if he "ever saw that grenade," but he is shouted down by others who insist that "Sheppard's name is goin' in for a medal!" Also, see "War is a Gamble," *This is War* 5 (Standard Comics, July 1952).

Artists invoke the language of "hero" throughout the narrative to describe soldiers who are killed in combat. In one panel a soldier who throws himself on a grenade is a "hero in the making."[98] This salient theme of warfare is deleterious to Joe's psychological health, as he is torn between the idea of a heroic death and his dream of returning home to his wife. Joe hardly desires to become a hero through death. First, Joe attempts to "goldbrick" by feigning an illness. This effort fails, placing Joe in another platoon deploying into combat. North Korean tanks in the next village ambush the platoon, and Joe once again stands alone amongst the dead. He now has a chance to run, and "the voice of fear begins to scream in his brain."[99] Overcome with fear, Joe pulls out his revolver and with great trepidation shoots himself in foot. This self-inflicted wound, or what soldiers call a "million dollar wound," lands Joe in the infirmary. He is soon on a plane back to the United States and reunited with his wife.

The authors, while at first appearing to uphold the heroic ideal—fidelity, courage, and honor—actually isolate Joe from the rest of his platoon, and philosophically question the quandary of dying in combat or returning home to family. The narrator presents Joe with two options. He must decide between death (symbolic of his reputation) or family (symbolizing his desire to return home). Through this moral dilemma, the authors place Joe in opposition to military and political war aims in Korea. For example, the narrator's language throughout the comic book reflects the larger social and cultural pressures weighing heavily on Joe. The artist juxtaposes Joe's cowardice with the images of his dead comrades who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Joe remains hesitant to shoot himself in the foot, and only does so after great psychological turmoil. The term "goldbrick" used

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[98] "The Terrible Decision!," *Battle Report* 1 (1952), 3.
[99] Ibid, 5.

by the author represents common military parlance for one who attempts to shirk his

duties through the false pretense of illness or injury. Finally, the term "yellow" represents

Joe's potential social castigation—a way that military officials identified a coward.

While Joe's commander does not reprimand him, his poignant guilt and wavering

self-opinion serve the same function. Although he has escaped the perils of combat in

Korea, his situation is made worse when, through an "ironic mix-up," Joe receives the

Congressional Medal of Honor for his acts of bravery. His local community lauds his

heroic deeds, and Joe's wife finds a sense of pride through her husband's

accomplishments. However, Joe "can't stand this torture any longer!" and decides to

confess to his wife that he is a "phony." The last panel shows Joe, hobbling into his

suburban home on crutches, prepared to confront his wife about his misconduct.[100] Joe's

instinctual desire to survive and return home to his wife motivated him to both kill the

communist enemy and wound himself. Like *Joe Yank*, this comic book also presents

soldiers as isolated from a larger group identity, and the protagonist works in opposition

to the military.

Battle Report's debut issue reflects the dissonance between World War II

sentimentalism—the soldier's loyalty to the collective group—and the emerging strains

of Korean War disillusionment.[101] The final panel leaves the reader pondering the

meaning of the episode title, "The Terrible Decision!" What did the cartoonists find

"terrible?" In one sense, the authors comment on the unenviable position of soldiers in

war—a new cultural motif during the early 1950s.[102] The artists depict Joe in isolation,

surrounded by the pitch-black night, corpses, and hordes of communist soldiers. Thus,

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[100] Ibid., 7.
[101] Andrew Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 132-170.
[102] Huebner, *The Warrior Image*; Savage, *Comic Books and America*.

perhaps the authors imply that it is unfair to judge soldiers, or push them toward a choice between heroic death and cowardly retreat. The language employed by the narrator, though, harkens back to World War II sentimentalism. The narrator uses "hero" to describe acts of bravery, and associates Joe with the negative terms "yellow" and "goldbricker." The juxtaposition of dead soldiers with the living Joe—symbolizing the group and sacrifice—serves as a foil to Joe's cowardice and selfishness. Thus, *Battle Report* is rife with internal contradictions between the World War II heroic ideal, and the inchoate construction of a Korean War soldierly image.

Various storylines in *Exciting War* identified the Korean War as a "man's war," and connected a man's emotional restraint with his ability to achieve victory on the battlefield.[103] Within one issue of *Exciting* War, an unnamed major cautions a subordinate that he will "never keep [his] men in line if [he] can't control" himself.[104] In another story line of *Exciting War*, the platoon leader assigns three soldiers the task of establishing a machine gun position on the top of a ridge. The three soldiers express frustration, with one claiming that officers always assign him "some dirty work to do!" The other two soldiers temper his emotional impulses, asking: "Don't ya want to be a hero!"[105] The three soldiers successfully establish the machine-gun position, defend the ridge from hordes of Communist soldiers, and become heroes. The platoon leader lauds the three soldiers' heroism: "You did it, Sergeant! The three of you covered yourselves with glory!"[106] A subsequent episode begins: "You're too cautious, Clay! Get moving or

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[103] "Geronimo Joe," *Exciting War 7* (Standard Comics, 1953), 5.
[104] Ibid., 5.
[105] "Glory Road," *Exciting War 7,* 12.
[106] Ibid., 15.

I'll break you back to corporal." The dialogue correlates cautiousness with fear and hesitancy.[107]

"Heroes Overnight," an episode in the debut issue of *Exciting War*, uses a stoic sergeant to illustrate the fact that competent, rational leadership secures emotional restraint in soldiers. The artists suggest that heroism is achievable through glorious death, as in *Battle Report*. Immediately, the unnamed sergeant exclaims: "up to now we've been the joke of the Army . . . the biggest dopes in Korea! But today, we show them that we're either soldiers or dead men!" The episode also upholds the cultural conception that warfare transforms boys, and "misfits," into men. The narrator opines that the "Sergeant took [the soldiers] in hand and all he had to do was change them from soldiers of misfortune into heroes overnight."[108] As the episode concludes, the so-called "misfit squad" of the sergeant's platoon overwhelms a Chinese machine-gun emplacement. Private Rains, one of the misfits, transforms into a "soldier" through his death in the struggle. The last panel features dialogue between the sergeant and Private Kleck. Kleck thanks the sergeant for making "me a hero overnight!"[109] Interestingly, the soldiers in this episode do not fight for political or patriotic reasons. The sergeant stands in for leadership, and the men pursue combat in an effort to win his approval. The sergeant's coolheaded competence in battle also dampens his subordinate's emotional instinct to flee.

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[107] "The Cautious Kid," *Exciting War 6* (Standard Comics, 1953), 10.
[108] "Heroes Overnight," *Exciting War 5* (Standard Comics, 1953), 20.
[109] Ibid., 25.

The idea that firm leadership mitigates fear, emotionality, and cowardice is also expressed in the Korean War comic book *Soldiers of Fortune*. An episode entitled, "The Colonel and the Coward," begins with the narrator saying:[110]

> Ask any vet of the Korean War about Colonel Strickland, and he'll tell you that the old ramrod was the toughest, orneriest, but the bravest battalion commander in the field! Some will say the colonel was heartless in sending his own son out to almost certain death—but the colonel would have said 'The Army's not for Cowards!'[111]

Colonel Strickland despised any sign of emotional and physical weakness. The narrator describes him as "a stickler for discipline! He never admitted any weakness in himself— and he just wouldn't allow any weakness in his troops!" As the narrator indicates from the beginning, the story revolves around Colonel Strickland sending his son, Danny, into deadly ground combat. Colonel Strickland is uncertain whether his son is a coward or a "fighting man." There is "no place in [the Army] for cowards," according to Strickland.[112] Through combat, though, the soldiers will "all be either LIVE heroes . . . or dead COWARDS!" Although Strickland remains a stoic figure in public, the man experiences an emotional breakdown in private—the thought that Danny is potentially a coward unnerves Strickland. However, the plot resolves itself when Danny demonstrates his heroism on the battlefield, saving the lives of countless soldiers. Colonel Strickland, thoroughly impressed by his son's heroics, personally congratulates him on the battlefield. When North Koreans and Chinese soldiers resume the fuselage of fire against American positions, a stray bullet kills Col. Strickland. The narrators immortalize Col. Strickland as one who died heroically in combat, and describe his son as a "chip off the

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[110] "The Colonel and the Coward," *Soldiers of Fortune 10* (American Comics Group, 1952), 2.
[111] Ibid., 2.
[112] Ibid., 3.

old block."[113] Again, the supporting protagonist in the story vied for the approval of a figure that represented his literal father and a military superior. The artists also stress the fact that emotional self-control prevented cowardice, and led to success.

The Korean War comic book *War Heroes* uses the relationship between two protagonists to identify the ideal hero-soldier in the episode, "A Change in Brass." The protagonist, Lieutenant Warwick, is an honest, forthright, competent platoon leader. His character is juxtaposed with the platoon sergeant, Mapes, who is arrogant, petulant, and is always "bucking" orders. Both men serve in World War II and the Korean War, highlighting the fact that many soldiers were double-veterans of both wars. However, in Korea the roles are reversed, and Lt. Mapes commands a platoon that includes Sgt. Warwick. Once again, the artists use Sgt. Warwick's character to critique Lt. Mapes. While Mapes finds himself caught in a trap, because "I was pigheaded!," Warwick leads the men on to destroy a number of North Korean tanks. The episode concludes with Warwick receiving another battlefield commission, and Mapes congratulating him on being a "better officer."[114] Both characters are transparent and two-dimensional, but they illustrate significant qualities of the hero-soldier dynamic. Although Warwick demonstrates courage on the battlefield, he is also an individualist who follows his own compass. Mapes' hostile attitude toward Warwick does not dissuade the latter from employing his strategic plans. Finally, men respect those who "never asked you to do anything he wouldn't do himself."[115] The future of America is secure when placed in the competent hands of Lieutenant Warwick, and others like him.

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[113] Ibid., 5-7.
[114] "A Change in Brass," *War Heroes* 2 (Ace Comics, July 1952). 4-5.
[115] Ibid., 3.

On the whole, by 1950, public officials began creating the language of the Cold War and 'Red Scare' that would coalesce during Senator Joseph McCarthy's infamous inquisitions. In an attempt to define America's image in a rapidly changing world, politicians and comic book creators alike struggled to illustrate the ideal American and soldier. As psychologists' interpretation of "homosexuality" came to represent an illness afflicting American strength, *Joe Yank* stressed the ideal soldier's heterosexuality, and tethered the soldier's sexuality directly to his success in the field. The artist isolates Joe Yank and Mike McGurk from the larger military establishment and their platoon. These protagonists did not represent the selfless, brave, sacrificial masculine soldier. Instead, their desire to fight was predicated on selfish sexual desires. In the same vein, *Battle Report* inherently questioned the role that emotional impulse played in the creation of heroes and cowards. A lack of self-control—a trait presumably exhibited by homosexuals and communists—precipitated cowardly acts. In a larger sense, *Battle Report* focused on the individual soldier, and framed him in opposition to the collective military establishment. Thus, writers attributed the waning fortunes of American soldiers in the peninsula to selfish 'yellow' soldiers, an ill-equipped army, and a fanatical, numerically superior enemy.

If anything, this examination of Korean War-era comics highlights the significance of comic books as a primary source. Comic books are not something to be derided as lowbrow literature. The war stories examined above presented complex, socially relevant stories that appealed to Cold War sensibilities. These illustrations fit into what historian Andrew Huebner describes as the struggle between the "grittier" combat

soldier of Korea and the nostalgic, "sentimentalized" soldier of World War II.[116] Despite

the sometimes exaggerated and adventurous motif of warfare, *Joe Yank* and *Battle Report*

reflected a mixture of World War II optimism about American power and an emerging

discontent with the military-industrial complex, and United States' involvement in

"limited wars." Soldiers in these romantic narratives operated as individuals. For

example, Joe Yank and Mike McGurk acted as free agents, and did not contribute to the

team effort in combat. Motivated by libidinous desires, these two men perceived combat

as a means to acquiring female companionship. Likewise, *Battle Report* lends great

sympathy toward the individual soldier, and sometimes illustrates him as the victim of

leadership. Soldiers in these comic books perform masculinity in the battlefield, but the

artists do not imply that warfare creates *better* men for society.

Children during the 1950s often attest in personal remembrances that comic books

were an influential and present medium in their lives as children, and offered them

romantic visualizations of war. Ralph Atlas, also a youth during the postwar decade,

recalled that he "loved comic books" and looked forward to reading them in bed, every

night. Moreover, Tim Collier recalled that he enjoyed war comic books because

American soldiers could usually overcome the enemy: "zap, pow bam! The Japs were all

dead, we killed them all and our guys never got hurt."[117] Certainly, most romantic comics

presented invincible, competent American soldiers who slaughtered the enemy. But,

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[116] Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 132-135.

[117] Interview with Fabian Felux, Cold War Narratives, Palo Alto College, Oral History Project, 9 April 2003, accessed 3 December 2012: http://www.accd.edu/pac/history/hist1302/OralHistory/ColdWar/Felux-Felux/oralhistory.htm

Interview with Ralph Atlas, North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries and Oral Histories, Alexander Stress Press, 27 May 1993, accessed on 3 December 2012: http://www.alexanderstreet4.com/cgi-bin/asp/imld/documentidx.pl?docid=S11467-D001

Interview with Tim Collier, Personal Oral History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, College of Literature, Science and the Arts, undated, accessed on 3 December 2012: http://www-personal.umich.edu/~amnornes/Kennan.html.

Collier's recollection presents a simplistic view of 1950s war comic books: that it served as a tool for promoting American exceptionalism and idolizing triumphant soldiers. Romantic war comics—and other war comics—contained strains of doubt about the success of American soldiers in Korea.

Comic books' presentation of triumphant American soldiers during the Korean War did not correlate with a contemptuous depiction of communism—both American and Communist soldiers shared similar character traits of guile, bravery, and remorse. A young boy during the 1950s, Fabian Felux later recalled comic books being used "to portray Communists as evil and that sort of thing . . . Captain America was always fighting them." It's significant that Felux remembers the portrayal of Communists as "evil" in superhero comic books. Whereas he links his recollection of *Captain America* to the wicked presentations of communists, *Joe Yank* and the realist comic books explored in chapter three do not explicitly condemn Communism as a vile ideology. Of course, these fictional soldiers engage with communist forces, and the artists often depict the enemy as deceitful and cunning. But, Americans Joe Yank and Mike McGurk also employ deception and chicanery to acquire women, or overcome enemy forces. Thus, the character traits ascribed to enemy forces in these illustrations are common tropes not limited to condemnations of Communism.

Joe Yank and *Battle Report* dovetail with a larger trend in 1950s American war culture, first identified by historian Andrew Huebner, which emphasized the day-to-day actions of individual soldiers. Although these fictional war heroes operated in a fanciful and unrealistic warzone, they introduced personable, flawed human characters—an artistic feat largely unachievable by the masked superheroes of World War II.

Entertaining Comics' Harvey Kurtzman produced realistic, cynical depictions of war starting in 1951. His comic titles *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*—discussed in chapter three—eclipsed romantic imagery in war comics by 1953. The growing popularity of realistic interpretations correlates to changing public opinion about the Korean War. It also provides a clue as to why *Joe Yank* and *Battle Report* survived for a limited time, and were cancelled by 1954.

Romantic themes of heterosexual masculinity also appear in soldier-produced cartoons in the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*. In both media, artists presented combat as an opportunity for men to express heterosexual masculinity, and soldiers' libidinous drive replaced "bravery" and "camaraderie" as the primary factor motivating men to fight. However, soldier-produced cartoons also constructed the father-husband identity in fictional soldiers—an identity not present in romantic comics—by juxtaposing soldiers with wives and families back home. The depiction of Korean warzone differed significantly between romantic comic books and soldier-produced imagery. Chapter two analyzes how illustrators placed soldiers in opposition to military leadership, and depicted soldiers as depressed, fatigued, and sorrowful. Soldiers' optimism largely ended with romantic depictions of the war.

Chapter Two

Aggravated with War and Captivated by Women: Warfare and Women in the

Pacific Stars and Stripes' Soldier-Produced Cartoons and Iconography of the

Korean War.

American soldiers serving combat tours in Korea continued a tradition of

producing and distributing humorous cartoons and comics to other soldiers that allowed

for reflection on the conflict and escape from the pall of war. These illustrations

functioned as a public forum to lampoon military leadership, depict common fantasies

about home and women, and reflect on loss. Artists created these cartoons in the vacuum

of the military camp, and during the war targeted a military audience that comprised

mostly men. These military cartoons offer insight into the average soldier's thoughts

about Korea and his broader experience at war. Soldier-produced images dwelt on

environmental hardship, men's frustration with military leadership and camp life, men's

desires to return home, and a sexualized portrait of women that upheld heterosexuality.

That many of these themes are tangentially related to violent combat illuminates the fact

that even "realist" comic books discussed below did not capture much of what actual

soldiers found important during their military service. Based on soldiers' oral histories

and personal correspondences, we also discover that soldier-produced imagery resonated

with soldiers' experiences of the Korean War.

During World War II, several military cartoonists published cartoons and comic

strips—a tradition that existed as early as World War I when the military first created the

Stars and Stripes. By 1950, many Americans would immediately recognize the most notable World War II cartoonist, Bill Mauldin, who drew from his own experiences as a soldier in that war to create *Up Front,* a string of cartoons featuring the antics of two infantrymen, Willie and Joe, and contained long dialogues between the soldiers about their combat experiences. Although not a celebrity during his initial enlistment, Mauldin exited World War II—as historian Stephen Kercher indicates—with "five battle stars, a Purple Heart, the Legion of Merit, a Pulitzer Prize, and a cover feature in *Time* magazine."[118] Thus, by the Korean outbreak, Mauldin's celebrity status positioned him to influence the masses. *Colliers* contracted Mauldin to create a series entitled "Up Front in Korea" that continued the storyline of Willie and Joe. Other cartoonists emerged during World War II aside from Mauldin. For example, Sergeant George Baker created *Sad Sack,* a comic strip about the unfortunate circumstances of a hapless private. The World War II military magazine *Yank* published Baker's cartoons during World War II, and the name of the character Sad Sack derived from the military slang, "sad sack of shit," that identified a useless, inept soldier on the frontlines.[119] Although Joe, Willie, and Sad Sack were all fictional characters, these World War II comic strips attempted to reflect the common, unlucky experiences of infantry.

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[118] Stephen E. Kercher, "Cartoons as 'Weapons of Wit:' Bill Mauldin and Herbert Block Take on America's Postwar Anti-communist Crusade," *International Journal of Comic Art 7*, no. 2 (2005), 311; For more on Bill Mauldin, see: Todd DePastino, *Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 155-165; Cord Scott, "'Frankly, Mac, this 'police action' business is going too damn far!' Armed Forces Cartoons during the Korean Conflict," Conference Paper, Proceeds of the Korean War Conference, Victoria College, Texas, June 24-26, 2010.

[119] Historian Paul Fussell documented in his work *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 89, the fact that "the cartoon character Sad Sack of course derives his name from the NCO's favorite term for a despised subordinate, a sad sack of shit, a bit of nomenclature reducing the addressee to a bag of noisome matter equipped, as if by some accident, with arms and legs;" George Baker, *The Sad Sack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944); Baker, *The New Sad Sack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946).

Some World War II veterans remember that Bill Mauldin's cartoons, *Sad Sack*, and mainstream comic books offered them substantial entertainment and realistic portrayals of soldiers between episodes of heavy combat. Veteran Carl Sturm remembered the fact that when he saw "stragglers" from the "St. Lo breakthrough" he thought they resembled "the Bill Mauldin cartoon type of character" because of their ragged appearance.[120] Having endured heavy fighting, "It wasn't too long after that that [he and his men] looked that way, too." Veteran Robert Inglis opined that "ninety days [in combat] would turn you into a Bill Mauldin" character.[121] Walter Denise, another solider during World War II, thought that Bill Mauldin truly captured the soldier's wartime experience: "It was a lot about Army life all the time. And some of the cartoons were very, very much at home . . . for the average mud hole GI he hit it right on the head every time."[122] Veterans Ben Honda and Raymond E. Logan described *Sad Sack* as accurately depicting the standard uniform and dress of Army soldiers, as well as offering

[120] Carl Werner Sturm, Oral History Interview, March 1, 1996, by G. Kurt Piehler and Ken Gilliland, Rutgers Oral History Archives [Hereafter: ROHA]. Online: http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/1276/sturm-werner-carl. (Accessed: 5 February 2013); Sturm brings up Bill Mauldin in the context of Kurt Piehler inquiring about his first experiences in France. Sturm notes that he found the 72nd Division in France a "very battered, worn out bunch of soldiers." Piehler then asks whether Sturm could tell, based on sight, that these soldiers were exhausted. It is at this point Sturm organically references his exposure to Bill Mauldin cartoons.

[121] Robert Inglis, Oral History Interview, October 27, 1998, by G. Kurt Piehler and Michael Ojeda, ROHA.Online:http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/997-inglis-robert. (Accessed: 5 February 2013); Similar to Carl Sturm, Robert Inglis naturally brings up Bill Mauldin in the context of describing his experience during the occupation of Germany.

[122] Walter G. Denise, Oral History Interview, March 25, 1997, by G. Kurt Piehler and Jennifer Lenkiewicz, ROHA. Online: http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/881-denise-walter. (Accessed: 5 February 2013); In his interview, Denise recollected the fact that he and his men often used humor to escape from the doldrums of war. Jennifer Lenkiewicz asks whether he could elaborate on his use of humor in the war, while Kurt Piehler notes that he "mentioned something about a GI cartoon. . . could you elaborate?" It's at this time Denise references his affinity for Bill Mauldin's cartoons during World War II, and Piehler opines that it seems like Mauldin's images "captured a lot of your experiences." Thus, Denise responds that the situation Mauldin's characters found themselves stuck in resonated well with the average GI in World War II.

humorous entertainment about the German enemy during the war.[123] Peter Sarraioco

began reading comic books while in the Army during World War II, and he maintained

that hobby after the war. In fact, Walter Reichman, a veteran of both World War II and

the Korean War, remembered that in the latter conflict men were "all laying in their

bunks [on the way to Korea] reading comic books, happy as larks, because they were

unhappy with their marriages, or things were not going so great."[124] Reichman does not

identify whether soldiers continued to have access to mainstream American comic books

once in Korea. That many of these soldiers naturally referenced Bill Maudlin and *Sad

Sack* without specific questioning suggests that these images accurately reflected the

problems of soldiers. All of these soldiers identify the fact that these illustrations

provided an outlet for humor and respite, but also captured the ragged, worn-out nature of

infantry who experienced long periods of violent combat.

      Korean War soldier-produced illustrations echo their World War II forbears in

their dramatizations of the doldrums of camp life, and the unlucky circumstances of

combat. For example, George Baker's *Sad Sack* pokes fun at the Army's inefficiency,

through such diverse scenarios as a soldier getting a new uniform, repairing a Jeep, or

attempting to get a three-day weekend pass. Sad Sack, the eponymous character, also

found himself negotiating Kitchen Patrol (KP), consuming disgusting chow, and avoiding

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[123] Ben Honda, Oral History Interview, July 27, 1999, by Betty J. Blum, *Chicago Architects Oral History Project,* Art Institute of Chicago, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries. Online: http://www.artic.edu/research/archival-collections/oral-histories/ben-honda-1918-2005. (Accessed: 7 February 2013); Raymond E. Logan, Oral History Interview, October 4, 2002, by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, ROHA. Online: http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/1077-logan-raymond-e. (Accessed: 7 February 2013).

[124] Peter M. Sarraiocco, Oral History Interview, March 3, 1995, by G. Kurt Piehler and Chris Everly, ROHA. Online: http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/1223-sarraiocco-peter-m. (Accessed: 7 February 2013); Walter B. Reichman, Oral History Interview, October 4, 1994, by G. Kurt Piehler, ROHA. Online: http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/1188-reichman-walter. (Accessed: 7 February 2013).

the harsh Military Police (MP).[125] While Sad Sack and other World War II characters

fantasized about women, the nature of these images changed by the Korean War. Sad

Sack's encounters with women revolved around erotic fantasy, or his assumption that

when he met women this interaction would lead to sex. For example, Sad Sack becomes

inebriated from alcohol and meets a woman on the side of the street. This woman

motions for him to follow her, and he hands her two dollars in cash. Baker depicts Sad

Sack's enthusiasm—he assumes that she is a prostitute—until he is led toward a church

function that requires a one-dollar admittance fee.[126] When compared to Korean War

soldier-produced imagery, the women featured in *The Sad Sack* are dressed rather

modestly, and typically function as maternal figures that rein in the emotional and moral

excesses of male soldiers. In another case, Baker depicts Sad Sack fantasizing about

sexual intercourse on the first date, but in reality receiving a kiss on the cheek at night's

end. While World War II imagery parodied Army life, it did not condemn the war effort

or military leadership. Sad Sack remained a team player and functioned within the

collective Army identity.

Korean War illustrations drawn by soldiers and war correspondents both

continued and deviated from the tradition in World War II, as they feature humorous

escape narratives about the war and explicitly critical interpretations of UN intervention.

The Pacific Stars and Stripes—a military newspaper written by and for enlisted men—

published numerous collections of "Cartoon Capers" during the conflict.[127] "Cartoon

Capers" comprise one- to six-panel "funnies" that identified common happenings during

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[125] Baker, *The Sad Sack*, 1-10, 17-18,

[126] Ibid., 33-34.

[127] To avoid repetition, I will refer to *Pacific Stars and Stripes* as simply *Stars and Stripes*. The Pacific iteration of this military magazine began during the American occupation of Japan in 1948. Its European counterpart began during World War I, and continued during World War II.

the war. The Marine Corps also tasked Norval E. Packwood with creating cartoons that portrayed "the personal, human side of the war that so often escape[d] the lens of the camera."[128] He published these cartoons in two volumes entitled *Leatherhead in Boot Camp* and *Leatherhead in Korea*. Cartoonist Bill Mauldin's *Colliers* series, "Up Front in Korea," described combat, the environment, and soldiers through illustrations and fictional articles. Shel Silverstein also penned several cartoons about American soldiers in Korea. The *Pacific Stars and Stripes* hired Silverstein expressly to create cartoons for its magazine near the end of the Korean War. Entitled *Take Ten*, Silverstein's collection of cartoons contained by far the most biting depictions of the Korean War. He dealt with suicide, death, the loss of friends, loved ones, and the ending of relationships back home.[129] Emphases on combat, environmental hazards, death, and leadership replicated the motifs found in mainstream romantic and realist comic book narratives. In all three genres, artists depicted cynical, individualistic soldiers who perceived the war as a distraction from the comforts of home. Fictional soldiers did not espouse patriotism, and stood in opposition to the military and political machine that sent them to Korea. Soldier-produced illustrations critiqued anti-communist rhetoric by illustrating the ambiguity of the definition itself. What was a communist? Many fictional soldiers in these narratives remain perplexed by this question. Like the realist war comic books discussed later,

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[128] Norval E. Packwood, *Leatherhead in Korea* (Virginia: Marine Corps Gazette, 1952), 1.

[129] Shel Silverstein, *Take Ten: A Collection of Cartoons* (Tokyo: Kyoto Printing Press, *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, 1955). For example, Silverstein's collection contains several illustrations of suicide, or attempted suicide. One man "stopped breathing" to purposefully avoid training, 48; The fictional Lieutenant Wilcox hangs himself to avoid serving a combat tour in Korea, 60; Another recruit constructs a noose to hang himself during boot-camp, while the Drill Sergeant persuades him that he is not a complete failure, 68.

Silverstein's take on the Korean War contains far more negative cartoons than *Pacific Stars and Stripes'* "Cartoon Capers." However, Silverstein's publications emerged during the waning months of the war, particularly at a time when peace talks resumed in 1953. Thus, public opinion and soldier morale reached its nadir, and Silverstein likely reflects that general attitude.

soldier-produced imagery worked against the common rationale for the Korean War—the containment of communism—by either identifying the humanity of communist soldiers or showing the absurd vagueness of anti-communist rhetoric.

Military generalship held *Pacific Stars and Stripes* editors responsible for the magazine's content, and it is likely that this shaped the content available in the magazine toward positive news and depictions of war. Historian Alfred E. Cornebise cites the fact that General Headquarters conceptualized *Stars and Stripes* during the First World War in an attempt to boost the morale of American combat units in France. In essence, the magazine served as internal propaganda to stoke soldiers' patriotism and placate their fears and discontent.[130] "*The Stars and Stripes* did accentuate the positive," notes Cornebise: "that was one of the reasons for its existence, and the editors were certainly selective in what they published."[131] By 1945, the U.S. Army used the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, to paint a rosy portrait of military living conditions in Japan to serve General Headquarters' interest of persuading wives and children to relocate.[132] James Nix, who spent several years in the Army after World War II, argued that *Stars and Stripes* "did a good job" keeping "down things that was happening back home that would depress the soldiers."[133] Thus, while the cartoons printed in *Pacific Stars and Stripes* during the Korean War provide a useful window for understanding the soldier's experience, one must acknowledge the fact that editors shaped the content of cartoons and articles in the *Stars and Stripes*.

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[130] Alfred E. Cornebise, *The Stars and Stripes,* xi-xiii.

[131] Ibid., xii.

[132] Michael Cullen Green, *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of American Military Empire after World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 46-47.

[133] Sarah Rowe, interview with James Nix, The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, 7 March 1993, accessed at: In The First Person (1 February 2013), http://www.inthefirstperson.com/firp/firp.detail.collections.aspx?collectioncode=OHC0000393

Compared to romantic comic books, soldier illustrations constructed a larger picture of the lived experience during the war in Korea by capturing the nuances of camp life, bodily acclimation to the environment, and the tensions between frontline and rear echelon soldiers. Although a variety of themes are present, these cartoons commonly reference the doldrums of camp life during the war, such as the disgusting chow served to soldiers, boredom, and inadequate living space. Other cartoons do mention violence, but often depict the aftermath and casualties incurred during combat. Still, many other cartoons constitute humorous interpretations of the harsh Korean environment. Through these cartoons, one also finds that soldiers continuously thought about home, the ambiguous portrait of a "communist," or simply lampooned military leadership. On the whole, these illustrations attempt to speak more authoritatively about the average soldier's experience during the war, one that sometimes hardly involved combat and violence, than the depictions of war offered by romantic comic books.

Soldiers complemented a motif found in EC's realist war comic books by similarly using cartoons to criticize the purpose of the U.N. intervention in Korea and pointing out the absurdity of such language as "police action." Corporal Glenn C. Troelstrup depicted American soldiers wearing police uniforms and driving police motorcycles and paddy-wagons toward the North Korean capitol at Pyongyang. The caption reads, "Frankly, Mac, this 'police action' business is going too damn far!" The cartoon identifies the disparity between supposed American war aims in Korea—to "police" North Korea out of South Korea—and the eventual attempt to invade and occupy North Korean soil. At the same time, Americans criticized Harry Truman and

military leadership for pushing too far into enemy territory.[134] But this cartoon does not

overtly criticize any particular person. Instead, it illustrates the dissonance between

officially stated language and goals and the reality of the situation. Corporal Troelstrup

points out the absurdity of invading North Korea without actually indicting military

leadership or the president. Moreover, the "police officers" in this cartoon wield only six-

shooter pistols and clubs. This imagery suggests that by labeling the Korean War a

"police action" it actually detracts from the true violent conflict that occurred. American

soldiers faced artillery barrages, strafing runs by MIG jets, machine guns, human wave

assaults, and many other deadly artifices contrived by the enemy.[135]

That the "police officers" in Troelstrup's cartoon brandish clubs and six-shooters

correlates to a larger problem of military unpreparedness during the initial stages of UN

intervention in the Korean Peninsula. Numerous military cartoons reference the

inadequate munitions and supplies provided to soldiers. "Hello, service battery? You'd

better get hold of some ordinance people and come on up here," suggests one fictional

soldier who opened artillery ordinance crates and found lamps.[136] Ordinance shipped

medieval plate mail armor in another cartoon, assuring the men that it would "stop a .45

at point blank" range.[137] A caricatured Spanish conquistador uses cannon against the

enemy in a different cartoon. That the antiquated cannon provided "better results" than

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[134] For example, see: "Ridgway Berates Doubters on War: Tells Those Questioning "Why Are We in Korea?" That What They Cherish is at Stake," *The New York Times*, 22 February, 1952, 2; George Barrett, "Ridgway Tells Soldiers in Korea They Fight for Their Homelands," *The New York Times,* 23 January, 1951, 4.; J. Henderson Powell, "Our Position in Korea: Original Objective, of Freeing South Korea, Considered Accomplished," *The New York Times*, 15 July 1953, 24.

[135] Cartoon by Corporal Clark Troelstrup in *Out of Line: A Collection of Cartoons from Pacific Stars and Stripes* (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Co., 1952) 2.

[136] Cartoon by Frank Miller, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 149 (29 May 1952), 9.

[137] Cartoon by Peter Chanin, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8,* no. 105 (15 April 1952), 9; The *Pacific Stars and Stripes* considered Chanin one of the most "prolific contributors" to the "Cartoon Capers" columns.

standard American artillery symbolizes the fact that superior technology does not

necessarily win wars.[138] The way these soldier-produced cartoons question the

effectiveness of American technology resonates well with realist comics, where artists

exposed the farce that superior armaments leads to success. Romantic comics, like *Joe*

Yank, also parodied military technology by illustrating the protagonists dispatching

enemies using medieval weaponry and armor.[139]

Cartoonists attributed the presence of ill-trained, incompetent platoon leaders to

the harebrained officers responsible for handpicking future leadership. Soldiers

characterized officers as inept, particularly when they attempted to identify individuals

capable of leadership. Private Peter Chanin depicts three recruits maneuvering across an

obstacle bridge comprising two oil barrels and a two-by-four plank. Two men struggle to

balance themselves, while the third appears to tread smoothly across the narrow plank.

The officer observing the three men opines: "Harkins possesses excellent leadership

potential." Chanin points out the absurd measurements for defining who possesses

leadership potential. In this caricature, one's ability to balance derives from innate

leadership skill. Perhaps poor methods of choosing platoon leaders account for the

pervasiveness of inexperienced or incompetent junior officers in Korea.[140] This correlates

to the depiction of junior officers in romantic and realist comic books, where incompetent

leaders led men into ambush.[141] Thus, soldier-produced cartoons contributed to a larger

motif in Korean War iconography where artists place the individual G.I. in opposition to

leadership, or portray him as a victim of incompetence.

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[138] Cartoon by Charles P. Wolf, *Out of Line*, 14.
[139] "Korean Jackpot," *Joe Yank #5* (Standard Comics, 1952), 14-15.
[140] Cartoon by Peter Chanin, *Out of Line,* 33.
[141] See, for example: "Korean Jackpot," *Joe Yank 5* (1952); "Unconquered!," *War Fury 1* (Comic Media, 1952).

Chanin's biting depiction of military leadership resonates with veterans' and other cartoonists' characterization of platoon leaders as reckless and too eager for glory. Veteran Arthur May remembered the fact that his company commander, Captain Vinsell, "was gung ho and had our company . . . go on eighty-six mile marches in three days, and do all these kinds of things," to display his outfit to higher-ups as evidence for further promotion.[142] Private Chanin similarly emphasized the "gung-ho" nature of military leadership in Korea by illustrating three men guarding a signpost that read: "Korea or Bust!"[143] Combined with the questionable motivations for invading North Korea across the 38th parallel, this cartoon correlates with the absurdity of labeling Korea a "police action." In fact, these cartoons and some oral histories argue that over ambitious military leadership desired promotion and glory, intent upon utterly destroying the North Korean forces. For example, veteran Warren Avery remembered a "real gung-ho second lieutenant who was going to make first lieutenant even if it killed us."[144] The North Korean and Chinese forces did not constitute the sole danger for American soldiers in Korea. Overzealous junior officers—hankering after promotion and glory—could also pose an immediate threat to the infantryman's survival in combat.

The rotation system utilized during the Korean War meant that junior officers could gain combat experience without enduring long tours of duty as combat platoon leaders, and that the constant influx of "green" soldiers necessitated constant re-training of platoons. Historian Melinda Pash argues that because of unit rotations, career officers

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[142]Arthur R. May, Oral History Interview, April 27, 2004, by Shaun Illingworth and Kevin Bing, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/31-interviewees/1102-may-arthur-r (Last Accessed: 3 February 2013).
    [143] Cartoon by Peter Chanin, *Out of Line*, 16.
    [144] Sergeant Warren Avery. Oral History Interview, *The Korean War: Uncertain Victory, the Concluding Volume of an Oral History,* eds. Donald Knox and Alfred Coppel (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 9.

"careened into the war zone just long enough to get their tickets punched, put combat on their records, and then move on . . . leaving units in Korea without adequate or consistent leadership."[145] Private Kenneth Hovis referenced the rampant inexperience of soldiers during the first months of Korea by showing a "green" soldier attempting to fire a machine-gun. Unable to master the weapon, the sergeant berates him: "Six rounds per burst, Mac . . . just six rounds!"[146] In another cartoon, fresh soldiers enter Korea through a pipeline. The caption reads: "Beats me, sir, must be that new pipeline shipment." The article mocks the 'for Korea only' purpose of many draftees during the war, and also depicts the downside of rotation systems.[147] These cartoons identify the various problems within the military organization—training, officer incompetency, fresh replacements, and technology—to, illustrate the grim reality of combat for most soldiers.

There are few extant cartoons that explicitly reference combat, but all underscore the brutality and high casualties suffered by American units. "If your [sic] looking for 'A' Company," one solider says: "I'm it." Contact with the Chinese or North Korean enemy wiped out his entire company, a unit comprising some one hundred to two hundred men.[148] Another cartoon contains a more humorous portrayal of combat, showing two soldiers hunkered down in their foxhole enduring a barrage of fire from enemy troops. One soldier complains that the enemy throws everything but the kitchen sink at the American position. "Well here it comes now," says one soldier as a kitchen sink arcs

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[145] Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 132; Also see, John A. Sullivan, *Toy Soldiers: Memoir of a Combat Platoon Leader in Korea* (New York: McFarland & Co., 1991), 20.

[146] Cartoon by Kenneth Hovis, *Out of Line*, 5; Also see Shel Silverstein, *Take Ten.* He suggested that the Selective Service System found a use for *every* individual by showing a sergeant assigning a pair of conjoined twins to the "Special Services" department, 3.

[147] Cartoon by Private Frederick Swanson, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9*, no. 2 (2 January, 1953), 9.

[148] Cartoon by Sergeant John Kennedy, *Out of Line*, 1.

across the sky.[149] In a letter to his parents, Private James Cardinal confided that "the Chinese are kicking hell out of us; there are just too many of them in Korea for us to fight. If the big wheels in Washington decide to continue fighting it will be the biggest mistake they ever made."[150] Cardinal emphasizes the enemy's strength and indicates that the United Nations should seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict, an issue regularly reflected in military cartoons. "Wish those guys at the peace conference would hurry it up," says one soldier encamped on a ridge overlooking the mountainous horizon. In another illustration, two soldiers take cover during an immense enemy artillery barrage. "Guess somebody said the wrong thing at the truce conference," opines one of the soldiers.[151] In any case, these cartoons recognize the fact that the North Korean and Chinese enemy constitutes a resolved, formidable fighting force capable of matching American manpower. Soldier-produced imagery, then, complemented the presentation of strong enemy opposition in realist comic books and undermined the romanticized idea that American soldiers were invincible.

These references to the cost of war resonate well with fictional soldiers in realist comics *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* who struggle to survive onslaughts of North Korean and Chinese soldiers. One American G.I. lives through a particularly deadly skirmish with the enemy. He discovers a severely wounded, but still breathing, Chinese soldier whom he carries back toward an aid station. He recognizes the fact that infantry soldiers sometimes struggle to contain the alternative personality within themselves that kills, a personality that, if unrestrained, pushes men toward maliciousness. Other men in his company want to kill the wounded Chinese solider, but

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[149] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 52.
[150] Private James Cardinal, Personal Correspondence, *The Korean War*, 14.
[151] Untitled Cartoons, *Out of Line*, 34, 53.

the corpsman asks: "In the middle of all this killing, how many of us will remember that each and every human being . . . is important?"[152] Similarly, a soldier-produced illustration identifies the psychological toll that combat wrought on soldiers. The cartoon cites the fact that the brief Rest and Relaxation (R&R) soldiers enjoyed in Japan starkly contrasted the grim furnace of Korea. The trauma of one's combat experience in Korea, and its psychological repercussions, undermined one soldier's enjoyment of R&R. "Every night I dreamt I was back here [in Korea]," he informs two fellow soldiers.[153] One commonality between these two iconographic publications is that neither lauds the Korean War, and both portray warfare as destroying humanity and men. Harvey Kurtzman—who crafted his war comics with the express purpose of criticizing war—and the unnamed soldier who produced the *Stars and Stripes* cartoon depict the psychological and physical *cost* of war. The fictional men in these images are made worse by war.

Many illustrations also suggest that soldiers often found it difficult to distinguish between friendly South Korean soldiers and the North Korean enemy.   One caption reads: "I don't care if he does say 'sho nuff,' 'right smart,' and 'you all,' I still think he's a North Korean."[154] In the illustration, two bewildered but anxious American soldiers aim their rifles at a surrendering Asian soldier. The Asian soldier raises his arms as a sign of submission, and speaks rapidly to the American soldiers. However, his uniform lacks any distinctive insignia, and it's difficult to discern whether he is truly South Korean or a defected enemy soldier. Because this quote uses American slang, it could also imply that American G.I.s might suspect an Asian-American soldier of espionage—a theme

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[152] "Korea!," *Two-Fisted Tales 29* (Entertaining Comics, October 1953), reprinted in *The EC Archives: Two-Fisted Tales,* vol. 2 (Maryland: Gemstone Publishing, 2007), 188.
[153] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 4.
[154] Ibid.

explored in the comic book *War Fury*, where Asian-American Nathan Na must vindicate his loyalty to America.[155] While his uniform is not clearly North or South Korean, the artist also does not distinguish his uniform from that of the American soldiers—thus, one might infer that this Asian soldier could be Asian American, North Korean, or South Korean. Similarly, when veteran Lieutenant Adrian Brian captured "fifty men, whom we collected in a field," he found that "all of them wore civilian clothing and looked all to the world like farmers." To distinguish the enemy from the civilian populace, Lt. Brian invited a friendly South Korean soldier to put the prisoners through military drill. All but one of the prisoners possessed an adept knowledge of drill maneuvers, and could "no longer . . . play the poor dumb farmer role."[156] "The Koreans all looked alike, there was no way to tell friend from foe," recalled veteran Donald Chase. "The enemy seemed to be everywhere."[157] American soldiers experienced considerable trouble distinguishing the enemy from civilian or friendly populations, and this stands in stark contrast to romantic comic books that contained clear distinctions between friendly and enemy soldiers. Whereas romantic portrayals of the Korean War clearly organized warfare around good versus evil, real soldiers experienced a far messier situation.

If American soldiers found it difficult to distinguish between Asian nationalities, fictional men also found the definition of "communist" vague. "He's worked so hard bringing him in, I hate to tell him it's not a Chinese Commie," opines one soldier as he observes a G.I. struggling to rein in a walrus.[158] *Stars and Stripes* published this cartoon

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[155] "Counterspy!," *War Fury 2* (Comic Media,1952); On this theme of the suspicion of Asian-Americans, see the romantic war comic story line covered in chapter three: "Counterspy!" *War Fury 2,* 22-24.

[156] Lieutenant Adrian Brian, Interview, *The Korean War*, 21.

[157] Corporal Donald Chase, Interview, *The Korean War*, 26.

[158] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 81.

amidst the Red Scare that erupted within America, and it's possible that the artist parodies the ambiguous definitions that Joseph McCarthy and others assigned to potential subversives and "communists." In this parody, the term "communist" encompasses such a wide swathe of individuals and objects that it even envelops the walrus. At the same time, it implies that although the soldiers fight a war against communism, they do not know exactly who or what constitutes a communist. If soldiers, fighting directly with communist forces, face difficulties identifying these subjects, then how could civilians target and unmask communist subversives? In a broader sense, Korean War iconography either ignored or critiqued the anti-communist rhetoric that pervaded the United States during the Red Scare. Chapter three's realist war comics emphasized the humanity of communist Chinese and North Korean soldiers, and illuminated some continuity between the presumably disparate cultures. Romantic war narratives avoided espousing anti-communist rhetoric, and usually racially caricatured enemy soldiers.

Entertaining Comics' *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* incorporated depictions of the enemy that resonate well with the ambiguous portrait provided by *Stars and Stripes* and veteran oral histories. A Navy Corpsman and his partner risk their lives to save a wounded American soldier in one episode. As they tread carefully through enemy territory, they suddenly hear men speaking Korean. "Koreans! They must be North Koreans! We're prisoners! I'd knew this'd happen!," yells one soldier. As the mysterious platoon of Korean soldiers move closer, guns drawn, the Corpsman realizes that "they're 'ROK's! South Koreans! It's our side! We made it!"[159] Another episode illustrates the fact that even Korean soldiers could not distinguish between friend and enemy. A violent North Korean colonel massacres a platoon of American P.O.Ws, and

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[159] "Combat Medic!," *Frontline Combat 4* (Entertaining Comics, January 1952), 4-5.

orders his men to don American uniforms and pose as South Korean soldiers. He also

orders his entire battalion of North Korean soldiers to murder all American prisoners.

Unfortunately, another North Korean patrol discovers the colonel's camouflaged outfit.

The North Koreans do not believe the colonel and his men are friendly soldiers, but insist

that they are the South Korean enemy. The story ends as the North Korean soldiers

mercilessly gun down the colonel and his rogues.[160] The enemy's guile and deception

rendered even innocent Korean civilians suspect, and American soldiers not only

struggled with overcoming a determined enemy, but sometimes lacked the resources to

find the enemy.

Soldiers also tried to articulate a reason to fight in the war, and defending the

Korean land hardly constituted a proper motivating factor. Two soldiers stand in an

unoccupied wasteland, with mountains cresting across the horizon. The desolate Korean

landscape appears unworthy of defending. One soldier inquires the location of a "latrine,"

to which the other soldier responds, "What do you mean, Where's the latrine? This IS the

latrine!"[161] Writing from the frontlines in Korea, Captain Norman Allen told his mother

that "Trying to convince us that we aren't just so much sacrificial cattle will be difficult

to do." The Korean War meant "survival, sheer, base, common survival." And Korea

"holds no value now, military, political or idealistic. The only thing of value it holds for

the men here is a 6 x 6 x 6 plot of burial ground."[162] One of Norval Packwood's Marine

caricatures also illustrates the fact that soldiers did not find Korea to hold intrinsic value:

"Oh, fighting to keep [the land] wouldn't be so bad, I guess, if I could figure out why

anyone would want it in the first place." He and another Marine sit on the peak of a

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[160] "Massacred!," *Two-Fisted Tales 20* (Entertaining Comics, March 1951).
[161] Silverstein, *Take Ten*, 40-41.
[162] Captain Norman Allen, Personal Correspondence to Mother, *The Korean War*, 23.

mountain, gazing out across the vast, empty landscape.[163] If anything, the Korean geography and climate presented as formidable a foe as the Chinese and North Korean adversaries. The soldiers' dissonance with the Korean land and people appears in both realist and soldier-produced imagery. In the same vein, romantic war comics illustrate little attachment between male soldiers and those whom they presumably defend. Thus, these various illustrations emphasize the soldiers' apprehensive relationship with Korea.

Artists' emphasis on the discordant relationship between soldiers and the land also permeates depictions of how American soldiers endured harsh climates during both the winter and summer while in Korea, and this ever-present oppressor appears frequently in cartoons. The frigid cold, snow showers, and freezing rain are a lethal combination in one cartoon and represent a unique aspect of the warfare for many soldiers. One soldier's foxhole ices over completely. The artist humorously illustrates an American soldier donning ice-skates and figure skating back and forth across his foxhole.[164] Another cartoon soldier reads aloud a letter from his wife: "She says it's cold enough at home to freeze your ears off." Both the soldier and his companion have lost their ears from frostbite, and because neither soldier can hear, he gesticulates wildly with his hands. In fact, the artist displays three ears lying on the ground in front of their foxhole.[165] Despite the fact that this cartoon is surreal, it suggests that civilians back home cannot understand the reality of combat. In another cartoon, two Marines attempt to heat a C-Ration over fire, but because of the sub-zero temperatures, "the bottom's burnt and the top is cold." "Try to get a couple bites out of the middle before it freezes,"

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[163] Packwood, *Leatherhead in Korea*, 32-33.
[164] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 8.
[165] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 16.

suggests one Marine.[166] In a separate parody, a sergeant presumably threatens his

subordinate with imprisonment for dereliction of duty, and that soldier responds: "Well,

sir, that depends. Just where is the stockade located." Thick layers of snow and ice cover

his equipment and clothing, and a menacing platoon leader stands over him barking

orders. In a humorous way, this cartoon suggests that *anything,* including imprisonment,

was preferable to freezing in one's foxhole.[167]

Shel Silverstein frequently depicted soldiers attempting to abscond from their

duty during the Korean War, and whether through suicide or feigned stupidity, these

soldiers tried to avoid serving in the Korean War altogether. When he placed his

characters in the stockade, they typically exuded happiness. For example, a cartoon

shows two soldiers imprisoned within the stockade for unknown reasons. Both soldiers

appear jovial. One soldier writes home that he remains a "prisoner of war," but does not

suggest that his own country imprisoned him for transgressing military law. His friend

inquires whether it's appropriate, or "accurate," to describe them as "prisoners of war."[168]

The soldiers' reluctance, and enmity towards, military service during the Korean War

veers away from characterizations of male patriotism and loyalty. Avoidance of wartime

obligations, distrust of indigenous peoples, and condemnation of publicized war aims all

reflect issues that became much more pronounced during the later Vietnam War.

Soldier-produced Korean War cartoons also demonstrate that men feared

maiming by the environment, and not only potential harm by an enemy attack. The

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[166] Packwood, *Leatherhead in Korea*, 43. Another Marine cannot brush his teeth, because an ice storm froze his toothbrush and canteen, 46. Other Marines radio for a jet fighter to drop napalm on an abandoned hovel. They quickly rush toward the conflagration, warming their hands over the burning building, 48-49.

[167] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 34.

[168] Silverstein, *Take Ten*, 11, 21.

oppressive Korean climate discussed in these cartoons—and the desire to escape from the cold and heat—taps into a theme that veterans later highlighted when sharing personal experiences. Veteran Arthur R. May remembered the fact that "it was the coldest cold I have ever seen in my life . . . and it was the hottest hot I have ever been in my life . . . but [Korea] had complete extremes" in seasonal temperatures.[169] Sergeant W. B. Woodruff recollected that when his unit relocated to defensible positions against a Chinese offensive into South Korea, men "were often certain [they] had frostbite. When we were ordered to dismount, our first efforts went to fire building."[170] Former soldier Arthur Macedo "trudged through knee-deep snow and tried to bury [his] head in [his] neck to avoid the biting wind."[171] Corporal Victor Fox and his companions suffered "temperatures at one time as low as -22°F" and "heavy snowstorms" that brought activity to a halt.[172] Besides the "fear and tension of combat," the "successive agony of lugging yourself and equipment up interminable hills" constituted a "gloomy cloud" that hung over Private Dave Koegel's experience in Korea. Once Koegel ascended the rugged cliff, in artic temperatures, the platoon sergeant ordered men to dig into the "frozen, granite-like hills [that] resist[ed] the most well-directed and ferocious chops of an entrenching tool."[173] Veterans' hostile experience with the Korean climate pervades much oral testimony, an issue paralleled only by recitations of violent conflict.

Artists drew on the environmental motif to lampoon military leadership by stressing a connection between the Korean weather and military meteorologists at Weather Headquarters. One cartoon marks the transition between winter and spring:

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[169] Arthur R. May, Oral History Interview.
[170] Sergeant W. B. Woodruff, Jr., Interview, *The Korean War*, 7.
[171] Sergeant Arthur Macedo, Interview, *The Korean War*, 8.
[172] Corporal Victor Fox, Interview, *The Korean War*, 14.
[173] Private Dave Koegel, Interview, *The Korean War*, 17.

"Today's the first day of spring. All winter clothing must be turned in. We don't want our men to be burdened down with a lot of hot clothes."[174] As soon as soldiers welcomed a reprieve from frostbite, they faced the scorching heat of summer. Soldiers also expressed their frustration with Army weather forecasters. Sergeant Mabry depicted a meteorologist at the "Weather Briefing Headquarters" donning a swami, and equipped with a crystal ball to predict the weather. An officer orders the meteorologist to throw out the crystal ball, as he doesn't "care how accurate it is!"[175] Another meteorologist pushes an officer back toward the Weather Headquarters on skis after he wrongly predicts the weather. He forecasted snow, but instead the weather was intensely hot and humid.[176] Joe Yank and Mike McGurk rarely suffered from extreme weather conditions. In fact, their escapades throughout Korea resembled a wonderland of beautiful, cool weather that neither chilled nor exasperated the two heroes. While *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* incorporated a far more realistic setting—depictions of rugged terrain, snow, and heat— they lacked commentary on how these factors depressed soldier morale. Instead, realist comic books, like their romantic counterparts, viewed warfare strictly through the prism of combat. However, soldiers used the environmental to subtly contribute to a wider cultural condemnation of military leadership. Joe Yank flaunted military command—and sometimes made officers look incompetent in the process—and artist Harvey Kurtzman illustrated grim reenactments of combat to inherently question the necessity of war. Soldiers maneuvered around the more explicit attack on leadership, but still questioned the intelligence of officers (symbolized by meteorologists) through an environmental motif.

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[174] Untitled Cartoon, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9*, no. 2 (2 January, 1953), 9.
[175] Cartoon by Sergeant Mabry, *Out of Line*, 15.
[176] Cartoon by Sergeant Mabry, *Out of Line*, 36.

By zeroing in on combat, many mainstream comic books eschewed any discussion of the internal divisions between officers, enlisted men, frontline soldiers, and support personnel, but soldier cartoons emphasized the enmity between frontline soldiers and serviceman stationed in the safety of rear base camps. A ragged, war weary soldier guards a procession of North Korean and Chinese P.O.W.s in one illustration. The artists place a sign in the background that reads, "Div. Rear," and position an overweight lieutenant directly in front of the sign. Whereas the frontline soldier wears filthy clothing, the lieutenant dons an immaculate uniform. This cartoon also identifies that rear soldiers rarely witnessed combat, thus characterizing combat in far more romantic terms. Rather than possessing an M-1 rifle, the rear officer brandishes an antique six-shooter placed in a decorative, ostentatious holster. He surveys the enemy P.O.W.s and surmises: "they don't look so tough to me." The frontline soldier, who likely witnessed American soldiers die fighting against this formidable foe looks upon the officer in complete disbelief.[177] Outside of cartoons, soldiers expressed frustration through personal correspondence. For example, Captain Norman Allen, in a personal letter, chaffed at hearing "some son-of-a-bitch stationed in Pusan—where he is so safe he doesn't even carry a gun, has hot showers every day, sleeps in a steam heated room between sheets, and has sufficient white women, liquor and cigarettes—gets to go to Japan. My God!" He candidly informed his mother that he hated "those rear-echelon bastards as much, or more, than the Chinese."[178] Two other soldiers are hunkered down in their makeshift sandbag fortress, enduring a heavy bombardment from enemy artillery. Servicemen operating from a distant base inquire whether the soldiers can "go forth and examine the shell holes—so

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[177] Untitled Cartoon, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 290 (17 October, 1952), 9.
[178] Captain Norman Allen, Personal Correspondence to Mother, *The Korean War*, 23.

that they can ascertain from whence the missiles are incoming." Both soldiers gaze incredulously at one another, and realize the absurdity of the question. If support personnel, stationed sometimes within mere kilometers of fierce battles, could not understand the soldier's experience in combat, how could those removed even further from the battlefield understand the soldier's experience? Thus, the relationship between frontline and rear-echelon soldiers might also symbolize the disconnected partnership between infantry and military brass.[179]

If combat dampened the soldiers' morale, life in the military camp exacerbated their depression and feelings of isolation from the civilian world. In soldier-produced illustrations, the consumption of disgusting chow constituted a pervasive problem that symbolized disparity between civilian life and military life, a constant reminder of home, of something lost. Most mainstream comic books contain minimal depictions of chow. In fact, most soldiers seem content with the food, and these few references pale in comparison to the heavy emphasis on combat and violence. Yet personal correspondence from soldiers in Korea to their families illustrated the desperation to acquire decent meals. "Dear Folks," wrote Private James Cardinal: "It's colder than the North Pole and we are getting miserable chow . . . I'm counting on your packages so much." Private Cardinal begged his parents to send "boxes of raisins, and sweet cocoa, a can of boneless ham," and many other homemade foodstuffs.[180] Discerning the ingredients of any meal befuddled even the most intelligent soldier. Cartoons argue that pack mules, horses, bulls, rats, and road kill comprised the main ingredients of hot food. "I don't identify it—I just

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[179] Both romantic and realist Korean war comic books do not distinguish between frontline and rear echelon soldiers in its episodes.
[180] Private James Cardinal, Personal Correspondence to Parents, *The Korean War*, 21-22.

serve it," declares one cook as a nervous GI finds skeletal remains on his plate.[181] Other

soldiers stand in the rain waiting for their turn to grab food from the mess hall. One man,

observing the heavy downpour, declares: "Looks like we'll have soup for chow!" Either

the rain will saturate what food the cooks prepared, or the men will simply drink the

rainwater from their bowls.[182] Another soldier, suffering from delirium, perceives the

company mess hall as a fine dining establishment. He looks carefully through the

"menu," and tells a friend that he will "try the chicken fricassee."[183] The fact that

someone snuck "meat into the hamburger" irritated another cook.[184] Depending upon

their position, frontline soldiers possessed some access to regular chow, but many times

relied solely upon C-Rations for sustenance. The lackluster choices available for food

consumption figured into the minds of many soldiers through their illustrations and

personal remembrances.[185]

The repeated references to chow fit into the larger story of returning home, which

played a prominent role in soldier-created cartoons. Illustrations of the home front

portrayed male soldiers as husbands and fathers, and linked their survival in combat with

returning to these domestic roles. Artists often reference this motif through humorous

depictions of American soldiers who adopt Korean or Japanese customs. Bill Hume

created many of these "When We Get Back Home" narratives, and published these in a

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[181] Assortment of Cartoons found in *Out of Line*, 21-22, 32, 66.

[182] Cartoon by Meyers, *Out of Line*, 36.

[183] Cartoon by Private Garnet Sleep, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 290 (17 October 1952), 9. Also see, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 149 (29 May 1952), 9. Two cartoons reference foodstuffs. One caption reads, "Peas porridge hot, pease porridge cold, what's in the pot, nine days old?" The other cartoon depicts two soldiers scarfing down C-Ration cans. One soldier jokingly inquires if he could trade his "chick-a-la-king" for his friend's "chile con carne;" Cartoon by W. L. Anderson, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 105 (15 April 1952), 9. Anderson's cartoon illustrates a cook in the mess hall placing "two fistfuls of flour, one fist of sugar, a dash of that, and whatever the heck this is . . ."

[184] Silverstein, *Take Ten*, 18.

[185] Also see, Packwood, *Leatherhead in Korea*, 66-67.

compiled volume by the end of the Korean War.[186] Most cartoons involve Navy sailors,

rather than Army soldiers or Marines. However, men serving in all four branches during

the Korean War accessed these cartoons through the magazine, and likely found them

humorous because of a shared experience of residing in Korea and Japan. "See—it's very

simple," one sailor informs his wife and children about keeping all shoes outside of the

house: "and saves lots of house cleaning too."[187] Another caricature depicts a sailor who

cannot readjust to using American currency as he asks his wife how much her ten-dollar

hat would cost in Japanese yen.[188] Sometimes in other cartoons, sailors would introduce

new furniture into the American household, such as the Japanese bed—which comprises

a modest mattress, two pillows, and quilt that lacks a bed frame and box spring.[189]

"Now—even if you do fall out [of bed] you won't get hurt!," he enthusiastically explains

to his wife. Similarly, another illustration shows an Army soldier, returned from war,

who replaces his dress shoes with Japanese *geta* footwear.[190] In a separate cartoon, a

woman speaks with a friend on the telephone and voices her concern that it may "take

awhile before [her husband is] adjusted" to living in back in America.[191] Meanwhile, her

Army husband sits barefooted at the living room coffee table eating rice with chopsticks.

Hume's cartoons articulated the idea that Asian and American cultures were compatible

from the soldier's viewpoint. Civilian spouses could not understand the soldier's

fascination with Asian culture, or why these men found Asian customs preferable to

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[186] Bill Hume and John Annarino, *When We Get Back Home from Japan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1953).
[187] Bill Hume, *Out of Line,* 27.
[188] Hume, *Out of Line*, 41.
[189] Hume, *Out of Line*, 48.
[190] Untitled Cartoon, *Out of Line*, 54; Bill Hume also uses the same idea in one cartoon that depicts an American sailor donning *geta* as he strolls along with his family. His wife points out the fact that his *geta* prevent his feet from becoming wet in the rain. Hume, *Out of Line,* 60.
[191] Cartoon by Don Klotz, *Out of Line*, 65.

American tradition. More importantly, these cartoons allowed soldiers to escape from the privations of war and reflect on life back home.

The wife and sweetheart figured into illustrations as the symbol of men's capacity in the domestic home. American women represented men's lost comforts of safety and home, particularly in Bill Hume's *When We Get Back Home* cartoons.[192] In these stories, artist John Annarino depicts American women in traditional domestic roles. A Navy seaman disciplines his child in one cartoon, as his wife watches in the background. Prior to the child's spanking, however, the wife diligently cooked dinner and set the table for her family.[193] Moreover, American women in these cartoons don modest and uniform attire: heels, long flowing dresses or skirts, long-sleeve shirts that cover the arms and bosom, and tidy perms.[194] Thus, *Pacific Stars and Stripes* cartoons that incorporated America women sometimes placed them in romanticized domestic roles. The loyalty and fidelity of women at home—dressed conservatively, and understanding of their husband's readjustment to American life—correlated with soldiers' perseverance in battle and crystallized male identities as father and husband.

Fictional soldiers might also receive depressing, problematic news from wives, mothers, and sweethearts that worsened their pining for home. Women's focus on the challenges at home—although less serious than the privations of soldiers on the front line—only exacerbated the desire of fictional men to return home. Returning home remained a distinct possibility for soldiers who operated under the "point system" that established a time frame for their eventual return to America. Those stationed on the

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[192] Hume and Annarino, *When We Get Back Home* incorporated a collage of cartoons and captions from the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* during the Korean War.
[193] Ibid., 11.
[194] Ibid., 25-26, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39.

Korean frontlines received four points each month, while support personnel operating in

the rear earned two points per month. Upon accumulating thirty-six points, the soldier

became eligible to rotate home.[195] Cartoonist Norval Packwood suggested the fact that

the receipt of news from home increased the soldier's desire to return home. One Marine

received a letter from his wife: "The furnace broke down, the wallpaper is coming loose .

. . she thinks she heard a prowler, and she wishes I was home." He coldly remarks, "*She*

wishes I was home!" His longing to return proves unparalleled.[196]

When American women did not symbolize comfort and safety, soldiers illustrated

their disloyalty in the "Dear John" breakup letter. Thus, cartoons did not always idealize

the home front—sometimes soldiers received depressing news from loved ones that

dampened their morale. For the creators of *Joe Yank,* combat and women were

comparable in that they both either emboldened men or destroyed them. One episode

entitled "G.I. Renegade" begins with the narrator stating: "Combat, like a woman, can

make a man—or break him! Sometimes it makes a soldier turn sour and gives him

thoughts of A.W.O.L."[197] The idea that women broke men correlates to the depiction of

"Dear John" letters in *Pacific Stars and Stripes* cartoons. As two soldiers carefully read

letters during their stint in Korea, the artists capture one soldier's frustration after reading

a "Dear John" letter from his girlfriend back home. The other soldier, unaware that "Dear

John" is a euphemism for breaking up a relationship, asks his friend "how come your

girlfriend calls you 'Dear John,' Lou?"[198] Both *Joe Yank* and this cartoon capture one

common aspect of the soldier's experience at war—the painful breakup with a sweetheart

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[195] Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 131.
[196] Packwood, *Leatherhead in Korea*, 50-51.
[197] "G.I. Renegade," *Joe Yank 6* (Standard Comics, 1952), 1.
[198] Cartoon by Private Peter Chanin, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8,* no. 112 (22 April 1952), 9.

back home. By April 1953, the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* reported that men of the 7th

Division started a "Dear John" club in Korea, inviting all those "disappointed in love" to

"apply for membership." The article cited the fact that "ten platoon members have

received Dear John letters in the last two months and have banded together to provide

mutual sympathy." Men in this platoon speculated that their inability to write home

frequently precipitated the influx of "Dear John" letters.[199] Private Frank J. Jones, who

received a "Dear John" letter from his beloved fiancée, wrote the editor of *War Time*

Romances an emotional and heart-felt letter asking for advice. The *Pacific Stars and*

Stripes reported that Private Jones received "more than 600 letters" that offered advice,

sympathy, or even substitutes for his "lost sweetheart."[200] These articles suggest that

many soldiers likely identified with the "Dear John" cartoons featured in the *Stars and*

Stripes.[201]

Furthermore, by 1952, military psychologists argued that "Dear John" letters

constituted a significant cause of psychological agony among soldiers in Korea. Corporal

Tim Adams reported in the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* that "another cause of psychic

anguish . . . is the "Dear John" letter (or any of its infinite variations), which leads to

overwhelming depression." Psychiatrist Dermott A. P. Smith suggested that the

psychological consequences of "Dear John" letters manifested into "imagined physical

illnesses that are very real to the man under mental strain." Therefore, when soldiers

illustrated the emotional turmoil wrought by "Dear John" letters, they captured a problem

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[199] "'Dear John' Club Started By Men in Tank Platoon," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9,* no. 106 (17 April 1953), 19.

[200] "Romance Magazine Aids Lovelorn PFC," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9*, no. 34 (4 February 1953), 19.

[201] Also see, Silverstein, *Take Ten,* 15. He illustrates a Russian soldier received a "Dear Ivan" letter from his girlfriend. The man appears thoroughly depressed by the news. That Silverstein depicted Russian soldiers shows the parallel experiences of warfare that transcend the common dichotomy of "us versus them."

that many real-life soldiers found important, and traumatic, in their own war experiences.[202] Artists juxtaposed heartbreaking "Dear John" letters with imagery that sexualized women, reinforced soldier bachelorhood, and depicted sexual interaction without emotional baggage.

Thus, escapist narratives in soldier illustrations also involved the portrayal of women as sexual objects—akin to *Joe Yank*—to construct a bachelor identity among male soldiers. Artists defined fictional male soldiers in relation to sexualized women, with whom the soldiers desired sexual liaisons.[203] Like *Joe Yank*, soldier-produced illustrations often present women not as actors, but simply mirrors to the heterosexuality of male soldiers. Both romantic comic books and soldier-produced cartoons emphasized men's sexual attraction toward women. Despite the inaccuracies and fictions of combat in romantic comics, when they featured sexuality they captured a theme that soldiers found important in their own publications. Soldiers created cartoons and comic strips that often illustrated American "dog-faced" G.I.s hankering after beautiful American (and sometimes Asian) women. For example, one cartoon features women rebuffing the advances of two men, and presumably giving them both black eyes. The caption reads, "what this town needs is a little more patriotism." In this scenario, the women defend themselves against the men's sexual aggression. The soldiers lament the fact that

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[202] Tim Adams, "Combat Crack-Up," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 52 (2 March 1952), 8.

[203] For similar representations of women in World War II, see: Ann Elizabeth Pfau, *MissYourLovin: GIs, Gender, and Domesticity during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), e-book, chapter one "Fighting for Home," ¶1-2, accessed 19 February 2013, http://www.gutenberg-e.org/pfau/chapter1.html. Pfau investigates the soldier-produced imagery and writings about women in World War II, and argues that "in the waiting arms of wives and sweethearts, young men found both a reason to serve and the promise of escape from wartime stress." As Pfau contends, men romanticized and idealized "the women they left behind and provided soldiers with a motivation to fight." The paradox is the fact that while women bolstered morale and provided soldiers with a motivation to fight, men occasionally distrusted women's fidelity on the home front and this undermined morale in World War II; Also, see: Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

women—symbolic of the home front—lacked patriotism and support for soldiers, and their disrespect led to rejection.[204] These illustrations allowed men to assert masculinity through hyper-sexuality and escape from the privations of warfare. In sexualizing women, men deployed both the iconoicMarilyn Monroe, and anonymous Korean and Japanese civilians.

When Marilyn Monroe appeared in cartoons produced by infantrymen in *The Stars and Stripes*, her presence always played up the heterosexual desires of male soldiers. One cartoon, published in June 1952, depicts a queue of infantrymen waiting to enter a tent at a temporary base in Korea. The caption under the cartoon reads: "All I know is that someone in this tent is supposed to have one of those much-publicized pictures of Marilyn Monroe!"[205] While Monroe often posed for calendars and other photo opportunities, this cartoon specifically references a controversial picture that leaked earlier in 1952: a calendar series that featured Monroe in the nude.[206] To the dismay of Monroe's fans, the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* reported in April that the calendar distribution company sold out of her photograph.[207] Soldiers in another cartoon placed a

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[204] Cartoon by Sergeant Edward G. Kucera, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9,* no. 15 (17 January, 1953), 7.

[205] Cartoon by Private Lawrence Nordstrom, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 161 (10 June, 1952), 9.

[206] This photograph caused some controversy in the public media. *New York Times* columnist Barbara Berch Jamison referenced Monroe's "preposterous past" in a July, 1953, article—noting the various aspects of Monroe's unusual childhood that defined her as a person. See, Jamison, "A Portrait of Marilyn Monroe Showing Why Gentlemen Prefer That Blonde," *The New York Times*, 12 July, 1953, X5; For more on this controversy see, for example , "Photos 'Haunt' Film Star,' *The Washington Post*, 19 December 1952, 31.; "If It's Nude, It's Lewd, Says Georgia Board," *The Washington Post,* 27 February, 1953, 14; Aline Mosby, "For Marilyn It's Been a Rough Road," *The Washington Post*, 13 January, 1952, L1; In a subsequent 1991 oral history interview, Mosby noted that during the early 1950s "actors and actresses want to say something that's going to help their careers along, so it's hard to say that it's very objective reporting." She specifically mentions the Marilyn Monroe piece from 1952. See, Interview with Aline Mosby, Women in Journalism Oral History Project, Washington Press Club, accessed through In the First Person (1 February, 2013).

[207] "Miss Monroe's 'Art' Fans Get Dejecting News," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 105 (15 April, 1952), 7.

sign in front of their tent that read: "This tent *on* limits to Marilyn Monroe."[208] Another

cartoon illustrates three soldiers exiting a "cinerama," where they viewed Marilyn

Monroe on screen. One soldier appears incapacitated, and his two comrades carry him

out of the theater. The caption reads, "Marilyn in 3 dimensions was too much,"

suggesting that her beauty simply knocked the soldier off his feet.[209] Perhaps because of

the full display of her body, or due to her success as a sensual blonde on film, Monroe

appeared with more frequency in soldier's cartoons and the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* than

any other woman during the time. The soldiers wanted to incorporate Monroe into their

everyday lives in the service, whether through displaying her photographs or the fantasy

of inviting her to visit the military camp.[210]

Marilyn Monroe and other female celebrities figured into many *Pacific Stars and*

Stripes columns that discussed the "perfect girl" and encouraged male sexual fantasy.

Editors at *The Stars and Stripes* published Edith Roosevelt's article "No Perfect Girl,

Says Film Star," in which the columnist discussed how to piece together the perfect

woman. The article begins by citing the fact that actor "Dale Robertson says there's no

such thing as the perfect woman." And confirming the necessity of male fantasy,

Robertson continued with the fact that "a man's got to assemble his dream girl from the

features of at least half a dozen women." These half-dozen features included Marilyn

Monroe's bosom, Hedy Lamarr's "tantalizing lips," Linda Darnell's hips, and Olivia de

Havilland's eyes. *The Stars and Stripes* incorporated a collage of photographs beside the

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[208] Cartoon by Clifford L. Johnson, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9,* no. 2 (2 January, 1953), 9.

[209] Cartoon by Private Don Girardi, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 9*, no. 1 (2 January, 1953), 8.

[210] Editors placed real-life images of American celebrities side-by-side with "Cartoon Capers," which probably allowed soldiers to quickly access both humor and sexual fantasy.

article, detailing the desirable body-part for each of the women in question.[211] This article

contributed to the social construction of an ideal male soldier masculinity by encouraging

and condoning the practice of soldiers' fantasizing about women during the Korean War.

Soldier cartoons suggested that even if soldiers writhed in psychological agony

from their war experience, they still fantasized about the nude female body. For example,

one cartoon depicts three wounded men in an infirmary. One soldier, reading a book,

asks: "A penny for your thoughts?" The soldier with whom he is conversing appears

uninjured physically, presumably suffering from shell shock, or Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder. The soldier's mental state prevents him from normal spoken communication.

Instead, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, he frantically carves the naked bust of

a woman into the wooden support of the infirmary. His two comrades appear both

shocked and attracted to the carving. He diligently constructed the breasts, flat stomach,

crotch, and upper thighs of the woman. He does not carve a face, presumably an

irrelevant feature in comparison with the commonly fetishized body parts present.[212] The

soldier revels in sexual fantasy, in part, to cope with his horrific war experiences. The

wood carving substitutes for conversation and allows the soldier to communicate with his

comrades, despite psychological injury.

Soldiers also defined themselves in relation to the Women's Army Corps

(WAC)—representing Wacs as either beautiful "camp followers" or masculine females.

Wacs stand at attention in one cartoon. Their tight shirts expose the curvature of their

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[211] Edith Kermit Roosevelt, "No Perfect Girl, Says Film Star," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 256 (8 September, 1952), 10.

[212] Cartoon drawn by Corporal Charles Earp, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 161 (10 June, 1952), 9; Another cartoon created by Sergeant Frank Miller adopts the same motif. Two soldiers wait anxiously for a third soldier to finish constructing a nude woman out of snow. "Careful! Careful!" they implore, as the soldier gently smoothens out the woman's stomach and hips. See, *Out of Line*, 57.

bosoms, and short, loose skirts flutter in the wind. A male officer inspects the cohort of

women. The wind blows fiercely, and the women attempt to hold their skirts in place.

The male officer chastises his female companion: "I don't give a damn what the manual

says, Lieutenant. I said 'Present Arms!'" Unfortunately, the petite blonde women fear

that the wind will raise their skirts up and expose their bodies. While these Wacs are not

cast in an explicitly sexual role, the artist implies that underneath the uniforms, most

Wacs possess sexy, petite figures.[213] The male officer's role reinforces an idea that

women cannot perform a military function without simultaneously remaining sexual

objects: their bodies—and male sexual desire—prevent these Wacs from transcending the

status of sexual object. But the artist uses this military drill as a pretext to reveal the legs

of these women. Similarly, a soldier who escorts a Wac back toward base gazes at her

slightly exposed cleavage, and watches her breasts as he hits bumps on a rocky road. The

woman astutely holds the soldier accountable for his sexualization of her: "I think you're

trying to *hit the bumps*," she exclaims.[214] Another cartoon depicts a group of Wacs as

haggard, masculine females commanded by an obese WAC officer. The caption reads:

"out of uniform again, eh?" Four Wacs are lined up, standing at attention. The artist

depicts three women with flat chests, and rather homely facial features. He illustrates the

fourth woman with large breasts. The overweight WAC officer apparently disagrees with

the appearance of her breasts, and reprimands her for being out of uniform. The women

in these illustrations are not placed in an important military capacity. In the first two

examples, Wacs function as sexy camp followers that are pleasing to the eye and bolster

men's morale in combat. The third cartoon implies that the Women's Air Corps

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[213] Cartoon by J.H. Cash, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 149 (29 May, 1952), 9.

[214] Cartoon by Private Lawrence Nordstrom, *Out of Line*, 45.

transforms feminine females into masculine, austere women. On the contrary, historian

Melinda Pash cites the fact that Wacs served vital support roles in the military, witnessed

the horrors of frontline combat, and usually allowed the military to push more men into

infantry capacities.[215] The reality of women's service in the Korean War does not match

up with the depiction of women in these illustrations. However, men likely resented the

fact that Wacs forced them into dangerous positions in Korea. By portraying these

women as incompetent sex objects—who serve no vital military role, aside from drawing

out male desire—the male cartoonists could voice their aggravation with the military and

buttress ideas of soldier heterosexuality. [216]

In *Joe Yank*, the male protagonist's lust for American nurses and civilians allowed

him to assert masculinity while simultaneously shirking his duties as a soldier. Joe Yank

and Mike McGurk enjoyed suffering wounds during combat, because they were placed in

close proximity to buxom female nurses who constituted the prime objects of their

attraction. Joe Yank rarely hesitated to return to the battlefield during his stint in Korea.

As in other romantic war comic books, a reluctance to fight implied cowardice or

feebleness. On occasion Joe "hated to go back to the outfit" when he left the infirmary.

"All them (sigh)—pretty nurses, I'd rather look at them than the sarge!" The artist imply

that pining after beautiful voluptuous nurses constituted the only reasonable explanation

for hesitating to do one's manly duty in combat.[217] In the episode "The Purple Heart

Kid," a North Korean artillery battery blasts Joe out of supply truck filled with ketchup.

A trio of French corpsmen find Yank covered in ketchup, but assume that he is badly

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[215] Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 161-168.

[216] Cartoon by Private Simon Jeruchim, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 112 (22 April, 1952), 9.

[217] "The Purple Heart Kid," *Joe Yank 6* (Standard Comics, 1952), 12.

wounded. Joe, not usually one to shirk his opportunity to kill commies, decides that the French hospital might teach him to "parley voo" with the French ladies. McGurk discovers Joe goldbricking in the French hospital, surrounded by two attractive female nurses. "Thanks for the cognac, 'girls! It's tray bone! But haven't you got another kiss for a poor wounded G.I.?" Within the confines of an infirmary of hospital, Joe perceives the nurses as both maternal and sexual figures, from whom he can extract sympathy. It's possible that nurses seemed especially tantalizing because they operated in an environment that forced close, intimate interaction with wounded male soldiers.

Stars and Stripes columns reinforced a bachelorhood mentality among male soldiers, transmitting dire warnings about the perils of marriage. Columnist Jay Breen argued that "staying single in 1952 is going to take constant vigilance in men over 30." The Bachelors' Protective league—an organization of men that abhorred marriage— sponsored the study of women, suggesting that "those of us who have never been led to the altar . . . need wise, constant guidance." The article analyzes the common tactics used by movie "sirens" to rope in a husband. While the article is explicitly humorous and tongue-in-cheek, it identifies that women possess the capability to dupe men into marriage. For example, Elizabeth Taylor adopts the "protect me from this big wicked world" technique to seduce lovers. Taylor's skill as a "huntress" proved most effective "against bachelors under 30." Meanwhile, Marilyn Monroe figures into this article as the "sexy, we'll live on love the rest of our lives" woman. Her sex appeal and charm could disarm even the most stalwart bachelor, who defended himself against marriage for decades. Joan Crawford, now decades into her career, represents the common gold-digger who possesses multiple personalities. She attracts widowers with a "supposedly mature

front" only to reveal the "truth" that "no woman can be trusted to reach complete maturity." Other women mentioned in the article tended to exploit men's paternalistic inclinations by posing as the "little girl variety." Or, a woman might pose as the "good companion" for the sports-addict, but that character trait constituted "just one more feminine wile." The content of this article dovetails with the idea presented in *Joe Yank*, that women both uplift and corrupt men. Although *Joe Yank* and the *Stars and Stripes* article do not identify the ideal vision of the feminine, they both inherently argue soldiers are better to avoid marriage and enjoy bachelorhood.[218]

Fictional American soldiers fantasized about opportunities to liaise with Korean dames after stints of combat. Sergeant Norval Packwood, whom the Marine Corps charged with creating cartoon depictions of the Korean War, showed one Marine guarding a group of comely Korean women. "Awright, you guys stand back!," the Marine orders. The women attract an increasing lot of Marines. He informs the other Marines that "the captain says he'll search this group of civilians for concealed weapons hisself." Not only do these Marines wish to fraternize with the Korean dames, but they are stymied from this ambition by the company captain who desires some quality "inspection" time with these ladies.[219] Other fictional soldiers enjoy driving reconnaissance missions to pick up local ladies.[220] The fact that cartoon soldiers enjoyed liaisons with women during extended periods of combat resembles the depiction of women in romantic war comics such as *Joe Yank*. In both cases, women appear in close

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[218] Jay Breen, "This is Leap Year, Men: Danger, Enticement Ahead," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 3 (3 January, 1952), 12; Bill Hume*, Babysan*, also depicted Japanese women as duplicitous and wily, 8, 10, 16, 25-26, 39, 41, 52-53, 55. The Japanese "Babysan" represented an amalgamation of American and Japanese cultural and physical features that men found desirable. She typically carried relationships with multiple soldiers, curried favors and gifts, and maintained an emotional façade of "love" with her men.

[219] Packwood, *Leatherhead in Korea*, 26-27.

[220] Cartoon by Fehlman, "Cartoon Capers," *Pacific Stars and Stripes 8*, no. 174 (18 June, 1952), 9.

proximity to the battlefield and function as a reward for soldiers who survive the fighting. In other words, as fictional women became more compatible with the battlefield— whether as Asian civilians, American celebrities, or servicewomen—they also reflected the heterosexuality and bachelorhood of American soldiers. Depictions of American civilians on the home front correlated with constructions of father/husband identities among the male counterparts.

Stars and Stripes provided one of the few outlets for soldiers' entertainment as well as informationabout the news back home. "The only information we got about home was through the mails or the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper—if it wasn't too badly soiled or shredded by the time you got to read it," remembered veteran Victor Fox.[221] For American soldiers and servicemen serving in Korea, the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* allowed men to create illustrations that referenced and reinforced the collective experience among soldiers. The fact that these illustrations encompassed characters from across all branches of the service allowed artists to establish multiple "realities" of the experience overseas, whether it was the frontline soldier, suffering from frostbite and Chinese human wave attacks, or the rear echelon support personnel that handled the clerical work, distributed ordinance, and dealt with boredom by improvising various games.

These humorous "funnies" and military publications also heavily objectified women, and played a role in constructing the ideal soldier masculinity as the father or bachelor. American wives and sweethearts remained in loyal, domestic roles on the home front and motivated men to endure combat and return alive. Men also received depressing

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[221] Corporal Victor Fox, Interview, *The Korean War*, 27.

news from home, symbolized by the "Dear John" letter. Articles about "Dear John"

letters bolstered the desirability of bachelorhood, and also reflected soldiers' broader

depression, anxiety, and fatigue. Articles and cartoons condoned male sexual fantasy and

extolled the value of remaining unwed. Women appeared in both romantic war comics

and soldier-produced cartoons as sexualized caricatures for which men expressed sexual

desire. Artists placed soldiers in opposition to military and political objectives, and

veered away from the idea that patriotism or idealism motivated soldiers to fight. The

Pacific Stars and Stripes consistently emphasized women and male sexuality in columns

and cartoons, while patriotic material remained scarce. These emphases suggest editors

tapped into male sexuality to entertain soldiers and improve morale.

The cartoons analyzed in this chapter contributed to a broader cultural effort to

cast the soldier in a sympathetic light, lampoon military leadership, and publicly express

discontent with the Korean War. Chapter three delves into realist comic books, especially

those produced by Entertaining Comics, which offered an alternative discussion of

warfare during the Korean conflict. Soldier-produced illustrations reflected discontent

among soldiers. But unlike realist comics, these cartoons did not directly attack political

and military leadership. Among a spate of literature that emphasized soldiers as heroic

and heterosexual, realist depictions constructed an alternative soldier-masculinity through

its presentation of men's sorrows, cowardice, and fear as socially acceptable. Entertaining

Comics philosophically questioned the legitimacy of war—especially the Korean War,

with its tenuous connection to American national security—and exposed the inhumanity

of violent conflict.

Chapter Three

A Rugged, Destructive War: Entertaining Comics, Realist Interpretations of the

Korean War, and Reflections of Anti-War Sentiment in War Comic Books.

"Any other men hit?," asks a soldier in the 1952 Korean War comic book

Frontline Combat. "Just one more man! (Gasp) Not much of a man! (Gasp) Just a little

half-pint of a man! (Gasp) Just a little shnooker," responds the company cook. Entitled

"Bellyrobber!," the story centers on the budding relationship between a company's irate

cook—also referred to as Sarge—and an orphaned North Korean boy who wanders into

the mess hall. The cook adopts the small child as his own, saving him "a piece of

chocolate," finding him "a new pair of shoes," and even dressing the child in an Army

uniform. Later, as the cook travels toward the frontlines to deliver food, North Korean

saboteurs sneak into the military camp. The cook hears several gunshots as he returns to

the mess hall. He rushes into the large tent and discovers two North Korean soldiers

standing over the child's corpse. "WHAT DID YOU DO?," the cook screams as he

viciously guns down the two soldiers. The story concludes with the cook in an

inconsolable rage. The narrator opines that Sarge's "smile wrinkles are gone from [his]

face, and the hard glint of old has returned to [his] eyes!" *Frontline Combat* and other

realist war comic books published at this time detailed events, such as this tragic

infanticide, to place the merciless brutality of warfare in high relief.[222] Creators of realist

war comics despised the rosy portrait of war provided by romantic comics such as *Joe*

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[222] "Bellyrobbers!," *Frontline Combat 6* (Entertaining Comics, May 1952), reprint in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat,* Vol. 1 (Maryland: Gemstone Publishing, 2008), 205-211. Emphasis appears in the original.

Yank.[223] War did not enrich the lives of men. It did not rejuvenate manhood. Instead, it

provided thousands of opportunities for men to die, to experience the death of friends, or

witness the destruction of humanity.

Realist war comics tapped into an existent anti-war sentiment among American

citizens and soldiery and emphasized survival over heroism to dismantle contemporary

romantic narratives and condemn American involvement in Korea. Romantic war comics

used warfare to illustrate the soldier-hero, and defined men by their feats of strength on

the battlefield. While romantic comics did not stress the link between warfare and

building men, their quest to glamourize the soldier-hero obscured the wretched conditions

of combat—avoiding issues of death, survival, and fear. Realist war comics offered an

alternative discussion of warfare that presented a sympathetic view of soldiers, even

cowards. It emphasized how the terrors of combat *unmade* men and destroyed humanity.

The publishers grew restless with limited warfare in Korea, reflecting broader American

frustration with the conflict. By allowing their characters to die or experience

dismemberment, fear, and discouragement, realist comics expanded the symbolic

meaning of soldiery. No longer did the soldier persona uphold an ideal stoic masculine

soldier, but it allowed men to shed tears and experience emotional catharsis. Historian

Joan W. Scott contends that cultural symbols "evoke multiple (and often contradictory)

representations" of gender.[224] Part of understanding gender is to acknowledge the

"normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meaning of the symbols, that

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[223] See John Benson, "A Talk with Harvey Kurtzman," in *The Comics Journal Library: Harvey Kurtzman: Interviews with the Pioneering Cartoonist* (Washington: Fantagraphics Books, 2006), 24; Harvey Kurtzman, interview in *The E.C. Archives: Two-Fisted Tales*, vol. 1 (West Plains, Missouri: Gemstone Publishing, 2006), p. 76.

[224] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review 91*, no. 5 (1986): 1067.

attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities."[225] Romantic ideas about warfare, filtered through the war comics explored in chapter one, presented the male soldier as hyper-heterosexual, fearless, and competent. By linking cowardice to irrationality, these publishers also drew from political discourses that described irrationality as the human defect present in communists, homosexuals, and subversives. Realist war comics contained scarce discussion of male sexuality, and focused on men's fear, fatigue, distrust of the government, and disgust with warfare. Whereas the male libido motivated Joe Yank to kill the enemy, realist narratives emphasized survival—not patriotism or duty—as the motivation for violence.

Artist and writer Harvey Kurtzman, the mind behind Entertaining Comics' *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*, wanted to push back against the current of comic books that romanticized warfare.[226] In an interview, Kurtzman saw two problems with the romantic portrayal of war. First, children gleaned the wrong impression of warfare—artists did not present a depressing and futile enterprise, but instead depicted male soldiers that were rarely harmed and enjoyed combat. Kurtzman's stories do not contain rogue soldiers, like Joe Yank, who openly flaunt leadership, kill merrily, and acquire white women on the battlefield. To make war "glamorous," Kurtzman thought, was "a terrible notion, what a twisted, what a perverted attitude, to want to make war glamorous."[227] Second, Kurtzman wanted to transcend a myopic view of warfare that presented "soldiers [spending] their time merrily killing little buck-toothed yellow men

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[225] Ibid., 1067.

[226] Historian Christopher Couch describes Kurtzman as one of the "few comic book creators [who] have had as profound an effect on popular art and media, and culture as a whole." Couch, "Harvey Kurtzman," in *The Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, vol. 1 (California: Greenwood Press, 2010), 356; Also see, Denis Kitchen and Paul Buhle, *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman: The Mad Genius of Comics* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2009).

[227] Benson, "A Talk with Harvey Kurtzman," 24.

with the butt of a rifle." He further argued that adults were obligated to divulge the truth about war to children—"I had to determine a certain attitude . . . [that] if I was to tell kids anything about war . . . [I would] research actual war and tell kids about what was true about war."[228] Harvey Kurtzman served in the United States Army during World War II, but remained stationed on the home front throughout the war. Although he did not experience warfare firsthand, Kurtzman rejected the simplistic view offered by previous comic books that did not reconcile with his perception of how World War II or Korean War veterans experienced combat.[229]

Kurtzman's goal to replace romanticism with realism is analogous to the way famous soldiers also expressed their disillusionment with warfare during World War II and the Korean War. In his 1949 autobiography, *To Hell and Back*, Audie Murphy explains how combat in Sicily and Salerno, Italy, shattered any romantic notions he once held about warfare. The Great Depression placed Murphy in a state of squalor, where he escaped from the grim reality of poverty during childhood by fantasizing about soldiery and warfare. In his dreams, "I was on a faraway battlefield, where bugles blew, banners streamed, and men charged gallantly across flaming hills . . . where enemy bullets always miraculously missed me, and my trusty rifle forever hit home."[230] Through introspection, Murphy questions his initial assumptions about war in the memoir. "How do you pit skill against skill if you cannot even see the enemy? Where is the glamour in blistered feet and a growling stomach? And where is the expected adventure?"[231] Murphy does not draw an explicit connection between his childhood ideas of warfare and popular culture.

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[228] Ibid., 24.
[229] Harvey Kurtzman, interview in *The E.C. Archives: Two-Fisted Tales*, vol. 1 (West Plains, Missouri: Gemstone Publishing, 2006), p. 76.
[230] Murphy, *To Hell and Back,* 6.
[231] Ibid., 4.

However, Murphy attempts to transmit to his audience the stark contrast that exists between civilian conceptions of warfare and the harsh reality of combat. His status as a public figure exemplifies that American popular culture during the war contained complex messages about the meaning of warfare and its relationship to masculinity and male adventure.[232]

Other historians also acknowledge Harvey Kurtzman's use of realism to present scathing critiques of warfare. Historian Christopher Couch contends that *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* "set a high standard for accuracy and quality in war comics." He continues by stating that the creator Harvey Kurtzman "replaced the jingoism and unquestioning cheerleading of previous comics [in World War II and the early Korean War] with culturally aware and reflective stories that were often critical of war."[233] Cartoonist John Severin, whom historian John Weinzierl describes as "one of the very best artists to ever work in war/military and Western comic books," joined Kurtzman in producing *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*.[234] Severin's artistic talent brought individual soldiers to life, vividly illustrating their facial expressions, wounds, and death. His ability to realistically portray the agony of soldiers supported Kurtzman's aim to provide his audience with a dose of real war.

While it's difficult to gauge consumption patterns of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales,* some evidence suggests that soldiers were avid readers of comic books during the decade after World War II. By 1949, the Army imposed bans on the

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[232] For example, in this beginning of his memoir Murphy often references the imagery of Marine recruiting posters and compares its message to his experience in World War II. He finds that real soldiers did not match up with the idealistic muscularity presented in recruitment posters. Nor did Marines exude the mental fortitude, heroism, and cool-headedness so common in popular stories.

[233] Couch, "Harvey Kurtzman," 356.

[234] John F. Weinzierl, "John Severin," in *The Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, vol. 2 (California: Greenwood Press, 2010), 563-564.

distribution of some comic books to base post exchanges. The *New York Times* reported

the fact that "soldiers who buy their comic magazines at Army post exchanges may find

some of their lustier crime and horror favorites missing from the stands."[235] It's unclear

how prolific the soldier readership of comic books was during the early 1950s, but

publishers distributed at least sixty million comic books throughout the United States on

a monthly basis. Major General Edwin P. Parker, head of the Joint Disciplinary Board of

the U.S. Army, promoted serious discussion among military brass about the necessity of

cleaning up comic books throughout the Post Exchange system. Gen. Parker and others

did not want to "censor soldiers' reading," but avoided any material that crossed a

vaguely defined "line of decency." This Army regulation occurred at the same time

comic book publishers attempted to self-regulate their collective publications by

establishing an informal comics code that prohibited "crime, sadistic torture, wanton

illustrations, vulgar and obscene language, humorous or glamorous treatment of divorce"

and racism.[236] That comic book publishers made an effort to regulate the content of

magazines, and the Army felt compelled to similarly constrain the distribution of some

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[235] Dorothy Barclay, "Army to Limit Sale of Comics: 'Line of Decency' to be Drawn at Posts—Publishers Now Explain Screening Plan," *The New York Times*, 18 January, 1949, 26.

[236] Barclay, "Army to Limit Sale of Comics," 26. Public concern about the subversive effects of comic books upon children reached a fever pitch by 1948, with many organizations and cities banning certain genres. Other child advocacy groups charged comic publishers with contributing the rise of juvenile delinquency. For more, see: "36 Comic Books Banned in Detroit as 'Corrupting,'" *The Washington Post*, 29 April, 1948, 16; "Comic Books Held Harmful to Youth: Careful Supervision of Reading for Children Urged at Forum of Man and Three Women," *The New York Times*, 5 May, 1948, 35; "Boys, 11 and 12, Fly Stolen Plane 120 Miles on Knowledge Obtained from Comic Books," *The New York Times*, 22 May, 1948, 17; "Boy's Death by Hanging Laid to Comic Book," *The Washington Post*, 3 June, 1948, B1; "Juvenile Delinquency Seen on Increase; Quaker Official Blames New Comic Books," *The New York Times*, 24 June, 1948, 22; "New Drive on Comic Books: State Law in California for Control Urged by Agencies," *The New York Times*, 29 June, 1948, 20; Robert Gorham Davis, "Standards for Comic Books," *The New York Times*, 11 July, 1948, E10; Dr. Ernest G. Osborne, "The Family Scrapbook: Comics and Kids," *The Washington Post*, 12 August, 1948, B13; "Comic Book Law Asked," *The Washington Post*, 17 September, 1948, 21; "Forum Finds Good as Well as Bad in Comic Books," *The Washington Post*, 18 October, 1948, B1; "Comic Books Banned," *The Washington Post*, 1 December, 1948, 6; "Comic Books Burned," *The Washington Post*, 11 December, 1948, B11; "Baltimore to Seek 'Objectionable' Comic Book Ban," *The Washington Post*, 14 January 1949, 20; "Man Reads Crime Comic Book, Kills Wife, Her Friend," *The Washington Post,* 11 February 1949, 25.

comic books suggests that soldiers consumed considerable amounts of comic literature. This also suggests that officers and military higher-ups were interested in the content of comic books. The 1949 Comics Code did not regulate depictions of war, and it's unlikely that the Army prohibited the distribution of mainstream war comics. Entertaining Comics' CEO William Gaines, and artist Harvey Kurtzman, were likely privy to consumption patterns among civilians and military personnel, but it's unknown how a soldier audience responded to their realistic portrayals of war.

In the first issue of *Frontline Combat,* Kurtzman depicted how American G.I.s lost their humanity through the merciless violence of war in order to condemn the fanciful, unrealistic nature of war presented in other comics. Kurtzman opined that he felt "strongly about not wanting to say anything glamorous about war, and everything that went before *Two-Fisted Tales* [and *Frontline Combat*] had glamorized war."[237] One particular episode, "Enemy Assault!," illustrates the fear and psychological trauma experienced by soldiers in combat.[238] The unnamed protagonist begins the story in the heat of battle: "My heart was pounding like a trip hammer! Tiny figures moving slowly toward our position! Chinese communists! Hundreds of them!." He is framed in a manner that suggests he is alone, hunkered down in a hastily dug trench with his rifle sighted on a group of distant enemies. The soldier is terrified—sweat is dripping down his face in the chill of winter. His "mouth was bone dry" from sheer terror.[239]

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[237] Harvey Kurtzman, interview in *EC Archives,* vol. 1, 76.
[238] "Enemy Assault!," *Frontline Combat 1* (Entertaining Comics, June 1951), reprinted in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat,* vol. 1 (West Plains, Missouri: Russ Cochran, 1982). This source was acquired thanks to Virginia Commonwealth University's Comic Book Collection and Archive.
[239] Ibid., 2.

His failure to forestall a Chinese assault on his position both emphasizes the futility of war and the relative strength of communist forces. He fires frantically as the enemy soldiers move within range, but he soon finds himself in a direct confrontation with a Chinese soldier and both soldiers fire their rifles simultaneously. The American G.I. is struck in the helmet and knocked unconscious. He awakens to find the enemy soldier slain, and laid across his body. It's not long before he realizes that his comrades were completely overrun: "Where is everybody? I'm the only one alive here!"[240] The artists show the soldier stumbling across a battlefield strewn with corpses, once again illustrating that death pervades war. This also places the soldier in isolation from the collective group of soldiers, but in a much different way than romantic comic books. Instead of operating outside of the military unit, this soldier experiences the total annihilation of all other Americans, except himself.

The soldier's isolation demonstrates that warfare does not consist of frolicking about on the battlefield—as do Joe Yank and Mike McGurk—but moments of sheer terror and loneliness. The dead bodies of Chinese and American soldiers, strewn about *en masse* highlight the human cost of warfare. In war, men do not perform masculinity by achieving great heroic feats on the battlefield. War confines men to an arena where they are killed and wasted. It is not long before the soldier stumbles upon a "wounded communist soldier . . . we both froze like ice and stood with our mouths hanging open!" The soldiers find themselves on equal terms. They are stranded among the dead, both have weapons at their disposal, and both are wounded. The Chinese soldier speaks English fluently, and they are able to communicate.[241] While romantic comics did not

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[240] Ibid., 3-4.
[241] Ibid., 4.

espouse anti-communist rhetoric within the storylines, *Frontline Combat* takes it a step further by providing communist soldiers with active roles and dialogue to establish some continuity between enemies.

As their conversation unfolds, the artists de-communize the Chinese soldier by displaying his unique personality and the economic, political, and familial similarities between himself and the American soldier.[242] The opening panel for this comic shows the enemy soldiers as mere automatons charging across the tundra. But, conversation transforms the "Chinese communist" into a human actor. The soldiers share similar stories about life in New York City—the American attended Columbia University, and the Chinese soldier worked as a "houseboy." They also both have wives and children. The Chinese soldier candidly admits that his dream was to own land, a farm, and cattle to support his family. However, the Chinese government drafted him into the Army. Likewise, the American soldier was drafted and forced into war. As they exchange photographs, the American reflects on the situation:[243]

> "It was ridiculous! Here I was in the middle of a war, comparing photographs of babies with an enemy soldier! Just a while back, I must have watched him . . . one of hundreds of tiny automatons advancing across the field . . . but he wasn't an automaton! He was a living breathing human being with a wife and children and hopes and plans just like me! Why should he want to kill me? Or me, Him! . . . For a while, I had forgotten the war existed! But it was there!"[244]

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[242] Historians Tony Shaw and Denise Youngblood use the term "de-communize" to suggest that American film during the late 1950s and 1960s emphasized the humanity of Communists. They defined this period (roughly 1960-1980) as drifting away from the hardline anti-communist propaganda pervading American culture during McCarthy's tenure in the Senate. In the same way, *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* traced the similarities between Reds and American soldiers as early as 1950. For more, see Tony Shaw and Denise Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010).

[243] "Enemy Assault!," *Frontline Combat 1*, 5.

[244] Ibid., 6; In fact, artist Jerry De Fuccio admitted that Kurtzman emphasized the fact that "the enemy was human. He showed that they had kids, and pictures in their wallets and all that, just as the Americans did." See, "The '72 EC War Panel," in *The Comics Journal Library*, 69.

Kurtzman uses this text to purposefully remind his audience that war is a contest between human beings who actually hold common values. This is far removed from the fictional, abstracted idea of war as a place where American hero-soldiers demonstrate bravery, courage, and honor in their fight with feeble, anonymous enemies. Retired Army Colonel Henry G. Franke III notes in the foreword to a 2008 reprint of *Frontline Combat*: "there is nothing romantic about war or the people involved. And *Frontline Combat* was unflinching in its message despite the then-recent entry of the United States and United Nations in the Korean War."[245] It is also important that all of the characters in this story remain nameless—it underscores the fact that both the American and Chinese soldiers are caught in a larger conflict out of their control. They are pawns in a game of chess played by politicians and military brass. In the end, the theme of survival resurfaces in this story. As U.N. reinforcements arrive, the Chinese soldier instinctively draws his weapon and shoots an American. The protagonist "had to choose sides" and kills the Chinese soldier with whom he conversed.[246]

The artists frame this story around the necessity for soldiers to suspend moral regard for humanity in the heat of combat in order to show that combat is far more about survival than a rational choice between heroism and cowardice. This is a "terrible decision" that is different in kind from that depicted in *Battle Report.* Kurtzman uses this story to philosophize about the morality of killing in warfare, and the potential consequences incurred. The story begins as the American G.I. wounds or kills a number of "tiny figures" before he is rendered unconscious. He does not perceive this as a problem because the enemies are mere automatons. He dehumanizes the enemy in order

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[245] Henry G. Franke III, "Foreword," in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat* (Maryland: Gemstone Publishing, 2008), 7.
[246] "Enemy Assault!," *Frontline Combat 1*, 7.

to address the dilemma of killing. However, his conversation with the Chinese soldier re-frames war in the context of *real* human beings killing one another. When the American kills his Chinese counterpart, he needs to explain this killing by suggesting that it was an issue of survival. Survival dictated that he choose sides. In fact, by repeating, "I had to," the soldier attempts to justify to himself the necessity of killing the Chinese soldier. The American experiences some transformation in personality during the story, as he moves from self-control toward an emotional rage. The artists do not even present the soldier's initial self-mastery as laudable, because it promoted emotionless, unrestrained killing. Thus, rather than the pitched battle enhancing the American soldier's manhood, or solidifying his position as the superior man, he only descends deeper into an internal state of chaos.

Illustrations in *Frontline Combat* attack social beliefs that warfare "makes" men, instead depicting how it destroys men, conquering their hopes and dreams. The artists leave the soldier nameless. This allows the character a semblance of anonymity, and symbolically represents any thousands of soldiers who face the same dilemma in war. Because this death is more personal, the soldier loses his mental composure and succumbs to neurosis, or what would be later understood as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.[247] In his monologue, the American admits that during peacetime he might have developed a lasting friendship with his Chinese counterpart. He can no longer compartmentalize the slain Chinese soldier as a combatant, but now registers him as a man with dreams. The artist implies that it is his knowledge of the other soldier's humanity that causes his psychological trauma. The conversation belied his assumption

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[247] B. C. Freuh, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," in *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, vol. 6 (England: Oxford University Press, 2000), 249-251; David Grossman, *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace* (New York: Warrior Science Publications, 2008).

that the enemy constituted automata, and through this the artists expose the fact that the American soldier becomes machine-like by suppressing emotions, suspending regard for humanity, and continuing to kill. The character, back on the line and facing another Chinese assault, must revert back toward stoic self-mastery to continue killing the enemy. The cartoonists illustrate the American's face in a manner suggestive of abject horror. The narrator does not laud the soldier as a hero, nor does the soldier treat this as a heroic act. In fact, what is terrible about this situation is that two like-minded individuals were sucked into the vortex of a futile, senseless war in which lives were wasted. *Frontline Combat* frames the soldier in the context of larger political structures that restrict their agency. The soldier's agency is confined to two negative choices: kill or flee. The former precipitates mental trauma, while the latter is socially unacceptable. In *Joe Yank* and *Battle Report* soldiers are able to kill without severe psychological trauma. *Frontline Combat* shows that American soldiers must enter an animalistic state that disregards humanity. Then, the soldiers are unable to revert back into their normal identity. Not only does this highlight the intimate, personal experience of warfare, but also grasps the immense psychological pressures at play in the average infantryman's mind.

The philosophical issue of killing during war also pervades issues of *Two-Fisted Tales*, Kurtzman's second comic that illustrated the Korean War. He intended to produce an adventure comic, saturated with "rip-roaring high adventure."[248] However, U.N. forces entered the Korean conflict and he quickly modified the content of *Two-Fisted Tales* and focused almost exclusively on war stories. The narrator of "War Story!" featured in the second issue of *Two-Fisted Tales* opens by discussing the true nature of war. "Again as

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[248] Russ Cochran, "The Birth of Two Fisted Tales," Assorted Interviews with Bill Gaines and Harvey Kurtzman in *The EC Archives: Two-Fisted Tales,* vol. 1 (Maryland: Gemstone Publishing, 2006), 42.

before, men are hunting men . . . blasting each other to bits . . . committing wholesale murder! *This*, then, is a story of man's inhumanity to man!"[249] The story centers on a conversation between private and sergeant about the nature of killing in war. The private discharges his weapon into an enemy corpse. Disgusted by his action, the private reflects that he is "like an animal! A - - a vicious killer!" However, "[t]here's killers, an' then there's killers!," notes the sergeant. He establishes a dichotomy between those who kill for pure enjoyment in war, and those who kill out of self-defense. The latter is wretched and unacceptable, and the former is driven by necessity and survival. In order to illustrate his point, the sergeant reminisces about his experience in World War II, where twin brothers represent these two "killers." One brother killed Japanese soldiers from an instinctual desire to survive. The other brother enjoyed killing and maiming the enemy. This brother's bloodlust eventually drove him mad, and he attempts to murder a wounded Japanese officer in the infirmary. In the middle of night he could not distinguish between the Japanese officer and his brother, and consequently stabs his brother to death. The darkness of night symbolizes the dismal nature of warfare that both Americans and their enemies experience. That he could not distinguish between his brother and the Japanese officer suggests that both men are equally helpless, and it is pure chance that spares the Japanese officer's life. "War Story!" parallels the similarities between Chinese and American soldiers' experiences in *Frontline Combat*'s "Enemy Assault," in that *all* men are mired within an arena of inescapable violence. The whims of distant, nameless forces drive their individual fates. The sergeant sums up the "moral" of his story as such:

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[249] "War Story!," *Two-Fisted Tales 19* (Entertaining Comics, January 1951), reprinted in *The EC Archives: Two-Fisted Tales*, vol. 1, 45. *Two-Fisted Tales* replaced a previous serialization at Entertaining Comics, and began with issue 18.

"War's a tough deal! We kill men not because we wanna, but because we *gotta*!"[250] By approaching warfare through a serious, philosophical lens, Kurtzman used episodes like "War Story!" to dispel the fantastical imagery of contemporary romantic comic books that portrayed American soldiers reveling in killing.

Emphases on loneliness, killing, and random chance allowed Kurtzman to place Asians and Americans on equal footing, and to eschew exaggerated caricatures of Asian savagery. The characters in "War Story!," for example, practice restraint in combat, and note that even the enemy is deserving of humane treatment. Moreover, the private's reaction to killing—he becomes emotionally distraught and ridden with guilt—implies that violent action entails severe psychological consequences, an idea not present with Joe Yank's ability to maim and kill countless enemy soldiers without concern. The motif of individual suffering and fear in *Frontline Combat* resonates well with Audie Murphy's autobiography, *To Hell and Back*, in which the famous soldier recounts the fact that "in the training areas we talked toughly, thought toughly . . . but it is not easy to shed the idea that human life is sacred." Murphy remembered that by necessity soldiers shed their ideas about the sanctity of human life to function properly in combat.[251] Veteran Warren Avery remembered his encounter with a wounded Chinese soldier who "looked up at me and I down at him." Recognizing the enemy's humanity, Avery "didn't have the guts to blow him away with my carbine." Instead, Avery continued moving in a different direction, but lobbed a grenade back toward the wounded soldier so that he "didn't have to look at him when he died."[252] "You had to have been there to understand the terror we had of being taken prisoner . . . it was pitch black and we could see nothing, but because we could hear

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[250] Ibid., 46-51.
[251] Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, 11.
[252] Sergeant Warren Avery, Personal Remembrances, in *The Korean War,* 48.

him, we knew that the enemy was in front of us and getting closer," recalled veteran Donald Chase.[253] Frank Almy attempted to assuage the fears of another "kid [who] got so scared that he shook like a leaf in a windstorm" when his squad heard Chinese movement.[254] These emotional reactions to combat—as remembered by veterans of the Korean War—correlate to how the fictional characters of *Frontline Combat* displayed sorrow and fear, and struggled to survive while all the time not losing their respect for human life.

Kurtzman illustrates the fact that killing, survival, and death all chipped away at the soldier's psyche, and also contributed to the complete mental breakdown of soldiers. Another *Frontline Combat* issue includes a story that focuses on one soldier's slow, agonizing death to illustrate how even "old soldiers" would "crack one way or another!"[255] The story introduces a platoon preparing to go "over the top" into no man's land during World War I. It is important that Kurtzman sets this story in World War I, as it allows him to question the morality of war, and not simply condemn American involvement in Korea. As the men rush into the desolate waste, German machine gunners target a "kid, a new replacement," wounding and pinning him in barbed wire. The young soldier pleads with his comrades: "Help me fellas . . . Please! Please gimme a hand guys! Oh, Please . . . water please!" As he "groaned again and again and *again and again*," the other men crack. Private Bryant Kitchens screams erratically, "I can't stand it!" He rushes out of the trench yelling: "I'm getting out of this filthy rotten war! I'm going home! Home!" The Germans target him and "spun him around like a rag-doll" with the

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[253] Corporal Donald Chase, Personal Remembrances, *The Korean War*, 186.
[254] Ibid., 189.
[255] "Zero Hour!," *Frontline Combat 2* (Entertaining Comics, September 1951), reprint in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat*, Vol .1 (Maryland: Gemstone Publishing, 2008), 59.

machine gun. The platoon sergeant, in an effort to stabilize his men, "had to do something!" and shoots the young kid to end his suffering and persistent moaning. The episode concludes with the sergeant's scathing critique of war:

> What kind of a thing was this war where grownup men called for their mommas? What kind of a thing? Where men cry like women! War! What an ugly name! The ugliest disease we men are cursed with! And where did this disease come from? From men! Who was crazy . . . Kitch or the rest of us? Firing was breaking out all around us! Soon we'd advance! The kid on the barbed wire lay still! My shot had gone true![256]

Artist John Severin magnifies the sergeant's face in the last panel, illustrating tears flowing down his cheek. Severin's use of "kid" to describe the helpless soldier emphasizes the fact that warfare destroys the lives of young men. "Kid" also implies that one has not yet fully experienced life. War consumes men, robs them of their youth. The soldiers in this story do not focus on heroics or adventure. They yearn for escape and think forever of home. The idea of "death" in *Frontline Combat* starkly contrasts that presented in *Battle Report*. In the latter, death represented the gateway to heroism and idolization. Fleeing from death symbolized cowardice and selfishness. *Frontline Combat* defines death as an escape from the harsh reality of war. What if it were that men deliberately placed themselves in the line of fire to escape war and go "home" through death? In fact, many episodes of *Frontline Combat* feature soldiers attempting to escape war, whether through death, observing a beetle in a pond, or contemplating home. These soldiers do not perceive war as adventure, but as a process so psychologically painful that one may find suicide appealing—escapism necessary.

In the same way, the 1952 Korean War comic *War Fury* illustrated how self-mastery and physical suffering during war turned soldiers into machines. The comic

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[256] Ibid., 59.

depicts a warzone devoid of fanciful heroics, women, and adventure. For example, artists

depict the brutal death of an American soldier on the pilot issue cover, with blood oozing

from a bullet-wound to the forehead. The debut episode, "The Unconquered," introduces

the protagonist Sergeant Norman Kaney.[257] The story opens with Drill Instructor Kaney

training a cohort of draftees for combat, and continues with Sgt. Kaney following these

same men into the field. Already a veteran of tough combat in Korea, Sgt. Kaney

operates like a machine in combat. The narrator explains that Kaney's cool-headed

effectiveness on the battlefield derives from his "will to succeed" rather than "fear" or

fearlessness. However, the artists use the dialogue of fellow soldiers to establish that

Kaney's previous combat tours erased his individuality and humanity. "You'll never

learn will you Lasser? He ain't human—he's just a machine!" Kaney's experience of war

differs from that of Joe Yank and Mike McGurk. The former constituted an emotionless,

automaton during combat—motivated only to lead his men and annihilate the enemy. On

the other hand, Yank and McGurk derived pleasure in combat from the sense of

adventure, and the pursuit of attractive women. Despite these differences, though, neither

the realist nor romantic narrative illustrate the beneficial aspects of combat for men. Yank

and McGurk are just as apt to pursue women in war as they would as civilians. Kaney's

experience forced him to lose touch with emotions.[258]

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[257] "The Unconquered," *War Fury 1* (1952). I specifically chose to juxtapose this comic book with *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* because *War Fury* emphasized similar realist motifs and published the title in the same period. *War Fury* also contained some romantic portrayals of warfare, making it a useful primary source for comparing realist and romantic narratives.

[258] Also see, "War Machines," *Frontline Combat 5* (Entertaining Comics, March 1952). Artist John Severin illustrates American soldiers securing a mountain fortress from the enemy, and the soldiers' movements appear mechanical. In an interview, Kurtzman and Severin identify their intention of showing "the foot soldier as a piece of machinery," but that also "in the end it's the human being who's really the most significant factor" in warfare. See, "The '72 EC War Panel," in *The Comics Journal Library,* 66-67.

Instead of persistently narrating American success on the battlefield, *War Fury* used "Unconquered!" to illustrate American defeat, a motif that most World War II-era comic books eschewed for the sake of promoting political war aims. Sgt. Kaney's men eventually find themselves caught in a North Korean ambush, and the artists use this scenario to emphasize the grim reality of warfare for the average soldier: death. The narrator opines: "This was *war*—stark, reality with pain and sudden death everywhere."[259] The men are "desperate" to escape with their lives, and at every potential exit enemy machine guns slaughter American soldiers in graphic detail. An enemy soldier kills the American platoon leader. American numbers dwindle throughout the night, and escape eludes the men. Psychological stress overcomes one soldier and threatens to spread throughout the platoon. "Go on!," says the soldier: "I—I can't make it! I just want some rest! I'm so tired—so tired . . ."[260] This moment of despair almost destroys any prospect of escape for the men. With his leadership threatened, Sgt. Kaney slaps the man around and brawls with Private Lasser to re-assert his authority in the platoon. The episode ends with approximately four to five men reaching their evacuation zone (out of an original group of around forty to fifty). The extraordinary numbers of North Korean soldiers pursuing the men overwhelm and kill Sgt. Kaney in his desperate attempt to buy time for the others. The final panel shows Kaney, dead, with a smile on his face. His "memory would live forever" in the hearts of those who survived. Although Kaney, in spirit, remained "Unconquered!," this scene also illustrates that even the strongest men can die.

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[259] "The Unconquered," *War Fury 1* (1952), 4. Emphasis added in the original.
[260] Ibid., 5.

In an attempt to undermine cultural ideas of American invincibility, *War Fury* and *Frontline Combat* both emphasize the strength of Chinese and North Korean soldiers vis-à-vis Americans. Many episodes feature the human wave attack, or "Banzai" charges. A small group of American soldiers, no more than twenty, are pitted against hundreds of Chinese and North Korean Soldiers. In *Joe Yank* and *Battle Report*, these American soldiers often annihilate the enemy opposition. However, as is the case in "Unconquered!" and "Enemy Assault!," these human wave attacks produce tremendous American casualties.[261] This also reflected Americans' growing awareness that Communist forces were formidable opponents. Lewis F. Manly, in a 1952 letter to the *New York Times*, cited the fact that "Communist military strength has become" much greater since the war's initiation in 1950. Manly criticized American politicians and military leaders for prolonging the conflict. They caused soldiers, "the forgotten citizens of this country . . . [to] daily face the risk of death and mutilation in Korea." He responded to the on-going truce talks in Korea that centered on the issue of prisoner-of-war repatriation. "This butchery will continue as long as we fail to reach agreement . . . now we are asking our youth to continue to die to defend a new principle of prisoner exchange." Manly condemned, specifically, U.N. refusal to release Communist P.O.Ws.[262] In the same sense, Greg MacGregor, a *New York Times* war correspondent during the Korean War, reported that by 1953 the stalemate between U.N. and Communist forces prolonged the "pain, suffering, and death" incurred by soldiers.[263]

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[261] For other episodes that feature grisly casualties and human wave attacks, see: "Grim Trio," *War Fury 3*, (1952), 1-7; "Death-Trap," *War Fury 3* (1952), 10-15.

[262] Lewis F. Manly, "Halt in Korean War Urged: Indifference is Charged to Loss of Lives, Danger of Full-Scale War," *The New York Times*, 1 August, 1952, 16.

[263] Greg MacGregor, "Where the Enemy is Fifty Yards Away: A Reporter Offers a Vivid Description of what Life—and Death—are like at the Front in Korea's 'Stalemate' War," *The New York Times*, 8 February, 1953, SM7.

Frontline Combat, War Fury, and other realistic war comics transmitted what MacGregor

witnessed firsthand on the battlefield—that Chinese and North Korean forces could

match, and sometimes best, American soldiers.[264]

Although "Unconquered!" smacks of realism, other contradictions existed within

this specific serialization, as other episodes harkened back to the romantic idea that

warfare turned boys into men through a baptism of fire. In an episode titled,

"Counterspy!," the narrator opines that the soldiers' "baptism under fire had performed

its bitter magic. Boys became men, tough, swearing, fighting men."[265] The story also

ends with heroic language, as North Korean forces capture the protagonist Nathan Na, a

second-generation Korean-American immigrant, and execute him for treason. In his final

statement, Nathan says, "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country! And

for my father's country, now under the yoke of communist tyranny."[266] Nathan imbibes

the rationale for the Korean War: containing communism and its spread to America. His

monologue also reinforces the idea that somehow warfare creates authentic Americans.

Significantly, the narrator describes Nathan as a second-generation North Korean

immigrant. Technically, Nathan's lineage, that of the nation's enemy, might expose him

to suspicion by comrades. However, his act of bravery vindicates Nathan's patriotism and

loyalty to America. Similarly, other episodes illustrated the fact that civilians gained

greater status as soldiers through death in combat. In the episode "Harrigan's Hat," set in

the Pacific World War II battle of Guadalcanal, Japanese forces kill Private Harrigan.

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[264] For example, MacGregor recounts, in some detail, a human wave attack against American and South Korean (Republic of Korea) forces near the 38th parallel: "The enemy comes fast and in large numbers through the suddenly alive darkness—some screaming curses, some firing prematurely, but always coming . . . 2,500 men . . . were facing each other in mortal combat with the odds heavily in favor of the Communists."

[265] "Counterspy!," *War Fury 2* (1952), 22.

[266] Ibid., 24.

The narrator recites a brief eulogy for Harrigan in the final panel: "And Harrigan got a burial befitting a Marine—and a civilian . . . For Harrigan was every inch a man in mufti or fatigues . . . the backbone of the Marine Corps."[267] Although the narrator does not specifically describe Harrigan as a "hero," this story presents the same underlying motif that the Marines Corps *builds* men. These two episodes are different both from *Frontline Combat* and romantic comics explored in chapter one. Whereas many comics sidestepped around patriotism and politics, through character dialogue, the artists of *War Fury* convey acceptance and support of stated American war aims in Korea. It also shows that through death Harrigan taps into a Marine Corps legacy. He becomes another figure residing in the hall of Marine Corps heroes from previous wars, of whom many write panegyrics. Thus, soldiers also benefit tangibly from combat, by either acquiring manhood, or gaining heroic stature in death. The contradictory stories within *War Fury* resonate well with Andrew Huebner's apt summary of the post-war "warrior image" as containing a mixture of World War II optimism and Korean War discontent.

War Fury continued to wax poetic about a particular heroic soldier in other episodes, who defied the odds, slaughtered the feeble enemy, and through blood and guts gained repute and glory on the battlefield. For example, one episode features various soldiers deriding a pudgy, squat Navy seabee in "The Runt!" However, the narrator opens this story by saying that "you can't recognize a hero by his outward appearance! They come in all shapes, sizes and colors! The courageous Seabees had many heroes of their

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[267] "Harrigan's Hat," *War Fury 2* (1952), 6; Also see, "Wise Guy!," *War Fury 3* (1952). The narrator describes "O'Neill" as a "braggart and conceited boob," but won the affection of his squad when he "proved that guts and courage can make friends," 19; "River Crossing!," *War Fury 2* (1952) features a shirtless "rookie lieutenant" wreaking havoc amongst German machine-gun positions.

own, but one about whom many stories are told."[268] This "bloody saga of war fury"

depicts the "runt" driving a bulldozer into enemy forces, shooting and maiming numerous

combatants. However, a Japanese sniper kills "the runt," and his comrades find him dead

among the bushes. The episode ends with the comrades eulogizing this hero, referring to

him by his real name: "Runt . . . er . . . Pete, you mighta been a little guy . . . but you had

the biggest, the fightin'est heart I ever saw! You were a real man!" While the moral of

this story is that one cannot judge others based on outward appearance, this *War Fury*

episode still connects death with heroism. "The Runt" did not transform into "Pete" for

other soldiers until he performed heroic feats on the battlefield and died. In fact, in this

and other *War Fury* episodes combat constitutes a vehicle that drives ignoble soldiers

toward honor and heroism.[269] Again, Pete gains far more stature as a man in death—

through combat—than he could have acquired while alive.

With those few exceptions in *War Fury, Frontline Combat* artists John Severin

and Harvey Kurtzman consistently attacked the romantic motif that American soldiers

were invincible against enemy combatants, war benefitted men, and patriotism drove men

to fight. They launch their assault in the debut episode of *Frontline Combat*, titled

"Marines Retreat!" "If you have any idea that Marines are superhuman," cautions the

narrator: "forget it! When their supplies are cut off, and when they're outnumbered . . .

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[268] "The Runt!," *War Fury 2* (1952), 17.

[269] Ibid., 23; Similarly, the narrator of "True Hero," *War Fury 2* (1952) opens: "They called him "Commie and Traitor! . . . and he took it silently . . . but when the chips were down . . . he faced two conflicts—His duty or his honor. He was a true hero."

One also finds the idea that combat repairs the reputation of disrepute soldiers in Standard Comic's *Exciting War* (1952), discussed extensively in chapter one. One should also note that *Joe Yank* does not feature the death of either protagonist. *Frontline Combat*, *Two-Fisted Tales*, and *War Fury* typically conclude a story with the protagonist's death.

Marines retreat!"[270] As Henry G. Franke III mentions in the foreword to the 2008 reprint

of *Frontline Combat*, "'Fate' and 'destiny' are too pat a label for the anarchy of chance

on the battlefield . . . life on the battlefield is a continuous roll of the dice . . . an

extremely personal affair in the extremely impersonal environment of war."[271] The artists

portray "Marines Retreat!" from the perspective of Private Harold Parks, a fictional

American Marine rifleman in the Korean War. He entertains doubts about his survival in

the pending combat operation, and also "wonders" if his comrade Tony Feranda will

"ever get to open that bottle [of wine] on Christmas?"[272] Almost simultaneously, a North

Korean sniper kills Tony in a roadside ambush. The episode concludes with Private Parks

mortally wounded. He tells his comrades to abandon him. As the other soldiers rush to

safety, Parks contemplates his dilemma, wishing he were "back in Wisconsin with the

folks and . . . and Jeanie." The last panel closes with Private Parks reciting, "No Man is

an Island in Himself," from John Donne's 1624 meditation. The artists' allusion to John

Donne foreshadows Private Parks' death, but also represents Parks' isolation and the

inter-dependence among soldiers for survival in warfare.[273]

Continuing to dispel the myth of American invincibility, Kurtzman also uses *Two-Fisted Tales* to discredit the role of "luck" in determining one's survival. The pure chance

for life or death on the battlefield dismisses any romantic notion that heroism and

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[270] "Marines Retreat!," *Frontline Combat 1* (July 1951), reprint in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat* (2008), 11.
[271] Franke, "Foreword," 7.
[272] "Marines Retreat!," *Frontline Combat 1*, 12.
[273] Ibid., 18; Several story lines in *Frontline Combat* emphasize the soldiers' focus on survival, and his dependence upon others. For example, see: "O.P.!" *Frontline Combat 1* (July 1951); "Mopping Up!," *Frontline Combat 7* (May 1952) illustrates Iwo Jima's harsh impact on the psychological state of U.S. Marines after 21 days of combat; "Sailor!," *Frontline Combat 11* (March 1953), features a Navy Corpsman treating wounded soldiers in the Korean battlefield. An artillery shell lands in the midst of American soldiers, maiming and killing several. Artists show the corpsman working frantically to staunch bleeding from one soldier's jugular vein, and removing gangrenous skin from a dying Chinese soldier.

cowardice hinge on the soldiers' ability to make a rational decision. Thus the irrationality

and chaos of combat parallel the individual soldier's irrational and emotional thoughts.

The story "Ambush!" follows the character "Lucky" in the Korean War. North Koreans

ambush ten American soldiers as they cross through the Korean countryside in their

Jeeps. The soldier Lucky remains optimistic about war, because his "Kewpie doll" wards

off any potential harm. One-by-one the North Koreans kill the American soldiers. One

soldier suffers from an acute mental breakdown, shouting: "I'm going to run! While you

guys rot, I'll be home! I'll run! They won't get me!" The ambushers immediately target

and kill the young soldier. This resonates well with the slain soldier in "Zero Hour!," who

used death as an escape from combat. Eventually, Lucky and Tex are the only two

soldiers who remain alive. As their ambushers approach, Lucky and Tex charge out from

cover and engage them in hand-to-hand combat. An enemy soldier kills Tex, and

American reinforcements manage to rescue Lucky from his attacker. The story concludes

with Lucky informing another soldier that his Kewpie doll protected him from harm. "Ha

ha! I told 'em my kewpie doll! Would save me! I'm the only one alive." The artist then

conveys the idea that luck has no place within war. Lucky's "kewpie doll" represented

the myth that through some amulet, one might avoid death. Chance dictates life and death

in combat, and no lucky charm or amulet can ward off the phantom of pure, random

chance. Lucky holds onto the notion that his doll spared his life during this skirmish.

Nevertheless, the artists show that Lucky actually switched helmets with another soldier,

"Pretty Boy," who died from a gunshot to the forehead. Lucky realizes that a North

Korean bullet went "through the helmet, through [the] good luck charm, and through

Pretty Boy's face." The last panel depicts Lucky sitting, head in his heads, emotionally

distraught.[274] The death of Pretty Boy, who temporarily donned the Kewpie doll,

disabuses Lucky of any notion that he can control his fate while in Korea. Again, the

artists dismiss hope as farce, and starkly illustrate how warfare worsened the condition of

men.

Emphases on futility and death are scarce in romantic comics, where the

incorporation of women provided soldiers with a reason to enjoy combat and killing

enemy soldiers, while at the same time rarely suffering psychological trauma. Joe Yank

and Mike McGurk perceive combat as a means to acquiring women, rest, and other

rewards. For example, in the episode "Battle of the Sexes," Joe Yank, through a dirty

trick, injures Mike McGurk and places him in the hospital. McGurk's "homely" nurse—

artists caricature her as short and overweight with a wide face and unkempt hair—fawns

over the injured soldier. In an attempt to rebuff her entreaties, McGurk points her in the

direction of Joe Yank. Meanwhile, Joe Yank is fawning over the tall, skinny blonde

nurses: "Not ba-aad! Not bad at all!" Joe Yank, tongue hanging out the side of his mouth,

visits McGurk and comments on the beautiful young "dames" nursing him. Soon Joe

meets Lieutenant Beaste (a homonym of "beast," this name is suggestive of her gross,

animalistic features), the unattractive nurse, and she makes an advance on Joe. Yank,

disgusted by Lt. Beaste, finds combat preferable to conversing with the "homely"

woman. The last panels feature Yank running aimlessly into the combat zone, and

dispatching several North Korean snipers before suffering wounds. Although wounded,

Joe Yank refuses to stay in the hospital and receive treatment from Lt. Beaste. He flees

back toward the front again, "where a *man* is *safe*!" Yank and McGurk's fascination with

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[274] "Ambush!," *Two-Fisted Tales 20* (March 1951), in *The EC Archives: Two-Fisted Tales,* vol. 1, 113-120.

female nurses marginalizes the importance of death and maiming to the story. On the other hand, women are absent in *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*—perhaps because the incorporation of sexual objects into the narrative would distract readers from the meaning Kurtzman wanted to convey, that war destroyed humanity. In fact, *Joe Yank's* comedic inclusion of women into the narrative highlighted male heterosexuality, defined notions of feminine beauty, and depicted combat as "fun" or preferable to conversing with uncomely women.[275] Joe and Mike find this "battle of the sexes" far more harsh than actual combat with the North Korean and Chinese enemy. On the other hand, Harvey Kurtzman expressly intended to show his audiences the true reality of war. In his effort to dismantle romanticized visions of warfare, Kurtzman created critical interpretations.

Harvey Kurtzman incorporated stories concerning warfare in the distant past to symbolically criticize America's involvement in the Korean War. In a *Two-Fisted Tales* episode titled, "Conquest!," Kurtzman implicitly questions the legitimacy of invading a country with a technologically superior army and subjecting the natives to inhumane treatment.[276] "Conquest," follows the Spanish conquistadors as they invade and conquer the Mayan peoples in the sixteenth century. The Spanish easily dispatch Mayan forces by dint of guns and cannon. Historian Christopher B. Field contends that Harvey Kurtzman, in this particular episode, voiced "some powerfully stated objections to American involvement in the Korean War."[277] The Spanish, defeating organized Mayan resistance,

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[275] "Battle of the Sexes," *Joe Yank 12* (1953), 27-32.
[276] Entertaining Comics published *Two-Fisted Tales* just as America committed troops to the Korean conflict in 1950.
[277] Christopher B. Field, "'He Was a Living Breathing Human Being:' Harvey Kurtzman's War Comics and the 'Yellow Peril' in 1950s Containment Culture," in *Comic Books and the Cold War, 1946-1962: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns,* edited by Chris York and Rafiel York (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 45-47.

establish themselves in the city and subject the people to cruel treatment. Although the Spanish enjoy total control during the day, Mayan guerilla forces are able to harass and kill Spaniards at night. In this alternative history, the Mayans gain the upper hand, defeat the Spaniards in combat and imprison the survivors—subjecting them to the same brutal treatment. The Spanish lacked a strong moral justification for attempting to conquer the Mayans, and without this legitimacy they suffered eventual defeat.[278]

Frontline Combat also re-interprets the Spanish-American War in the episode "Rough Riders," and dismisses the romanticization of American combat in Cuba. The artists juxtapose the romanticized, fearless character attributed to the Rough Riders with a wounded soldier who comments on the reality of combat in Cuba. While the mythical Rough Riders holler that they are "Rough, tough, we're the stuff . . . we want to fight, but . . . we can't get enough," the wounded soldier struggles—alone and helpless—to survive his wounds. "A man falls quick, quiet, and limp like a sack . . . without the theatricals they show on the stage," he opines. "I've seen 'em *die . . . all* kinds of ways!" His interpretation retreats from Theodore Roosevelt's staunch support of the "strenuous life" and the necessity of warfare for rejuvenating manhood. In fact, this storyline dovetails with historian Kristin Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood* in that she traced growing disillusionment among anti-imperialists who condemned the idea that warfare built "civilized" men during the Philippine-American War.[279] "Rough Riders" concludes with the wounded soldier, barely alert, futilely fending off an attack by flesh-eating crabs. If anything, this story highlights the dual reality of warfare. For civilians and ideologues,

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[278] Kurtzman incorporated several critiques of American (or white European) destruction of foreign cultures. For example, see "War of 1812!," *Frontline Combat 6* (May 1952) that condemns American and British exploitation of the Delaware and Mohican Native American tribes.

[279] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.

warfare might represent the heroics of the "Rough Riders," while for the average soldier war parallels the experience of the nameless, wounded man who succumbs to the enemy and environment.[280]

Kurtzman's implicit criticism of U.N. occupation in Korea registers with how other Americans writing to *The New York Times* condemned the invasion of North Korea by United Nations' forces. Prior to the Korean War, Japanese invaders occupied the Korean Peninsula during World War II. Allied forces ended the Japanese occupation of Korea after the nation's defeat. At that time, Allied forces agreed to create two separate countries—a North and a South—on the Korean Peninsula. In 1950, North Korea invaded its southern neighbor, sparking the U.N.'s intervention in the conflict. However, the United States and its allies invaded North Korea as they pushed the North Korean Army back across the 38th parallel to the Yalu River. J. Henderson Powell, in a 1953 letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, stated the fact that "we did not send an American Army into Korea to help Dr. [Syngman] Rhee [President of South Korea] conquer North Korea."[281] Powell opined that the U.N.'s invasion of North Korea was "analogous to North Korea's use of force in June, 1950, for the accomplishment of the same objective."[282] The *New York Times* also published a letter from Arnold Rosenberg, who asked if there were "any necessity to continue the killing and maiming of the peoples and the ravishing of the land in unfortunate Korea?" He elaborated by citing the fact that "Gen. Mark Clark has stated it was never the desire . . . to 'liberate' the area north of the

[280] "Rough Riders," *Frontline Combat 11* (March 1953), in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat*, Vol. 3 (Missouri: Russ Cochran, 1982); Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," 1901 Speech, found at "Voices of Democracy, The U.S. Oratory Project," University of Maryland, http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/roosevelt-strenuouslife-1901-speech-text/.
[281] J. Henderson Powell, "Our Position in Korea: Original Objective, of Freeing South Korea, Considered Accomplished," *New York Times*, 15 July, 1953, 24.
[282] Powell, "Our Position in Korea," 24.

38th Parallel."[283] The U.N.'s successful repulsion of the North Korean invasion fulfilled America's initial "moral justification" for entering the conflict. America's attempt to occupy North Korea blurred the "fundamental political distinction between communism and democracy—" the use of force to resolve political disagreements.

That Americans questioned the motivations behind U.S. involvement in Korea prior to Powell's diatribe, and Commanding General Matthew B. Ridgway attacked "doubters" of the war earlier in 1952, indicates an insipient protest against the conflict as early as 1952—the heyday of Entertaining Comics. General Ridgway operated under the aegis of containment policy, arguing "everything Americans cherished was at stake ultimately in the grim and wearisome Korean conflict."[284] If U.N. forces failed to contain communist advances in Korea, suggested Ridgway, American citizens risked "enslavement of the body and mind, instead of freedom for both," and the replacement of "collective decency" by "group brutality."[285] He refuted the idea that America "invaded" North Korea, and justified its war aims by arguing that America responded to deliberate, unprovoked North Korean aggression. Furthermore, as if adopting the dialogue from an issue of *Joe Yank*, or any number of romantic war comics, General Ridgway asked if "on every American field of battle, the issue [of fighting or retreating] was decided by those timid few whose fears overrode their courage, whose doubts beclouded their vision."[286] If Americans would suppress their fears and emotions, according to Ridgway, then rational Americans would support America's containment of communism abroad.

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[283] Arnold Rosenberg, "Stopping Korean War: Unification Should be Achieved by Conference, It is Felt," *The New York Times*, 8 July 1953, 26.
[284] "Ridgway Berates Doubters on War: Tells Those Questioning "Why Are We In Korea?" That What They Cherish is at Stake," *The New York Times*, 22 February, 1952, 2.
[285] Ibid., 2.
[286] Ibid., 2.

While American citizens questioned war aims in Korea, fictional American

soldiers in *Frontline Combat, Two-Fisted Tales,* and *War Fury* expressed disdain for

warfare. Although largely romantic in nature, one soldier in the "Counterspy!" episode of

War Fury remarked: "What is there to fight in this barren place? Why are we here? Who

ever heard of Korea?"[287] Private Harold Parks, a protagonist in *Frontline Combat*, pines

for home. "How I wish I was home right now! . . . While I was home, I had my troubles!

Rough time getting a job . . . yet compared to this, that was paradise . . . and I'd trade my

last G.I. nickel to be ba[ck]."[288] Another soldier in the episode "Bouncing Bertha" draws

a comparison between soldiers in war and a small beetle struggling to escape submersion

in water. "See? Just a little bug . . . in the middle of a big pond! He doesn't know how he

got there, or where he is going!" He continues, "He doesn't know how to get back onto

land! Doesn't know a thing!" Then, referencing the soldier's continual peril, and survival,

in war: "That little bug has enough sense to keep struggling . . . to keep fighting and to

have hope till the very end, even though he doesn't know how he'll save himself! It's just

like people!"[289] For all of these soldiers war represents a continual struggle that requires

great perseverance—an unwanted setback from the simple pleasure of civilian life.[290]

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[287] "Counterspy!," *War Fury 2* (1952), 20.

[288] "Marines Retreat!" *Frontline Combat 1* (1951), 14-15.

[289] "Bouncing Bertha," *Frontline Combat 2* (September 1951), reprint in *EC Archives: Frontline Combat,* Vol. 1 (2008), 45.

[290] For more on the theme of survival and soldiers' wishes to return home, see "A Platoon!," *Frontline Combat 6* (May 1952); "The Landing!," *Frontline Combat 7* (June 1952) features a soldier who experiences "shell-shock," and balks at orders to continue fighting. A sniper kills the soldier by the episode's conclusion; "The Caves!," *Frontline Combat 7* (June 1952), tells the story of Iwo Jima from the Japanese perspective. A disillusioned Japanese soldier chafes at his commanding officer's willingness to die for the Japanese emperor and "take ten Americans with him." "He is a military man," says the soldier: "Let *him* die!" "Let him go face the Americans with his samurai sword . . . I want to live! I have no desire for death!" When he is the last left alive, however, he feels ashamed at his inability to commit suicide. The final panels show the soldier blindly charging Americans with a hand-grenade; "Massacred!," *Two-Fisted Tales 20* (March 1951) illustrates the massacre of American P.O.Ws by a ruthless North Korean colonel. His own company later kills the colonel after he dons an American uniform.

The salient themes of anti-war sentiment and homesickness found in *Frontline*

Combat and *Two-Fisted Tales* reflect the protests of some American soldiers serving

during the Korean conflict. On March 13, 1951, Marine Lieutenant Gale C. Buuck mailed

a letter to his local paper, *The Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*. In this letter Lt. Buuck

condemned Harry Truman's policies in the Korean Peninsula: "How many YEARS are

you going to let the American manpower, materials, and money drain into this Korean

sewer?"[291] Furthermore, "how many of my men must die," asked Buuck, "on account of

your stubborn refusal to pull out of Korea?" Lt. Buuck demanded that Truman pull

American forces out of "the God-forsaken hole of Korea," to avoid the further loss of

American lives. A careful reading of Lt. Buuck's letter identifies the gap that existed

between many cultural depictions of warfare–particularly the romantic viewpoint of *Joe*

Yank—and the real experiences of American soldiers in warfare. For Lt. Buuck, the

Korean War did not constitute a battleground saturated by heroes and cowards. Instead, it

represented a "sewer" that consumed the lives, hopes, and dreams of his men.[292] Lt.

Buuck's letter criticized leader's decisions in the war, rather than emphasizing the actions

of the individual soldier. On the contrary, realist comic books focus on the choices of

individual soldiers—and their victimization by forces outside of their control—to critique

the Korean War. Thus, realist comic books fall into a broader trend of war culture that

Andrew Huebner contends "could grow cynical about the war itself, or all war generally,

but remain a steadfast supporter of the troops themselves."[293] Kurtzman illustrated the

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[291] Lieutenant Buuck's letter is reprinted in its entirety by Dennis M. Giangreco, *Dear Harry: Truman's Mailroom, 1945-1953* (New York: Stackpole Books, 1999), 349-351. According to Giangreco, Lt. Buuck furnished his personal copy of the letter. Emphasis in original.

[292] Ibid., 350.

[293] Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 126.

sorrow, helplessness, and frustration of the individual soldier to implicitly condemn oblivious politicians who funneled men into the warzone.

Secretary of the Navy Dan A. Kimball officially reprimanded Lt. Buuck by January 27, 1952, indicating the risk of criticizing the commander-in-chief's policy in Korea. The *New York Times* reported that "Lieut. Gale C. Buuck of Fort Wayne, Ind., has been reprimanded privately for his published criticism of President Truman's conduct of the Korean War."[294] The reprimand constituted "the least punishment" a Marine could receive for transgressing military code, according to Secretary Kimball. However, Soviet and Chinese forces obtained Lt. Buuck's missive and translated the document onto propaganda leaflets that were distributed throughout Korea. Thus, it is difficult to argue whether this Soviet and Chinese propaganda (which operatives likely used to bolster the morale of Communist forces), or Lt. Buuck's initial criticism, provoked the reprimand by Secretary Kimball.

Uncertainty about war objectives cast a pall over troop morale in Korea, warranting a memorandum by General Matthew B. Ridgway entitled "Why we are here" in 1951. The *New York Times* reported that for the average officer and G.I. serving in Korea, the "resolutions agreed to at the United Nations" for prosecuting the war constituted "diplomatic gobble-dygook."[295] Like Lt. Buuck, most soldiers found Korea unappealing and unworthy of defending against communism. In his memorandum, Ridgway adopted the "wide and disillusioned view held by so many soldiers . . . that Korea for itself was not worth defending."[296] Ridgway informed soldiers that defending

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[294] "Marine Reprimanded in Attack on Truman," *The New York Times*, 27 January, 1952, 36.
[295] George Barrett, "Ridgway Tells Soldiers in Korea They Fight for Their Homelands," *The New York Times*, 23 January, 1951, 4.
[296] Ibid., 4.

South Korea, or the freedom of South Koreans, should not be their primary motivation

for fighting. Instead, he argued that American soldiers should realize the "wider issues"

at stake in the war: the continuing power of Western civilization, democracy, freedom,

individual rights, and dignity. Will we "survive, with God's hand to guide and lead us, or

. . . perish in the dead existence of the Godless world[?]"[297] Ridgway attempted to allay

the concerns of soldiers by reminding them that they fought not for South Koreans, but

for their very home and way of life in America—"a fight for our own freedom, for our

own independent national existence."[298] More importantly, though, Ridgway's action

indicates that the majority of American soldiers serving in Korea, facing its harsh

realities, did not conceptualize war in terms of adventure, heroics, and valor. Like their

fictional counterparts, Ridgway found soldiers who were disillusioned by the privations

of warfare, which forced him to convince the men that their efforts were necessary.

By April 1953, American soldiers in other outfits expressed their desire to return

home safely and leave the warzone. Robert Alden, a *New York Times* war correspondent,

reported: "the hope of peace came to fighting men who face the enemy in trenches and

bunkers . . . of this war-devastated peninsula."[299] Peace talks resumed in early 1953,

rekindling the soldiers' hopes that they would return home and "never have to do that

dirty job" of fighting again.[300] The American soldiers that Alden interviewed hardly

expressed a gung-ho attitude about continuing to fight in the war. Many soldiers chafed at

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[297] Ibid., 4.

[298] Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, "Why We Are Here," Memorandum for Corps, Division, Separate Brigade or RCT Commanders, and Commanding General issued in Korea, 1951, ¶7, http://www.milhist.net/global/whywearehere.html.

[299] Robert Alden, "G.I.'s in Korea Talk of Peace—And Home," *The New York Times*, 1 April, 1953, 2.

[300] Ibid., 2.

the idea they might be "back again at the grim task of fighting and dying in a shooting war."[301] Entertaining Comics' realistic interpretations of warfare and combat resonated well with the language used by *The New York Times* to describe the plight of soldiers in the peninsula.

In the end, Kurtzman's intention to capture the reality of war and promote the cultural acceptability of anti-war sentiment and pacifism achieved some success. Although the ability to gauge broader audience reaction remains limited, Entertaining Comics did publish some letters to the editor in its various issues of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales.* In 1952, Mrs. Mary McNamarra wrote a scathing critique of *Frontline Combat,* indicting Harvey Kurtzman and William M. Gaines for tainting "the kiddies' minds with how horrible adults are in war." The editors received "literally hundreds and hundreds of letters" defending *Frontline Combat* against McNamarra's condemnation. Larry Stark asked if Mrs. McNamarra were not being unrealistic: "Her main point is that because there is so much brutality in the world, everyone ought to seek escape . . . the world is in such a stomach-turning mess that the front pages of the *New York Times* will either have to print comedy or go unread." Reader James Savage asserted that "by reading the magazine, [boys] can see what war is like [and] perhaps when we grow up, some of us may put a stop to it before the world is destroyed." More importantly, Savage drew a connection between *Frontline Combat*'s realistic portrayal of warfare and Harvey Kurtzman's intention to dissuade boys from romanticizing warfare.[302]

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[301] Ibid.

[302] Letters to the Editor, *Frontline Combat 7* (May 1952);

Frontline Combat and *Two-Fisted Tale*s promoted a culturally subversive message about America, Communism, the Cold War, and the policies of containment. Romantic narratives were tied to, or upheld, larger political discourses that targeted communists, homosexuals, and reinforced American military might. In these works, cowardice derived from irrational emotional impulsivity. More importantly, fear and psychosis sapped unit morale and contributed to the failure to achieve war objectives. Realist comic books eschewed the language of hero and coward, instead arguing that fear, paranoia, and "shell shock" were normal responses to the exigencies of warfare. Through episodes such as "Conquest!" and "Enemy Assault!," Entertaining Comics questioned both the legitimacy of arbitrating civil wars in foreign nations and the dogged demonization of communists. On the whole, this counter narrative offered by Entertaining Comics constituted the analogue of American anti-war rhetoric and condemnations of Cold War foreign policy that occurred during the late 1960s.[303]

War comics, and possibly *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*, also drew condemnation from *Parents' Magazine* in 1952 for presenting objectionable material that would dissuade youth from enlisting in the armed forces. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Parents' Magazine* published an annual rating of all comic book titles currently in publication. Critics rated comic books on a scale from A (not objectionable) to D (very objectionable). In 1952, *Parents Magazine* rated *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*, giving both a C (objectionable). Surveying the industry as a whole, the editors identified

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[303] James Gilbert and David Halberstam both contend that historians can trace the beginnings of 1960s radicalism in the 1950s. These historians, and the developing historiography, challenge the assumption that domesticity, conformity, and complacency defined the 1950s. Likewise, a careful consideration of realist war comics in the early 1950s demonstrates that 1960s anti-war protestors used rhetoric that originated much earlier than the Vietnam War. For more, see: David Halberstam, *The Fifties*; Ronald J. Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Barricade Books, 1990).

a significant increase in the amount of objectionable material, and attributed this to the "perceptible increase in comic books that deal with war and horror."[304] Jesse L. Murrell, who compiled and assessed the *Parents' Magazine* reports as the Chairman of the Cincinnati Committee on the Evaluation of Comic Books, argued that war comics, in particular, were highly objectionable because they portrayed "the United Nations soldiers in Korea as being in a hopeless situation." He cautioned readers that this portrayal of warfare both exacerbated anti-war sentiments in the United States and discouraged "young men from enlisting" in the Army or Marine Corps.[305] The report noted that at least two war comics adhered to this depiction of warfare. Although it did not specifically mention *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*, John Benson—interviewing Harvey Kurtzman—tagged *Parents' Magazine* as delivering "a partial condemnation to [Kurtzman's] books because they might tend to make boys grow up into men who didn't want to be soldiers."[306] *Joe Yank* also received a "C" from Murrell, perhaps because it portrayed scantily clad women. Certainly *Joe Yank* did not specifically portray soldiers as "helpless," but depicted fun-loving, adventurous American protagonists. While *Joe Yank* violated social expectations about the appropriate portrayal of women, *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* transgressed cultural norms of military sentimentalism. *Parents' Magazine* cited the fact that this could dampen the fighting spirit of American men. Thus, by 1952, public intellectuals took note of realist war comic books and identified its anti-war message as potentially subverting the acculturation of men toward military service in the United States.

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[304] Jesse L. Murrell, "Annual Rating of Comic Magazines," *Parents' Magazine,* 1952, 133-135.
[305] Ibid., 134.
[306] Benson, "A Talk with Harvey Kurtzman," 25.

As the Korean War ended so too did the wide market for many war comic books. Harvey Kurtzman and William M. Gaines (the CEO of Entertaining Comics) cancelled publication of *Frontline Combat* and reverted *Two-Fisted Tales* back into an adventure comic by 1954. In a 1972 interview, Kurtzman and Gaines identified the fact that "the Korean War being over, the war books stopped selling as such."[307] Kurtzman approached these two serializations with the hope of dispelling common romanticized myths about warfare. Both Gaines and Kurtzman tailored these comic books to compete in a broadening market for war comics after American entry into the conflict. In particular, Kurtzman contended with Stan Lee at Atlas Comics (later Marvel) who produced *War Comics* immediately after the Korean War began. Lee's *War Comics* romanticized warfare, perpetuating what historians Sheng-mei Ma and Christopher B. Field describe as the "Yellow Peril." The "Yellow Peril" defines the racist cultural caricature of Asians as animalistic, buck-toothed, savage, and slant-eyed. Moreover, Lee portrayed American soldiers as "unabashedly positive" and universally able to "suppress their emotions and excel under the pressure of combat."[308] *War Comics* translated post-World War II optimism to Korea. Kurtzman's *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* challenged not only *War Comics*, but also the notion of American exceptionalism and moral authority in the world. He defined war in terms of how it permanently damaged its participants through death, maiming, or psychosis. In the same way, even romantic war comics contained a mixture of World War II optimism and the growing discontent with the

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[307] "The '72 EC War Panel," 68.

[308] Field, "Harvey Kurtzman," 47-49; Sheng-mei Ma, "Imagining the Orient in the Golden Age of Adventure Comics." In *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 3-37.

limited Korean War. In both romantic and realist narratives, artists avoided patriotic language, open support for the war effort, and often depicted soldiers' demise during war.

The emphases on disillusionment in realist and romantic comic books parallel similar qualities in cartoons and images produced by American participants in the Korean War. Chapter two investigated how American soldiers serving tours of duty in Korea created and published cartoons through the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*. These cartoons contained biting depictions of the harsh Korean environment, inept leadership, and conflict with publicized war aims. Like romantic war comic books, women featured heavily in the published iconography of American soldiers to reinforce their masculine heterosexuality. On the whole, the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* scarcely contained patriotic, uplifting statements about the Korean War and the policy of containment. In soldier-produced cartoons, World War II sentimentalism took a back seat to the emerging ethos of discontent. Nevertheless, the protest and discontent seen in the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* differed significantly from that in the realist war comics. The latter, through dialogue and narration, explicitly condemned *war* as a flawed enterprise that destroyed humanity and caused needless suffering. By extension, this implicated American military and political leadership in the Korean debacle. The *Pacific Stars and Stripes* did not replicate this open disdain for war and American leadership; instead, soldiers' cartoons implicitly presented soldiers' discontent with leadership and boredom through humor without reference to military authority. During its publication of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales,* Entertaining Comics also reached a much wider American audience than the *Pacific Stars and Stripes*. Both serializations were accessible to American

civilian youth and adults, whereas soldier-produced cartoons reached a smaller cohort of military personnel.

Conclusion: "These Are Stories You Should Never Have Been Allowed to Read."

Roughly eleven years after Entertaining Comics ceased publication of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales,* artists John Severin and Alex Toth—who created *Frontline Combat* and *Joe Yank* respectively—returned to war comics. Americans faced another "limited war," this time in Vietnam. Severin and Toth churned out a new publication, *Blazing Combat*, prior to the widespread social dissent and outrage against the Vietnam War in the United States.[309] In 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson committed American forces to protecting South Vietnam, Toth and Severin's *Blazing Combat* realistically depicted war as chaos, inhumane, and destructive of soldiers. James Warren, director of Warren Publishing, hired Toth and Severin specifically to carry on the tradition begun by Harvey Kurtzman in 1951: "I told Harvey *Blazing Combat . . .* was not going to be pro-war or blood and guts. It was going to be anti-war."[310] Its episodes contained explicit critiques of American efforts in Indochina, and condemned American political and military leaders for their deceitful prosecution of the war. *Blazing Combat* echoed Kurtzman's earlier creations by exposing the psychological and physical toll of war on its participants. In the preface to the 2010 reprint of *Blazing Combat*, Michael Catron recalled that the "U.S. military, The American Legion, and [comic book] wholesalers" viewed *Blazing Combat* as decidedly "anti-American."[311] In fact, the

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[309] *Blazing Combat* (Warren Publishing, 1965-1966).

[310] Jon B. Cooke, "Wrightson's Warren Days: The James Warren Interview." *Comic Book Artist 4* (1999), accessed online: http://web.archive.org/web/20110604124243/www.twomorrows.com/comicbookartist/articles/04warren.html.

[311] Michael Catron, "These are Stories You Should Never Have Been Allowed to Read," in *Blazing Combat* (New York: Fantagraphics, 2010), inside cover.

military banned *Blazing Combat* from military bases, wholesalers delayed shipment, and

The American Legion lobbied publicly against consumers buying the product. The

subject of political and economic attack, *Blazing Combat* ended after four issues in 1966.

More importantly, though, Harvey Kurtzman's earlier attempts to condemn warfare

through comic books served as a precedent for publishers in an eerily similar Vietnam

Conflict eleven years later. That Alex Toth penned romantic war comics during the

1950s, and transitioned to anti-war narratives during the Vietnam War, also indicates that

even romantic Korean War comic books contained undercurrents of discontent.

While 1950s war comic books and soldier-produced illustrations all replicated a

broader cultural struggle to define the Korean War in the light of World War II,

Entertaining Comics' realist narratives of war established the foundation for how later

artists would attack the Vietnam War. During the Korean War, these illustrations

challenged World War II sentimentalism in three distinct ways: soldier motivation,

camaraderie, and the justification for U.N. intervention. Artists veered away from the

idea that bravery, manhood, loyalty, or patriotism motivated soldiers to fight. In its place,

romantic comic books substituted sexuality into the narrative. Thus, romantic heroes

remained successful in the battlefield by dint of physical masculinity (represented in the

male libido). Soldiers in realistic narratives of the Korean War appear fearful, depressed,

and psychological depraved. The men fight and kill the North Korean and Chinese

enemy. They participate in combat out of an instinct to survive and return home to wives

and sweethearts—not because they owe allegiance to the United States, or exude patriotic

drive. Finally, soldiers illustrated themselves in isolation from the collective group

identity. While real-life American soldiers expressed discontent and disillusionment

through writings, remembrances, and letters home, their fictional counterparts displayed similar cynicism about the war. In soldier-produced illustrations, men appear bored, fatigued, defeated, and overwhelmed by the enemy. The draft system—which compelled men to serve—precipitates suicide and self-inflicted injury. In the manner of romantic and realist comic books, these men are entertained by fantasies of women, returning home, and surviving the war.

Rather than placing soldiers within the collective military identity, artists illustrated soldiers in isolation from larger military units and allies. Andrew Huebner contends that popular war culture placed the individual soldier in high relief during the Korean War, sympathizing with the soldier while simultaneously condemning the political and military war effort in Korea.[312] Comic books and soldier-produced illustrations replicated this broader cultural device. In romantic comic books, soldiers operated as rogue mercenaries, openly flaunting military order and leadership. If military leadership were not presented as incompetent, they remained out of touch with the infantryman's experience. Both soldier-produced illustrations and realist comic books implicitly attacked the draft system that inducted many soldiers into the war. Artists depicted soldiers' limited agency in war—forced to fight, kill, and survive due to larger political and military pressures. In many cases, creators described soldiers as pacifists, depressed, maniacs, hopeless, and longing for the amenities of home. In romantic and soldier-produced illustrations, women symbolized sexual desire *and* the home front. Soldiers sexualized women who held a close connection to the warzone, while romanticizing the domestic mentalities of wives and sweethearts back home. Soldiers frequently sexualized Marilyn Monroe in illustrations to uphold a bachelor identity

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[312] Huebner, *The Warrior Image*.

among soldiers, and thus cartoon soldiers hankered for romantic liaisons with her in the battlefield. Soldiers held little incentive to fight, aside from survival or sexuality, and often despised stated war objectives.

Comic books and soldier-produced illustrations struggled to justify American commitment to defend South Korea, due to the limited nature of the war, coupled with a tenuous relationship between Korean and United States' security. American soldiers expressed their enmity toward the Korean landscape, aggravation with the euphemistic term, "police action," and the ambiguity between North and South Koreans through illustrations. These illustrations ignored any discussion of why American soldiers arrived in Korea, whom they were defending, and why they waged war against communist forces. By contrast, World War II-era iconography universally acknowledged the Nazi and Japanese enemy, replicated wartime propaganda, and promoted American democracy. Thus, by the Korean War, comic books—and even soldier-produced imagery—eschewed any direct affiliation with United States' foreign policy in Korea. For romantic heroes, Korea constituted a fantastic playground for the fraternization with beautiful women. Killing communist soldiers merely served as a means toward carousing with women. Realistic narratives of war openly condemned the Korean War, and they engaged in philosophical discussions about the morality of killing. Harvey Kurtzman and EC developed stories about the Spanish-American War, World War II, the War of 1812, and Spanish conquistadors to symbolically question the legitimacy of invading North Korea. Both realistic and soldier-produced illustrations challenged the effectiveness of technology—displaying how older technology trumped the America use of "superior" armaments. Kurtzman incorporated stories of infanticide, civilian causalities, and

collateral damage to condemn the wanton destruction of humanity in Korea. These stories

also underscored America's arrogant posture in the world, and its insistence upon

intervening in civil wars. On the whole, these cultural emphases had established the

precursor of Vietnam War activism and discontent.

Not only did artists and writers expand definitions of the ideal masculine soldier

through these illustrations—by marginalizing the importance of stoicism, physical

strength, and camaraderie—but they also decoupled manhood from warfare. One of the

more significant findings in these primary sources is the fact that men are consistently

made *worse* through warfare. Iconography from previous conflicts in American history

stressed the link between combat, war, and the betterment of manhood. Such language is

absent in Korean War popular culture. Many comics show men physically or

psychologically destroyed by warfare, or philosophically discuss warfare's destruction of

humanity. In other ways, fictional soldiers used the warzone to express masculinity

through sexual promiscuity and dominance. Realist and soldier-produced comics shied

away from emphasizing stoicism, and presented masculine soldiers who could express

emotion, regret, and fear without others lambasting them as cowards. The longevity and

wide readership of these illustrations suggest that these presentations registered with

consumers, despite the fact that details of the audience's remain elusive.

This evidence exposes the need for further research that connects the insipient

anti-war protest in the Korean War to the far more overt demonstrations during the

Vietnam War. A comparative case study of comic books and iconography from both

wars might illuminate some continuity between forms of anti-war protest in each war. It

is also worthwhile to continue searching for archives that hold testimony from comic

book readership. If this evidence were to become available, it might illuminate how these depictions of warfare influenced or resonated with their audience. Finally, this thesis traces the beginning of cultural presentations of soldiers as individuals—and the sympathetic bias in these depictions—that constitute the foundation of the "support of troops" mentality that pervades society today. The idea that manhood derives from warfare represents a social construction. Despite the litany of literature that upholds this relationship, the iconography explored in this thesis attacked this idea and offered an alternative discourse that exposed how warfare destroyed manhood.

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