

James Madison University

JMU Scholarly Commons

Masters Theses, 2020-current

The Graduate School

5-7-2020

Serialized soldiers and the new archetype: America's portrayal of soldiers in the Post-Vietnam Era

Rachel Childers

James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/masters202029>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Childers, Rachel, "Serialized soldiers and the new archetype: America's portrayal of soldiers in the Post-Vietnam Era" (2020). *Masters Theses, 2020-current*. 31.

<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/masters202029/31>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses, 2020-current by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Serialized Soldiers and the New Archetype:
America's Portrayal of Soldiers in the Post-Vietnam Era

Rachel Childers

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

May 2020

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Committee Chair: Dr. Emily Westkaemper

Committee Members/ Readers:

Dr. Evan Friss

Dr. Gabrielle Lanier

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Serialized Soldiers and the Formation of the Archetype	6
Chapter 2: American Morals and Reclaiming Power	29
Chapter 3: Nurses, Women, and the Female Soldier	49
Conclusion	73
Bibliography	76

ABSTRACT

In post-Vietnam War popular culture, a fundamental shift in how Americans portrayed soldiers in media occurred. A new soldier archetype was created that allowed Americans to reintroduce patriotism and heroism into stories about a deeply controversial war. These fictional soldiers embodied the political and cultural turmoil of their time as well as America's complicated relationship with Vietnam and its own self-image. This project looks at serialized media in the late 1960s-1980s, primarily utilizing popular television shows such as *M*A*S*H*, to follow the development of these characters, their part in shaping American memory of the war, and to understand why these characters continue to resonate with modern audiences.

INTRODUCTION

Bradley Cooper wore no less than two separate pairs of tanning glasses in the 2010 movie adaptation of *The A-Team*. Cooper's character, Lieutenant Templeton "Face" Peck, was introduced in the 1980s as an appearance-obsessed womanizer with a penchant for five-star hotels and designer sweaters.¹ This original Peck was a clean-shaven conman who spent a great deal of time each episode worrying if his team would make it out of any given sticky situation, and he acted as a foil to the laid-back leader of the team, John "Hannibal" Smith. Peck is almost unrecognizable in Cooper's performance. Cooper's Peck was gruff, unbothered by Hannibal's plans, and took charge of the team in the final act of the movie. Moreover, he tanned religiously. The differences in the adaptations are staggering, but what is truly remarkable about the two versions of Templeton Peck, who exist almost 30 years apart, are their similarities.

The current wave of 1980s nostalgia that has dominated recent American culture has breathed new life into the war stories created after the Vietnam War. From 2010's reboot of *The A-Team* to a new installment of the *Rambo* series, there is a resurgence of popular post-Vietnam entertainment; however, these remakes typically change the war but keep the characters. In the years during and directly after Vietnam, Americans crafted a new idea of what it meant to be an American soldier—one that was versatile and popular enough to remain embedded in American culture as new conflicts emerged. This new soldier could be both a hero in the eyes of the public and still allow Americans to simultaneously condemn the actions of the United States military. In general, the "new soldier" portrayed soldiers as pawns to the whims of the more powerful and shifted blame

¹ Bradley Cooper, *The A-Team*, Amazon Video, Directed by Joe Carnahan, 20th Century Fox: Los Angeles, 2010.

of wartime atrocities away from the individuals committing them and onto the “faceless figures” that gave the orders.

Americans grappled with finding heroes in a war they were ashamed of by creating characters that could uphold American values in impossible situations. These characters were crafted to be overtly moral individuals rather than patriotic. In media with ensembles, the group dynamics still emphasized a high moral code. Teams were established with two parts: the leader and the highly specialized team. The leader was designed to represent the morals of the American public and included characters that did not leave men behind, showed compassion for enemies, and attempted to solve conflict in ways that limited casualties. The team, usually highly specialized agents that were the best in their respective fields, was meant to represent assets of the military. In this dynamic, a moral figure always controlled military might. In conjunction with this, these characters often clashed with upper brass. This is shown in media such as *The A-Team*, where the team’s leader John “Hannibal” Smith often put his team at risk of capture by the military in order to help innocent Americans. Within popular culture, the military became distanced from the individual soldier.

Various problematic tropes became prevalent in post-war media as Vietnam soldiers became Vietnam veterans. Urban legends about the treatment of Vietnam veterans were retold on-screen and changed myth into memory for many Americans. Depictions of veterans as victims of their circumstances suffering from rampant mental illness and violent tendencies crafted a new trope of the veteran that labeled him as highly skilled yet damaged. This served to separate veterans and soldiers from the general public by stressing that only those with military experience could empathize with

soldiers. The isolation then continued by simultaneously showing the public that the best they could do was pity the soldier. In all, these factors accumulated into forming a type of stoic figure that appears to only find acceptance in others like himself. This furthered a divide between the military and the soldier and the soldier and the public, leaving the soldier completely isolated from everyone but himself and others exactly like him. This isolation can be seen in issue 43 of the comic book *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* in a panel depicting a soldier becoming a traitor after being left behind by the military and experiencing rejection from the public.² He explains that he turned to a villainous organization because they were the only ones who did not leave him behind.

This isolation, however, was unique to male soldiers as female representation took a different turn. Women primarily served in caretaking roles during military conflicts, and their appearances on screen reflected that history. In general, female characters had to be placed in what were traditionally considered masculine spaces. Despite the awkward positioning of their characters, fictional female military personnel were guaranteed more freedom than their real counterparts due to the nature of television. These women did not have to face real threats of physical or sexual violence and the removal of those threats gave female characters the ability to speak and create unique positions for themselves beyond the roles of caretakers. This is most clearly shown in the evolution of Loretta Swit's character Margaret Houlihan in the show *M*A*S*H*.

This thesis will be considering the long-term effects the Vietnam War had on popular culture during and after the war and will be broken down into three parts. Each

² Larry Hama, "Long Range Recon Patrol," *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*, no. 43, Marvel Comic Group, January 1986.

part will analyze serialized media that stemmed from American involvement in Vietnam because observing serialized media is crucial to understanding how Americans defined the conflict. Television acted as American's primary source for news about Vietnam.³ The role of television as a source of information helped the serialized programs shown on the platform become a part of American memory. Stories about soldiers, in turn, shaped memories about soldiers, and the serialization provided an avenue for repetition. As long-running series were apt to change to remain relevant and in-line with newer political beliefs, memories were altered. In short, political turmoil deeply impacted the war stories that were told. As political leaders were looking for someone to blame for a disastrous war, Americans were turning that conflict into entertainment. The first chapter addresses this.

Chapter 1 identifies elements of the individual fictional soldier and the changes he underwent in reaction to the Vietnam War and the cultural turmoil of the 1970s. It addresses the popular tropes that emerged within portrayals of soldiers in television and comic books and looks at the politics that shaped them. This section identifies the new archetype of American soldier that emerged post-Vietnam—one that one isolated from the public and the military, damaged by his experiences in war, highly skilled in some way, and morally superior to upper brass in the military hierarchy.

The second chapter looks at fictional soldiers in ensembles and the vilification of the military in fiction. First, it is important to note that post-Vietnam serialized media did not reinvent the wheel when incorporating groups into their stories. Members of fictional

³ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 106.

teams and the tropes associated with them are present and easily distinguishable in most, if not all, popular media. The group dynamic in war stories, however, showcases Americans' shifting interpretation of the military and the soldier by creating team leaders guided by American values and highly specialized team members that represented the assets of the military. This was done to let Americans exercise control over the military after over a decade of mistrust. The mistrust manifests in these stories as the military is portrayed as either an outright antagonist or a problematic nuisance.

The final chapter will revolve around female representation. While there is an exhausted trend in history to include discussions of women near the end of any given work, discussing women in the final chapter is crucial in understanding the nature of their portrayals. Serialized stories about women in the military began with women reprising their historical roles as caregivers. In these stories, women are allowed to develop, but the development is in part created from a clash between their stereotyped femininity and the masculinity of their surroundings. Women subvert both to create a new position in these stories as both women and soldiers.

CHAPTER 1

Captain Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce of the fictional 4077th mobile army hospital unit was introduced to America through a game of golf. The very first episode of the popular 1970s sitcom *M*A*S*H*, opens on a scene featuring Hawkeye and his fellow captain John “Trapper” McIntyre driving golf balls into a minefield. Hawkeye and Trapper, played respectively by Alan Alda and Wayne Rogers, wore a combination of army and civilian garb—Hawaiian shirts over standard army olive green trousers. The text on screen read “Korea, 1950 / a hundred years ago.”¹ Little did they know that Hawkeye would become the main character in a television series that would span eleven seasons, earn 14 Emmys, and hold the record for most-watched television finale in history.²

First airing in 1972, the *M*A*S*H* television series premiered three years before the official end of the Vietnam War, and one year before troops were pulled from the country. The show told the story of an odd-ball group of doctors and hospital personnel at a mobile army surgical hospital unit stationed a few miles from the front lines of the Korean War. Yet, despite being set during the Korean War, *M*A*S*H* acted as a critique of America’s involvement in Vietnam, and the show’s popularity was staggering. The success of the show, however, was unsurprising considering the climate of American culture during its initial run. *M*A*S*H* went from book to movie to television series, each adaptation became more popular than the last, and its arrival and popularity in the

¹ *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 1, “Pilot,” Directed by Gene Reynolds, Hulu video, September 17, 1972. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/4045ee04-07e8-4c33-94a6-4244b7b67c5f>

² Travis M. Andrews, “106 million people watched ‘M.A.S.H.’ finale 35 years ago. No scripted show since has come close,” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/02/28/106-million-people-watched-mash-finale-35-years-ago-no-scripted-show-has-come-close-since/>

1970s owed itself to the unpopularity of the Vietnam War. *M*A*S*H* turned popular politics into moralistic comedy, making the anti-war movement easily digestible for a mass viewing audience who already agreed with its primary message. While the show was the most notable and groundbreaking in its own right, it was not alone. *M*A*S*H* was one of a long string of shows and comic books about war that sprung up during the 1970s and 1980s.³

As these shows came out, there was something unique about them that differentiated them from war stories of the past. As the Vietnam War became more controversial and more viciously opposed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the war stories that emerged were intrinsically structured as anti-military while somehow remaining pro-soldier. This pattern aligned with cultural trends as the government and military were met with outright distrust from the American people due to political and economic turmoil rampant during this period. Coinciding with this, the anti-war movement and pro-war movement were locked in a heated debate over who to blame for American losses during the war. Faced with these conflicts, Americans turned to entertainment to digest their feelings of betrayal and shame toward what they considered to be America's first lost war.

A new American soldier archetype was created in the post-Vietnam era, and it still dominates American popular culture today. The archetype can be broken down into five parts: 1) the soldier has experienced some form of trauma from their military service that causes behavioral issues that manifest as violence, substance abuse, and isolation; 2) the soldier has in some way been betrayed by the military; 3) the soldier is unable to

³ These shows also included *Private Benjamin* (1981), *CPO Sharkey* (1976), *Operation Petticoat* (1977).

connect with civilians; 4) the soldier is highly skilled due to their experience in the military; 5) the soldier is morally superior when compared to those with higher levels of authority. The new fictional soldier exists disconnected from a military who betrayed him and from a public that cannot relate to him. He represents the shame the American people felt toward the Vietnam War, and in a way, he is painted as the victim of the conflict.

Distrust toward the government did not necessarily translate to a distrust of individual soldiers. Soldiers were “victims of the draft” or “patriots serving their country,” and America’s anger toward the atrocities committed in Vietnam did little to distort that view. After all, newscasts were still portraying footage of American soldiers as “boys in action.”⁴ Americans were possessive of their “boys,” atrocities be damned. “Supporting the troops” was a popular rallying cry for both the anti-war and pro-war movements and many Vietnam veterans. For example, during a discussion of anti-war advertising tactics, directed at the New York advertising community and hosted at Yale University in 1971, professionals encouraged anti-war advertisers to place emphasis on the death toll of U.S. soldiers and to demand troop removal with hard deadlines.⁵ While the major television networks declined to run the advertisements generated by these groups, these campaign plans effectively captured part of the spirit of the antiwar movement.⁶ Citizens wanted to protect soldiers from being trapped in an endless, unpopular war.

Americans managed simultaneously to support their troops and still condemn the actions of the military through their media as fictional soldiers began to be distanced

⁴ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 115.

⁵ Mitchell Hall, “Unsell the War: Vietnam and Antiwar Advertising,” *The Historian* 58 (1): 69. 1995. 73-75

⁶ Mitchell Hall, “Unsell the War,” 76-77.

from the institutions they served, and television was the perfect avenue to create that distance. Sitcoms about the military during this time, according to Larry Gelbart, had the tendency to become “gang comedy set in an Army background.”⁷ Gelbart was likely thinking of shows like *Hogan’s Heroes* (1965-1971) and *CPO Sharkey* (1976-1978), which featured members of armed forces operating outside the confines of the military. *Hogan’s Heroes* was set in a World War II prison camp, albeit one with very limited security, and *CPO Sharkey* took place on a Navy training vessel. The army did not behave as the main actor in these programs; it operated as the stage. *M*A*S*H* made the military a central part of the show’s conflict, and the more a character rebelled against the army, the more likable they were. Yet the concept of likeability based on insubordination did not just appear out of thin air. Two major outside political forces shaped this trope—the army and the politics embodied by Ronald Reagan during the Vietnam War and, later, by the Reagan administration. First, we turn to the army.

The army changed how it advertised itself between World War I and the Vietnam War to appeal to American individualism. In 1948, one recruitment flyer for the army stated, “I need you again” and displayed Uncle Sam at the forefront of the image, positioned between two soldiers.⁸ This advertisement, and advertisements like it, heavily relied on the public’s patriotism following the end of World War II as America shifted into having a standing army. The phrase “I need you again” signifies that the soldier joined the military to serve the nation, not for personal gain. During this time, military

⁷ Larry Gelbart, “Larry Gelbart,” Interviewed by Dan Harrison, *The Bob Hope Comedy Collection*. Archive of American Television. May 26, 1998. <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/larry-gelbart>.

⁸ “I need you again” found in Beth Bailey, “The Army in the Marketplace: Recruiting an All-Volunteer Force,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2007, 56.

service was seen as a civic duty.⁹ Heading into the Vietnam War, recruitment advertisements had morphed into a combination of 1940s civic duty and promises of excitement. One commercial asked young men if they wanted “fast action,” “outdoor action,” or “real-man-sized action.”¹⁰ None of these recruitment tactics were particularly successful, and the army shrank from 1.5 million to 860,000 active troops by 1960—only about 10% were draftees.¹¹

A couple of internal problems worked against the army’s attempt to recruit post-World War II. First, messages claiming that military service was a civic duty tended to also encourage other activities associated with good citizenship, and military advertisements highly encouraged staying in school and emphasized education.¹² Additionally, because the army was an arm of the government, military advertisements were categorized as public service announcements, meaning that they played just before networks signed off or at 5:30 am, severely limiting their viewership.¹³ When the Vietnam War rolled around, the army desperately needed more men.

By 1965, 2.6 million American soldiers were tied up in multiple Cold War fronts, the draft was in full effect, and the army still needed more bodies.¹⁴ The draft was extremely controversial as it was seen as an affront to individual liberty, and its institution was met with protests almost immediately. A draft during an unpopular war dealt one of the largest blows to the army’s image. Opposing the draft started at the

⁹ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 12.

¹⁰ Jeff Quitney, “Army Recruiting Commercial “You Want Action?” circa 1962 US Army 60-second spot,” 1962. 1:01. December 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnRQjCIdmA4>

¹¹ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 13.

¹² Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 12-13.

¹³ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 70.

¹⁴ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 15.

individual level, but by 1967 it had become one primary methods of protest used by the anti-war movement.¹⁵ It did not matter that Richard Nixon, close to his election date in 1968, promised to end the draft. It did not matter that the idea of an “all-volunteer” force had been in the works for years.¹⁶ The damage to the army’s image had been done.

To counteract this and to continue toward an all-volunteer force, the army overhauled its advertising practices and looked at internal problems that discouraged young potential volunteers.¹⁷ After all, the army, in order to become a volunteer force, had to become attractive to young people.¹⁸ In 1970, an internal study called the *Study on Military Professionalism* found that the army left no reasonable room for mistakes, and the level of perfection required to succeed was stifling soldiers.¹⁹ Moreover, young men thought they would lose personal freedom and individuality if they joined the army.²⁰ The army’s rebranding emphasized individuality and creative thinking, styling itself as a boots up rather than brass down organization. The rebranding carried over into new army advertisements that sought to move beyond the standard “summoning young men to service with a stern-faced Uncle Sam and a declarative command.”²¹

So, in the 1970s, the army’s tone and methods of recruitment drastically changed to counteract the negative press. The N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency was given the job of rebranding the army through a contract that would last from 1967 to 1986, and it seemed like an impossible task until the money pumped into the account skyrocketed in

¹⁵ Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War*, (Raleigh: North Carolina Press, 2003), 49.

¹⁶ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 2-3.

¹⁷ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 52.

¹⁸ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 37.

¹⁹ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 45.

²⁰ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 72.

²¹ Beth Bailey, *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 74.

1971. The Army recruitment advertisement budget rose from \$3 million to \$18.5 million, with \$60 million being floated as a potential budget.²² Advertisements started responding to the anti-war movement, the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, and America's defeat. The campaign started catering to potential soldiers and the political climate they were raised in. As advertisements started appearing more often as commercials, they could run alongside television programs that presented similar imagery. These commercials became serialized through association and repetition. In 1979, four years after the end of the Vietnam War, advertisements used slogans such as "Join the people who've joined the army,"²³ and by the 1980s, commercials primarily emphasized the value of sacrifice and personal growth.²⁴ The army was no longer sold as a civic duty but as a community that showed the soldier as an individual rather than a cog in the army, and the army was not the only group putting forth a soldier-first platform.

Politicians began utilizing "soldiers first" platforms as a way to gain popularity without having to directly comment on the war. Conservatives even began criticizing the anti-war movement for characterizing soldiers' Vietnam service as shameful. Across decades, Ronald Reagan criticized the effects of Anti-Vietnam protests on soldiers and on their public reputation. Reagan thus sought to claim a pro-soldier position. In 1967, during a televised debate with Robert F. Kennedy, Reagan declared "Everyone has the right to be wrong" in reference to the increasing numbers of anti-war demonstrations in the United States.²⁵ A governor at the time, Reagan went to great lengths to condemn the

²² Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, 72.

²³ "This is the Army," N W Ayer Advertising Records, 1979. National Museum of American History Archives Center. https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/slideshowViewer.htm?eadrefid=NMAH.AC.0059_ref3801

²⁴ "1980s Army recruiting commercial," ScribasDotCom, 1:56. August 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmj3IDvnh4Q>

²⁵ Robert F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, *Town Meeting of the World*. C-SPAN, 15 May 1967, 53:06. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?428273-1/ronald-reagan-robert-f-kennedy-discuss-vietnam-war-1967>

anti-war movement by insisting the protests could only exist because Congress failed to make a declaration of war.²⁶ Furthermore, and equipped with similar arguments used by pro-war organizations, Reagan vehemently protested the movement by arguing it supported the enemy.²⁷ In one of his responses, he stated:

Well I definitely think that the demonstrations are prolonging the war in [that] they're giving the enemy—who I believe must face defeat on a relative basis [sic] the comparison of the power of the two nations, they're giving him encouragement to continue, to hold out on the hope that the division here in America will bring about a peace without defeat for that enemy.²⁸

Reagan perpetuated the myth that America's lack of will and unity directly impacted the continuation of the war. He shifted the blame from the military onto a bitterly divided country, and his popularity helped make the myth stick. Reagan continued to promote this myth in the 1980s as president.

In the 1980s, Reagan's popularity came at a time of conservative resurgence. America had been rocked by the upheaval of economic crisis, the Vietnam War, and political scandals, and Nixon had set the stage for Reagan's 1980 Presidential success by attacking 1960s liberalism.²⁹ Additionally, where the youth of the 1960s were fairly united in activism, youth politics became more sympathetic to conservative plights in the 1970s.³⁰ Reagan entered his presidential race with a very clear message of restoring America's traditional family values which endeared him to the growing religious right

²⁶ Robert F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, *Town Meeting of the World*.

²⁷ Robert F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, *Town Meeting of the World*.

²⁸ Robert F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, *Town Meeting of the World*.

²⁹ Seth Blumenthal, *Children of the Silent Majority: Young Voters and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1968-1972*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 264.

³⁰ Seth Blumenthal, *Children of the Silent Majority*, 263-264.

movement and conservative party.³¹ Alongside family values, he continued promoting pro-soldier rhetoric by indicating both citizens and the government failed to support American troops. In 1980, after securing the Republican nomination for President, Reagan said, in a speech to a Chicago chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars,

We dishonor the memory of 50,000 young Americans who died in that cause when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful, and we have been shabby in our treatment of those who returned...let us tell those who fought in that war that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war our government is afraid to let them win.³²

While Reagan's push to "support the troops" was not groundbreaking, his narrative was supported by the myth of the spat-upon veteran, and his popularity saw to it that the myth spread.

The myth of the mistreated Vietnam veteran became a popular trope in revisionist media in the mid-1980s. In 1989, Bob Greene published a book filled with veteran accounts of mistreatment.³³ Greene was a newspaper columnist, and after hearing rumors of veteran mistreatment for years, he asked his readers, "If you are a reader of this column, and you are a Vietnam veteran, were you ever spat upon when you returned to the U.S.?"³⁴ He received over one thousand responses.³⁵ Jerry Lembcke, however, could

³¹ Brooks J. Flippen, *Jimmy Carter: The Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 279.

³² Ronald Reagan, "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention."

³³ Bob Greene, *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1989).

³⁴ John Dolen, "Vietnam Vets Tell How They Were Greeted *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam*. By Bob Greene. G.P. Putnam's Sons. \$17.95" *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, April 23, 1989. <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1989-04-23-8901210557-story.html>

³⁵ John Dolen, "Vietnam Vets Tell How They Were Greeted."

find no evidence of such events in local newscasts, secondary sources, or historical accounts.³⁶

It is accepted widely among scholars, however, that the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans is still, in fact, a myth perpetuated by American memory. Lembcke is one of the loudest voices discrediting reports of mistreatment of actual veterans. He argues that this fault in American memory was egged on by political leaders to explain the lack of pro-war Vietnam veterans, as well as vilify veterans in the anti-war movement. It created a “good veteran” versus “bad veteran” dichotomy that discredited veterans’ narratives in general.³⁷ In this dichotomy, “good veterans” were ones who supported the war, and the mistreatment of them was used to explain why so few veterans were involved in the pro-war movement. Essentially, pro-war veterans could be painted as victims of ungrateful American individuals and anti-war protests, and anti-war veterans were thus aligned with the villainy of anti-war protests. Lembcke argues that one of the most popular ways to fabricate the victimization of veterans was through fictional soldiers in visual media being spat on, and he argues that the prevalence of this imagery acted as an outlet for Americans to express the betrayal they felt after the Vietnam War.³⁸ Regardless, the imagery of the spat-upon veteran was prevalent in popular culture.

Understanding the prolific nature of this trend requires looking at the myths being perpetuated in media. Spitting on veterans and referring to them as “baby-killers” are repetitious elements of the myth, and found in movies, comics, and television. Different

³⁶ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 8.

³⁷ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 54-55.

³⁸ Jerry Lembcke, “The Myth of the Spitting Antiwar Protester.” *The New York Times*. October 13, 2017. “<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/opinion/myth-spitting-vietnam-protester.html>

forms of media feed off each other and have the potential to hit consumers multiple times with the same images. For example, in *Rambo*, John Rambo states, “And I come back to the world and see all those maggots at the airport, protesting me, spitting, calling me baby killer.”³⁹ *Rambo* is one of the most well-known examples of this trend, but he does not stand alone. In the *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* comic, similar imagery appears above an image of a female protestor spitting on a man in uniform at an airport.⁴⁰

Additionally, the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans is a recurring theme in the first season of *The A-Team*. A 1983 episode titled “A Nice Place to Visit” features a family actively preventing members of the community from attending a veteran’s funeral. The antagonists give no real reasoning why.⁴¹ In the second season, following a similar pattern, the episode “Water, Water Everywhere” tells the story of three disabled veterans being forced off their land by a wealthy local for water rights.⁴² In both stories, the local community actively mistreats veterans. Americans agreed with those images, which contained elements associated with stories of veteran mistreatment analyzed by Lembcke. This is especially true for *G.I. Joe* as the image of a female “hippie” spitting on soldiers was so common it made even Bob Greene doubt the validity of the accounts he received.⁴³ Scenes repeated in popular culture set the stage for a communal belief that soldiers were mistreated by the government; and with the support of notable political

³⁹*Rambo: First Blood*, HBO Video, directed by Ted Kotcheff. Anabasis Investments, N.V., 1982.

⁴⁰ Larry Hama, “Long Range Recon Patrol,” *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*. no. 43. Marvel Comic Group. January 1986.

⁴¹ *The A-Team*, season 1, episode 13, “A Nice Place to Visit,” Directed by Bernard McEveety, Amazon video, May 10, 1983.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000W4Q9TU/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1

⁴² *The A-Team*, season 2, episode 10, “Water, Water Everywhere,” Directed by Arnold Laven, Amazon video, November 22, 1983.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003Q5ANKS/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s2

⁴³ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 79-80.

figures like Reagan, accepting the myth as truth became easy.

In television and other popular media, it did not matter if accounts of mistreatment were true, they were popular. As television works as a reflection of popular thought, the narrative of mistreatment fit with the idea that America did not successfully “support her boys.” The mistreated soldier stuck because it was profitable and fit with a long-established narrative. If Lembcke is to be believed in that the spat-upon veteran was a manifestation of America’s shame, it is no wonder the imagery was popular because Americans had more than enough shame to go around. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the pro-war movement having argued that the anti-war movement’s lack of support for policy led to soldiers suffering, and the anti-war movement arguing the government and military’s policy did the same, the only shared belief they had was that someone let American soldiers down. Veterans were trapped between two political groups that both believed they had been victimized. The media portrayals acted as a continuation of that belief, and Kathleen McClancy argues that it was even present in proposals for the Vietnam memorial.⁴⁴ This set the stage for a new soldier archetype in the 1970s and 1980s, one that was defined by perceived victimization and shame.

Pro-troop sentiments and the accepted myth of veteran mistreatment merged together to create the new fictional soldier archetype, and it grew rapidly in popularity. It was seen throughout the post-Vietnam era in television shows like *M*A*S*H*, movies like *Rambo*, and comic books like *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*. While it was prevalent across all forms of popular culture, its existence in serialized media—in television and comic books—was unique. While all media attempted to express the angst

⁴⁴ Kathleen McClancy, “Back in the World: The Vietnam Veteran through Popular Culture,” Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences, vol. 70, no. 12 (June 2010). 116.

Americans felt toward the war, serialized media operated under a different system of rules for creation and viewership that was more closely aligned to the opinions of the average American. McClancy argues, “The world of television is clearly different from our real social world, but just as clearly related to it in some way. Rather than representing ‘the manifest actuality’ of a society, television programmes reflect, ‘symbolically, the structure of values and relationships beneath the surface.’”⁴⁵

Television, in particular, acts as a warped mirror for American society, boiling political, economic, and ideological issues down to their simplest forms and pushing them back onto the viewers that shaped them.

Television shows and comic books in the 1960s and 1970s are fundamentally different from motion pictures because of the audience. Television and other serialized mass media operated under different rules because they had to attract “repeat customers.” This altered the archetype produced. TV writers and producers created fictional soldiers who were more righteous than movie soldiers. This was in part because of the censorship controlling television and comic books, as well as the serialization of the media requiring characters to be likable for continued viewership. The limitations on what could be shown, however, limited how realistic the program could be.

McClancy argues that media portrayals of Vietnam veterans exposed the immorality of the Vietnam War and created an interpretation of conflict that glorifies violence.⁴⁶ In general, Americans were willing to embrace war stories situated within a despised conflict as long as the stories chronicled soldiers’ experiences with violence and pain. Soldiers were not necessarily cast as heroes in every piece of media, but all

⁴⁵ Will Kaufman, *American Culture in the 1970s*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 56.

⁴⁶ Kathleen McClancy, “Back in the World,” v-vi.

experienced defining character moments through some form of violence. McClancy argues some film portrayals created the image of veterans as “the fascist war machine and the desperate revolutionary” and locked them both into a connection with violence.⁴⁷ John Wood, to further her point, argued that Vietnam veterans were either viewed as extremely violent or mentally exhausted.⁴⁸ McClancy explains that the new mark of the soldier was when their violent nature gave way to suffering.⁴⁹

Suffering typically came in the form of mental illness. McClancy writes, “Once Vietvets were successfully redefined as sick, and once the responsibility for their actions in Vietnam was removed, veterans began to be portrayed significantly more sympathetically in the media.”⁵⁰ Giving an explanation of violence began the process of forgiveness, but the inclusion of mental illness allowed for sympathy. The suffering veteran paired nicely with the ongoing messages of veteran mistreatment and “support our troops.” Television and comics are unique because they manage to follow this same trajectory of forgiveness without ever physically showing real violence.

The reality of war and the violence it caused could not be explored viscerally on television and in comic books, but the characters behaved as if it was still present. In general, the horrors of war were spoken rather than shown. In an effort to protect family values, comics and television programs were forbidden from showing extreme violence and gore. This included things such as excessive blood and on-screen deaths. For example, in *M*A*S*H*, doctors announced patients’ deaths rather than showing it.⁵¹ This

⁴⁷ Kathleen McClancy, “Back in the World,” 42.

⁴⁸ John A. Wood, *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016).

⁴⁹ Kathleen McClancy, “Back in the World,” 73.

⁵⁰ Kathleen McClancy, “Back in the World,” 91.

⁵¹ *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 5, “O.R.” Directed by Gene Reynolds, Hulu video, October 8, 1974. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/c91cb55c-a13d-42a7-885f-40cd97851477>

was a standard practice, and even in the initial phases of the show's creation, CBS was nervous about showing blood.⁵² In television, the soldier's narrative is divorced from violence. In *M*A*S*H*, death is never actualized, because the show is episodic, the impact of a death in one episode is dismissed by the next week to make way for the new plot.⁵³ The emotional burden of death is felt, but only through its quantity and through general statements about the cost of war.⁵⁴ The closest *M*A*S*H* ever came to showing the consequences of death came in the episode "The Late Captain Pierce" in 1975. This episode dealt with Captain Pierce being falsely labeled dead by the military, and it starts with a 2:00 am phone call from Pierce's father who had already been notified. While the episode mostly shows Pierce becoming frustrated with the bureaucratic side of being declared dead, such as no mail or paychecks, the underpinning conflict is that the unit cannot get into contact with Pierce's father to notify him of the mistake. When told that the mistake might take months to fix, Pierce exclaims, "He [Pierce's father] just rattles around in that empty house, gives my things away to the Salvation Army, and ages a couple of years for every day he thinks I've shaken off this khaki coil!"⁵⁵ This is one of the only times a grieving family member is identified, and it is for a death that did not happen. Grief for the individual is an abstract in *M*A*S*H*.

Without clear depictions of physical or emotional consequences, the actions of

⁵² Larry Gelbart, "Larry Gelbart," Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

⁵³ The only time *M*A*S*H* mentions an individual's death multiple times is in the case of Henry Blake, who was a main character who died off-screen in the episode "Abyssinia, Henry" (1975).

⁵⁴ *M*A*S*H's* setting in a hospital also makes a certain amount of death acceptable. Audiences can assume some deaths will occur because the unit is essentially an emergency room, and the characters, being hospital personnel, can appear to be unaffected because of their familiarity with it. The setting provides an apathetic expectation of death.

⁵⁵ *M*A*S*H*, season 4, episode 4, "The Late Captain Pierce," Directed by Alan Alda, Hulu video, October 3, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/e0a19f45-56f4-406f-9c26-944743fddfd7>

fictional soldiers are based entirely on the morality guiding their behavior. This morality was dictated by American values. It emphasized the rights of the individual, fairness, and honor. In *M*A*S*H*, this type of honor is seen keenly in episodes like “The Korean Surgeon.” In this 1976-episode, Pierce and Captain B.J. Hunnicutt disguised a friendly, wounded North Korean doctor as a member of the unit to give the *M*A*S*H* another doctor as they faced a permanent shortage.⁵⁶ The characters prioritized caring for patients to the point they were willing to conceal an enemy and face serious repercussions. By using morals as the foundation for the actions of fictional soldiers, the soldiers’ choices appear justified. While the trend of writing soldiers as inherently moral owes a lot to the army and the rhetoric of politicians’ pro-soldier platforms, it also owes its creation to censorship.

There is no greater anecdote for television censorship than the evolution of the *M*A*S*H* theme song. “Suicide is Painless” was written by Johnny Mandel and Mike Altman and used as the theme in both the movie and television adaptations of *M*A*S*H*. Writing for the movie, Mike Altman—the director’s fourteen-year-old son—came up with the chorus, “Suicide is painless. It brings on many changes, and I can take or leave it if I please.”⁵⁷ The lyrics are meant to be sardonic and ridiculous to match the overall tone of Robert Altman’s movie. On television, the lyrics are removed, even though the writers wanted to stay true to their source material.⁵⁸

Television has a long history of censorship in one form or another, and it finds its

⁵⁶ *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 9, “The Korean Surgeon,” Directed by Gene Reynolds, Hulu video, November 23, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/e11c52b8-d21e-4f43-9c0a-df52d1893568>

⁵⁷ Johnny Mandel, “Suicide is Painless,” *M*A*S*H* (Original Soundtrack Recording). Columbia/CBS. 1969. Spotify.

⁵⁸ Larry Gelbart, “Larry Gelbart,” Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

roots in the guidelines that governed radio broadcasts. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) applied its code of ethics to television in 1954, emphasizing goals to uphold values and protect children from adult themes.⁵⁹ Thus, the Television Code became a voluntary set of guidelines adopted by networks, and each network formed its own version of an Office of Standards and Practices. Alan Alda referred to these offices as the networks' "organs of censorship" and as holding "thinly veiled connections to politicians."⁶⁰ Alda was likely correct in this assessment, as government policy began echoing the values put forth by the codes. For networks, abiding by the NAB's code of ethics was optional, but following the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) was not. In 1975, under the leadership of Richard Wiley, FCC created the Family Viewing Hour.

The Family Viewing Hour limited networks on what they could show between the hours of 8:00 and 9:00 pm, but this policy was short-lived. The FCC's new policies were struck down nearly a year after their implementation as Judge Warren J. Ferguson ruled the Family Viewing Hour violated the first amendment and Administrative Procedures Act.⁶¹ In his ruling, Judge Ferguson wrote, "Although the Commission could not directly censor programming content, it could achieve the same result by 'public interest' jawboning."⁶² Government attempts to censor broadcasts ultimately failed, but self-censorship still remained within the networks. Yet, after the Family Viewing Hour was abolished, sections of Television Code were left without legs to stand on. The Television

⁵⁹ "National Association of Broadcasters Television Code," Provided by Vinnie Rattolle, c.1970. <https://archive.org/details/1970sTelevisionCode>

⁶⁰ Alan Alda, "Alan Alda," Interviewed by Michael Rosen, Archive of American Television, November 17, 2000, <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/alan-alda?clip=chapter1#about>

⁶¹ David W. Rintels, "Why We Fought the Family Viewing Hour," *The New York Times*, November 21, 1976, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/21/archives/why-we-fought-the-family-viewing-hour.html>

⁶² David W. Rintels, "Why We Fought the Family Viewing Hour."

Code finally met its end in the early 1980s, and internal censorship was on its way out the door. That being said, the Offices for Standards and Practices still managed to last until the late 1980s.⁶³

Comic books experienced similar censorship until the early 1970s. Paul Lopes identifies post-World War II America as the beginning of a decades-long “crusade against comic books.”⁶⁴ The Comic Codes of 1954 were created in response to concerns from parents that children were consuming comic books that displayed hyper-violent scenes and over-sexualized women.⁶⁵ Stories about soldiers were particularly at risk for censorship as the codes’ list of general standards heavily impacted war comics.⁶⁶ Two rules that were particularly problematic hid violence and promoted morals. The first stated, “all scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted,”⁶⁷ and the second stated, “inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.”⁶⁸ The Comic Codes not only blocked violence but promoted the moralizing of the characters.

The history of censorship matters for scripted programming because *M*A*S*H* and shows like it were beholden to the Television Codes, each of which were marked by

⁶³ “NBC and CBS Reduce Role of Self-Censors,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 1988, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/20/business/nbc-and-cbs-reduce-role-of-self-censors.html>

⁶⁴ Paul Lopes. *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 29.

⁶⁵ Paul Lopes, *Demanding Respect*, 32-33.

⁶⁶ Paul Lopes, *Demanding Respect*, 29.

⁶⁷ “The Comics Code of 1954,” Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. October 26, 1954. <http://cblbf.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>.

⁶⁸ “The Comics Code of 1954,” Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc.

a stamp indicating their cooperation in the end credits.⁶⁹ How the codes impacted different programming varied as the common censors placed on them in the 1970s focused on vulgarity, violence, and sex. Censorship concerning sex plagued the early seasons of the show. Alda recounts a scene in which Major Margaret Houlihan encounters a jockstrap in Hawkeye's tent, and the network insisted that the jockstrap could not be shown or identified.⁷⁰ Alda elaborates that he found it interesting that men's underwear could not be displayed despite the overwhelming presence of female underwear throughout the show's run.⁷¹

Likewise, through this censorship, depictions of war in television were stripped of violence while simultaneously presenting extremely violent situations. There is a focus on the aftermath of violence in *M*A*S*H* rather than the action itself. In the episode "Point of View," a soldier's trip to the 4077th is chronicled through a first-person account. At the beginning of the episode, one soldier is affected by a throat injury, and despite the on-screen appearance of three mortars exploding and the sounds of gunfire, not a single man has an on-screen injury.⁷² Additionally, scenes filmed in the operating room never show the operation, and only as the show reached its later seasons did it show more than a limited amount of blood.

The cheapening of violence in *M*A*S*H* was not limited to censorship as the network forced alteration through the addition of laugh tracks. Much to the dismay of the writers, laugh tracks were required, with varying levels of intensity, for the majority of

⁶⁹ *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 3, "Requiem for a Lightweight," Directed by Hy Averback, Hulu video, October 1, 1972. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/2ccd2cf5-a013-4501-a689-1ed6b94a9549>

⁷⁰ Alan Alda, "Alan Alda," Interviewed by Michael Rosen.

⁷¹ Alan Alda, "Alan Alda," Interviewed by Michael Rosen.

⁷² *M*A*S*H*, season 7, episode 10, "Point of View," Directed by Charles S. Dubin, Hulu video, November 20, 1978, <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/fd156ec3-04ad-4547-ab6b-beb080c1d9da>

jokes on the program. Only with the insistence of the show's writers and production team were they kept out of the operating room.⁷³ The laugh track, Gelbart explains, was a holdover from radio broadcasting, much like the tracks themselves.⁷⁴ This meant the laughter used was recorded long enough ago that every person on it was dead by the time the *M*A*S*H* team came into contact with them, considering the subject and context of his show, the irony was not lost on Gelbart.⁷⁵ The holdovers created from radio broadcasting, in both the Television Codes and the inclusion of laugh tracks, altered the tone in shows like *M*A*S*H* and placed limitations on their ability to portray realistic violence.

When the Television Codes fell, on-screen violence grew, but it was altered, becoming even less realistic. On-screen violence remained watered down, but networks used an entirely different method to do so. In the 1980s, it focused on the action rather than the aftermath. For example, in *M*A*S*H*, the episode "Dear Sigmund" dealt with a flipped ambulance, which happened off-screen and killed the driver.⁷⁶ In *The A-Team*, when cars flipped or sank, voiceovers or visuals were added that explicitly told the audiences that the driver and passengers were okay.⁷⁷ Other examples of momentary violence in *The A-Team* included bullets being aimed at feet or toward the sky. In one instance, in the episode "Black Day at Bad Rock," B.A. Baracus suffered a bullet wound. The conflict in the episode began with a search for help, but once it was secured, any

⁷³ Larry Gelbart. "Larry Gelbart." Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

⁷⁴ Larry Gelbart. "Larry Gelbart." Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

⁷⁵ Larry Gelbart. "Larry Gelbart." Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

⁷⁶ *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 7, "Dear Sigmund," Directed by Alan Alda, Hulu video, November 9, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/12458889-4b7d-4d3b-8309-e607e6692a54>

⁷⁷ *The A-Team*, season 1, episode 1, "Mexican Slayride: Part 1," Directed by Rod Holcomb, Amazon video, January 23, 1983, https://www.amazon.com/Mexican-Slayride-Part-1/dp/B000W4Q9TU/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=a+team+show&qid=1587962067&s=instant-video&sr=1-1

weight given to the injury was dismissed through a rapid recovery.⁷⁸ Throughout the series, the wounded always got back up. The A-team was violent, but on television, no one got hurt. Mr. T, who played B.A. Baracus, admitted that is what he loved about the show.⁷⁹

The divorce between violence and repercussions occurred over time. By being prevented from displaying the true consequences of violent acts, *M*A*S*H* had to rely on tone and *The A-Team* had to rely on the initial action. Yet because the characters in *M*A*S*H* denounced violence and the characters in *The A-Team* never truly hurt anyone, their decisions lacked any real gravity. Without gravity or the expectation of consequences, the soldiers could morph from pacifist doctors to hired mercenaries and demand the same level of slack from the audience.

Despite the clear guidelines surrounding on-screen violence, other factors dictated the amount of censorship faced by any particular program. In some cases, the level of censorship depended upon a program's popularity. Larry Gelbart, one of *M*A*S*H*'s lead comedy writers in its earlier seasons, stated "The relationship between what you want to do and what you can do really depends on your success."⁸⁰ Gelbart got away with more than most, and his early draft of the pilot was particularly raunchy compared to most American television. In his defense, he had been heavily influenced by British television as he was living in London when he wrote the pilot.⁸¹ Fortunately for Gelbart, the politics of his show were left relatively uncensored. The NAB had loose policies

⁷⁸ *The A-Team*, season 1, episode 5, "Black Day at Bad Rock," Directed by Christian I. Nyby II, Amazon video, February 22, 1983.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000W4Q9TU/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1

⁷⁹ Ben Child, "Mr. T pities the fools who made *The A-Team* film too violent," *The Guardian*, June 9, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jun/09/mr-t-the-a-team>

⁸⁰ Larry Gelbart. "Larry Gelbart." Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

⁸¹ Larry Gelbart. "Larry Gelbart." Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

addressing political programming, meaning the discussion of politics experienced a different level of freedom than that of sex or violence. The policy of the NAB requested programs to give consideration to political opposition and refrain from misleading audiences.⁸² Overall, writers could take the political aspects of their shows as far as they wanted, or at least as far as the audience would let them. *M*A*S*H*'s political commentary came at a time when the Vietnam War was highly unpopular, prompting Gelbart to state, "It was chic to be anti-war. You couldn't offend anybody."⁸³ When Alda was asked about censorship from the network, he replied, "We weren't ever in danger of political censorship. We were subjected to other kinds of censorship all the time, every day."⁸⁴ The American public was accepting of highly politicized anti-war themes throughout the 1970s, and this is seen through the popularity of shows like *M*A*S*H*.⁸⁵

A comment from Craig Bennett of Australia's Studio 10 sums up the situation best. During an interview with Jamie Farr, he said, "*M*A*S*H* managed to walk a razor's edge, showing the horrors of war in a way that was palatable to a television audience."⁸⁶ This comment would likely have Larry Gelbart rolling in his grave. Gelbart prided his show on its elements of realism and was not aiming for a *palatable* take on war, and he attempted to show it through episodes like the third season's finale in 1975—"Abyssinia

⁸² "Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters," Television Board of National Assn. of Radio & Television Broadcaster, December 6, 1951, <http://www.tvhistory.tv/SEAL-Good-Practice.htm>

⁸³ Larry Gelbart quoted in Will Kaufman, *American Culture in the 1970s*, 58.

⁸⁴ Alan Alda, "Alan Alda," Interviewed by Michael Rosen.

⁸⁵ As the 1980s took off, in television, the anti-war message became less important, because war became less of a central conflict. Soldier stories became veteran stories. The conflict the characters faced was no longer rooted in war, but in veterans finding their place in society. Thus, shows like *The A-Team* became stories about veterans and what the war did to them rather than about soldiers actively engaged in war. This type of media was pro-soldier, and its rise in popularity showed that Americans were willing to engage with it. This new trend of pro-soldier media came with a hefty burden, and stereotypes about damaged veterans betrayed by the military and never able to return to their civilian lives became commonplace.

⁸⁶ Jamie Farr, "Exclusive: Jamie Farr Looks Back on His *M*A*S*H* Days," Interviewed by Craig Bennett, Studio 10, July 21, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjAYjb8AaDw>

Henry.” The story follows the 4077ths leader, Henry Blake, after receiving his discharge papers and as he says goodbye to everyone in the camp. In the very last scene of the episode, in a surprise announcement, it is revealed that Blake’s plane was shot down over the Sea of Japan.⁸⁷ After the episode aired, Larry Gelbart and the other writers received many letters from fans mourning the loss of the character. Gelbart and his team responded to each one. In the letters, Gelbart says that:

[they] pointed out that that same week that this fictional character died in Korea, a planeload of Vietnamese children taking off from Saigon to come to America had crashed and they all perished. And I said...I hope you felt the same way about them that you did somebody who really doesn’t exist.⁸⁸

Regardless of the writers’ intention, *M*A*S*H* did make war palatable. The politics in its messaging was well-received, and Americans were open to pro-soldier/anti-military narratives from the get-go. Americans were pre-disposed to tales of heroic soldiers that stemmed from World War II and re-exposed to it through the rhetoric of political figures. The unpopularity of the Vietnam War coupled with the draft set the stage for anti-military sentiment to build. The lack of visual violence cleared the pathway for morals to exist in a land where they were never tested. Americans could see fictional soldiers as heroes with uncompromised morals making the archetype more prevalent and garnering more support for soldiers. Ironically, despite *M*A*S*H*’s comedic protesting of the military, the moralization of its characters might have helped the army’s rebranding campaign by showing individuals who were guided by the principles the army claimed to possess.

⁸⁷ *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 24, “Abyssinia, Henry,” Directed by Larry Gelbart, Hulu video, March 18, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/9fbc342e-5819-467d-83e3-101ce4a5dc6d>

⁸⁸ Larry Gelbart. “Larry Gelbart.” Interviewed by Dan Harrison.

CHAPTER 2

Somewhere around season four of *The A-Team*, NBC started reusing stunt footage. Viewers young and old were treated to the team's van destroying the same billboard a handful of times within a few years. In the face of production costs, the network's attention to continuity was underwhelming, but no one has ever argued that *The A-Team* is a realistic show. From shrugging off bullet wounds to drugging a 230 lb ex-army commando with laced milk, realism was never an option. Yet, the characters of *The A-Team* were fundamentally shaped by *real* conflict. The A-Team were veterans of a non-fictional war, and their position as such impacted how the team and the war were handled by the show's writers. *The A-Team* differed from shows like *M*A*S*H* and *Hogan's Heroes* because these shows crafted fictional versions of historic wars rather than alluding to them. This meant that for *The A-Team*, the conflict that created the strongest character traits happened off-screen. In making the characters veterans rather than soldiers, *The A-Team* makes the assumption that its audience has a passing familiarity with the history of the Vietnam War, or at the very least, the impact it had on soldiers. Because the show relies on that historic familiarity, moments of realism scattered amongst goofy sound effects and clearly telegraphed punches are reserved for the team's recollections about the war. If *The A-Team's* portrayal of Vietnam was not perceived as accurate and in line with American memory, the show's characterizations fall apart. By creating a reliance on the public's knowledge of the war, *The A-Team's* portrayal of the Vietnam War and its veterans was controlled by the memory, politics, and shame created in the post-Vietnam world. This would impact the fictional soldier's relationship with the military, their team, and themselves. It would also create unique

pathways for Americans to shape war stories that not only aligned with memory but also let them cope with their feelings toward Vietnam.

On May 13, 1986, during the season four finale of *The A-Team*, the team returns to Vietnam for the first time since the war. The A-Team had been relentlessly pursued by the military after being framed for robbing the Bank of Hanoi and murdering their commanding officer.¹ The team had been under orders to carry out the robbery, and the military's refusal to look into the matter left the team as fugitives and cast the military as the series' antagonist.

The fourth season's finale was a moment in the series where the A-Team had to confront their past while solving a problem. The episode was titled "The Sound of Thunder." The title was a reference to Operation Rolling Thunder—an operation that was greenlit by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 that saw a massive show of force from the American military through aerial bombing,² and the short story "The Sound of Thunder" by Ray Bradbury.³ In the episode, members of the A-Team started experiencing flashbacks almost immediately after landing 10 clicks outside of Hanoi. The flashbacks only got worse when the team made it to their hotel. As members of the team stared at the ceiling fans in the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Hanoi, the muffled sounds of helicopters played over clips of apparent Vietnam b-roll mixed in with scenes of the A-Team

¹ *The A-Team*, season 5, episode 2, "Trial by Fire," Directed by Les Sheldon, Amazon video, October 3, 1986. https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003Q5K3S0/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s5

² Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History, The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 413-415.

³ Bradbury's short story was about time travel, and it was a fitting inspiration for the episode as "The Sound of Thunder" was full of flashbacks.

prowling through jungles and glimpses of fallen soldiers.⁴ Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction” began playing as the montage continued.⁵

The “Eve of Destruction” is a Vietnam protest song created in 1965. While it was recorded by multiple artists, the Barry McGuire version is the most well-known.⁶ The song’s lyrics sum up many of the complaints and insecurities the American people had in the 1960s. It referenced the Vietnam War, the debate over the voting age, and struggles to integrate. With the inclusion of lines like a “handful of Senators don’t pass legislation” it also picked up on the growing discontent Americans had with their government.⁷ This discontent continued to fester for the rest of the decade and into the 1970s. A “government versus the people mentality” had hold of the country after President Richard Nixon’s poor handling of the Vietnam War and its protestors.⁸ It is with this in mind that we can understand that the characters in *The A-Team* being burned by the military did not happen as a quirk of storytelling from the show’s writers.

Teams in war stories post-Vietnam were coded as mistrustful of the military and authority. Leaders and the team members were constructed to fulfill unique roles for Americans looking to grapple with their feelings about Vietnam through the media they consumed. The moral leader and the hyper-skilled team were created. Moral leadership and hyper-skilled team members in fictional media were used by Americans to exhibit control over the power of the military in the wake of decades of mistrust toward the

⁴ B-roll is a collection of supplementary footage used alongside the main shots in television or film.

⁵ *The A-Team*, season 4, episode 23, “The Sound of Thunder,” Directed by Michael O’Herlihy, Amazon video, May 13, 1986.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003Q5CNB0/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s4

⁶ The song reached #1 on Billboard’s “The Hot 100” in September 1965.

⁷ Barry McGuire, *Eve of Destruction*, P.F. Sloan, July 15, 1965, by Dunhill, Spotify.

⁸ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 18

government. The morals of serialized media's team leaders coincided with a rise in patriotic rhetoric by figures such as Ronald Reagan as they attempted to appeal to conservative voters.⁹ These political figures began pushing a new wave of patriotism with pro-soldier narratives as one of its key arguments.

According to historian Michael Stewart Foley, abuses of power and economic decline generated some of that distrust.¹⁰ The Nixon Administration provided the nails for the metaphorical coffin containing Americans' trust with a series of blunders involving the mishandling of the anti-war movement and a slew of political scandals. Richard Nixon's policies for Vietnam were unclear from the get-go. Throughout the 1968 Presidential campaign, he remained unattached from any concrete plan to end the war while simultaneously discouraging peace talks until after the election.¹¹ Nixon used the pro-war movement to gain political power, and winning the election, he attacked the anti-war movement for disagreeing with his policies. For example, after the Cambodian invasion, Nixon referred to student protestors as "bums" that would move onto other issues quickly, and after the Kent State University shooting, Nixon blamed the protestors for allowing dissent to turn into violence.¹² Soon after these events, the Pentagon Papers were released, and the Nixon administration's fight to bury them sparked even more dissent. By the time the Watergate Scandal rolled around, 61 percent of Americans thought the war was a mistake, and Nixon's credibility was shot.¹³ Yet, Nixon's failures were not the only force spurring dissatisfaction with the government. By the 1970s,

⁹ J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter: The Politics of Family and the Rise of the Religious Right*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 286.

¹⁰ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 22.

¹¹ Sandra Scanlon, *The ProWar Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 88.

¹² Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 19.

¹³ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 19-20.

America was in economic disarray as factories and farms shut down and rent prices spiked.¹⁴ All across the country, Americans were losing faith in their economic stability, and in turn, their government.

These events coincided with the emergence of the televised news cycle. It appears the continued rise of news coverage and American's growing discontent with the government walked side-by-side in the 1960s and continued their stroll well into the 1970s. Daniel Hallin points out that every presidential administration operating in the world of broadcast news experienced some form of crisis when attempting to handle negative press coverage.¹⁵ In short, these administrations were being judged by the public for their ability to manage their image. Yet, there is still some question about how large a role television actually played in the dismantling of trust between citizen and government.

Hallin observes there are a few problems with research conducted to study American news viewing habits. First, some studies shown that Americans trusted news broadcasts less than they trusted the government.¹⁶ Second, studies about American television habits took people's self-evaluation of their viewing habits at face-value.¹⁷ Finally, studies conducted in the mid-1980s have showed that only about one-third of Americans watched any form of televised news.¹⁸ Additionally, even if someone watched the news, there is no way to tell how much they watched or if they retained the information.¹⁹ While these issues call into question the true role of television, they do not

¹⁴ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 179.

¹⁵ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 7.

¹⁶ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 106.

¹⁷ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 106-107.

¹⁸ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 107.

¹⁹ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 107.

dismiss it entirely, especially in the case of the Vietnam War. Hallin states that research shows that Americans relied on television for news about Vietnam more than any other event.²⁰ Regardless if television was the ringleader of dismantling trust in the government or not, it did play a large role in how Americans viewed the Vietnam War and the military.

The distrust between the people and the government extended to the military, which had become increasingly unpopular in the final years of the Vietnam War, so unpopular, in fact, that the iconic G.I. Joe action figure was discontinued for a few years.²¹ Yet the trajectory toward negative news broadcasts about the war was a slow crawl. Between 1961-1965, news coverage about Vietnam was more patriotic.²² But by 1967, American news broadcasts began showing “Americans in action” and the news became less about policy and more about the actions of soldiers; essentially, the war became a drama.²³ Alongside this coverage of soldiers, the portrayal of drama extended to the home front, and by 1966, 20% of CBS’s coverage of Vietnam involved some form of domestic controversy.²⁴ Hallin suggests that this shift contributed to political tensions after the war. By 1968, after events like the My Lai Massacre and the Tet Offensive, negative press became more prevalent. As Americans believed the war started with the intention to preserve democracy, they could not reconcile the bad news coming out of Vietnam with their self-image of righteousness and their faith in the power of their

²⁰ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 106.

²¹ Jimmy Stamp, “Now You Know the History of G.I. Joe. And Knowing Is Half The Battle The evolution of the All-American Hero from artist’s mannequin to action figure,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 29, 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/now-you-know-the-history-of-gi-joe-and-knowing-is-half-the-battle-11506463/>

²² Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 114.

²³ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 114-115.

²⁴ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 192.

military.²⁵ Americans started searching for the source of their failure in Vietnam, and they found it in a lack of American will.²⁶ This perceived “lack of will” came from the public failing to support the war, as well as the government failing to let the soldiers win it.

The Nixon-Agnew administration blamed civilians, and the first head on their chopping block was the anti-war movement. The anti-war movement was consistently under attack by news broadcasts and the Nixon-Agnew Administration throughout the duration of the Vietnam War. News programs chose to focus on the more radical and extreme examples of protesting, and in consequence, the movement was portrayed as a threat to “law and order.”²⁷ Meanwhile, the Nixon-Agnew administration was looking to undermine the anti-war movement by painting activists as unpatriotic and a threat to soldiers. Spiro Agnew, in particular, helped popularize the myth of the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans by promoting a harsh dichotomy between “good vets” and “bad protestors.”²⁸ In reality, many Vietnam veterans and veterans of previous wars were active supporters of the anti-war movement, but that mattered little when it came down to assigning blame. It did not help matters when Ronald Reagan doubled down on the myth after his 1980 election.²⁹

In turn, and in an elaborate game of pointing fingers, civilians blamed the government. Even those who had supported the Vietnam War were dissatisfied with the government’s handling of the conflict and complained bitterly that the government

²⁵ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 209-210.

²⁶ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 210.

²⁷ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 194.

²⁸ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 29.

²⁹ Sandra Scanlon, *The ProWar Movement*, 2.

prevented the military from winning; much of this anger was directed toward Lyndon B. Johnson's Administration.³⁰ This mistrust and conflict within the American people bled out on screen and in comic books. The mistrust of the military is visible in media created near the end of and after the Vietnam War. In these pieces of media, the military became the enemy of the soldier through betrayal.

In *The A-Team*, the betrayal of the military is continuously stressed throughout the series. At the beginning of each episode of *The A-Team*, the same message is played before the opening theme music that tells the audience that a military court convicted a "crack commando unit" for a crime they did not commit.³¹ The A-Team's conviction is addressed multiple times throughout the series without being fully explained until the show's final seasons.³² The A-Team allegedly robbed the bank of Hanoi, but in actuality, it was a covert mission arranged by their commanding officer. When their commanding officer disappeared, no one could corroborate their story, and they were charged.³³ This description paints a picture of highly trained soldiers following orders and being punished for it.

The introduction, even without all the finer details, still manages to paint a firm picture of how events transpired—a team with a stellar track record was betrayed by the military. After the betrayal, the team began to use the skills they learned during their service to survive and simultaneously serve the public. The phrasing "sent to prison by a military court" emphasizes that the military is at fault for the team's misfortune. The phrasing makes it clear that a different outcome might have been achieved in civilian

³⁰ Sandra Scanlon, *The ProWar Movement*, 2.

³¹ Mike Post, *The A-Team Theme*, Peter Carpenter, 1982, by Elektra Records. Spotify.

³² *The A-Team*, "The Sounds of Thunder."

³³ *The A-Team*, "Trial by Fire."

court.³⁴ Throughout the series, the military hangs in the background, operating as a persistent threat promising the team's incarceration if they are caught. In short, soldiers are the protagonists, and the military is the antagonist.

The A-Team were not the only soldiers getting the cold shoulder from the military. In the episode "The Sounds of Thunder," a former enemy, MP General "Bull" Fulbright, comes to the team looking for assistance rescuing a prisoner of war from Vietnam.³⁵ To accomplish its mission, the team "acquisitions" a plane. After arriving at the airfield, the team's pilot, Captain H.M. Murdock, picks out a four-star general's plane for the mission. They pretend to take Fulbright hostage, and they abscond with the aircraft. The general arrives and demands that the plane be stopped at any cost. When he is told of Fulbright being held hostage on the plane, he responded, "he's a soldier" indicating that Fulbright was expendable.³⁶ The general represented the upper brass of the military, and his cavalier attitude toward the potential death of a soldier villainizes the military. Despite the general's insistence to not be made into one of "the A-Team's fools," the team escaped unscathed, and the military is once again portrayed as callous and incompetent when faced with the A-Team. Displaying the incompetency of the military became an effective way to showcase the skill and heroics of the soldier in media like *The A-Team*.

In *M*A*S*H*, military incompetency is primarily showed through "G.I." characters. Chief among these characters, or "major" if one wanted to get technical, is

³⁴ The 2010 adaptation of *The A-Team* even addresses this when one of the demands the A-Team makes when they agree to assist the CIA is that they are given a new trial in civilian court.

³⁵ It is later revealed that this was a ploy by Fulbright to rescue his son. It is revealed shortly after that Fulbright's supposed "endangered son" was fabricated by his daughter looking to enact revenge on Fulbright for leaving her mother.

³⁶ *The A-Team*, "The Sound of Thunder."

Major Frank Burns played by Larry Linville. Burns was a notoriously bad doctor. Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce in episode “Chief Surgeon Who?” told Burns, “I’ve seen better surgeons operating on trees” and accused him of being “a year behind on your journals.”³⁷ Hawkeye’s descriptions were apropos as Burns was, in fact, the worst doctor in the unit. Beyond simply being a bad doctor, Burns’ incompetency was emphasized by his rank. His position of power over more qualified people was an engine for comedy in the first five seasons of the show.

Burns was a character obsessed with rank to the point that he often displayed moments of entitlement that negatively impacted his unit, and in turn, he was constantly spurned for his obsession with regulation. Banter between Burns and his peers included wordplay like: “Well, what about rank?” / “Can I help it if I’m not as rank as you?”³⁸ With the exception of Major Margaret Houlihan, none of the other characters respected military rank. In one exchange with his commanding officer, Henry Blake, in “Chief Surgeon Who?”, Burns insisted on being appointed the chief surgeon of the unit. Burns’ reasoning was: “I have got oak leaves on my shoulders,” to which his commanding officer responded, “and I got dimples on my butt.”³⁹ Burns knew he was not the most qualified for Chief Surgeon based on skill alone, but he felt he should be handed the privilege because of his rank. Blake dismisses Burns outright and shows that Burns is in the minority opinion on the importance of regulation.

Burns’ obsession with military hierarchy and regulation coupled with his incompetency and entitlement drew clear implications that the military’s rigid structure

³⁷ *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 4, “Chief Surgeon Who?” Directed by E.W. Swackhamer, Hulu video, October 8, 1972. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/112b061b-1c18-4f15-bed8-042d44919735>

³⁸ *M*A*S*H*, “Chief Surgeon Who?.”

³⁹ *M*A*S*H*, “Chief Surgeon Who?.”

placed undesirable people into command. Burns thought he deserved to be chief surgeon because of his rank. Blake insisted, “We can’t be so GI we lose patients.”⁴⁰ This gets at the heart of one of *M*A*S*H*’s messages about the military—the military rewards the obedient. This style of underscoring the problems with the military, unlike *The A-Team*, said less about how the military mistreated its men and more about how it treated individuality and morality. Burns attempted to gain a prestigious title at the risk of the patients under his care. Hawkeye, who was named chief surgeon, fought back. He was known for being anti-G.I., consistently out of uniform, and the best doctor in the unit. His individuality was valuable to the betterment of the hospital. Near the end of the episode, when Burns’ appeals to upper brass ended with a one-star general inspecting Hawkeye’s work as chief surgeon, the general apologized to Hawkeye for doubting him. The general suggested Burns be given a high colonic and sent on a ten-mile hike.⁴¹ Hawkeye’s skill and dedication were prioritized over military regulation after the general watched him work. By choosing skill over rank, the general shows the triviality of regulation.

In both *M*A*S*H* and *The A-Team*, being anti-G.I. was a badge of honor, and there was comradery rooted in distaste for the military between fictional soldiers. In *The A-Team*, the team embraced unconventional methods to gain a reputation as “The A-Team,” and its members were proud of it. In *M*A*S*H*, individuality signified the character was a good doctor. The ensemble approach to both shows provided vindication, or at the very least scenes of soldiers supporting soldiers. The presence of other soldiers gave characters vindication through the support of their peers. In general, military teams were a popular trope. It solved hard problems of making characters with vastly different

⁴⁰ *M*A*S*H*, “Chief Surgeon Who?”

⁴¹ *M*A*S*H*, “Chief Surgeon Who?”

life experiences find similarities between themselves. Everyone had a trait in common thanks to the military, but everyone was anti-G.I. enough to maintain individual personality traits. Additionally, fictional soldiers could not connect with civilian characters as easily. After all, Hollywood's "damaged" soldier was still incapable of truly connecting to the public, and the myth of veteran mistreatment still ran rampant in war stories. Military teams, therefore, developed based around their quirky commonalities. Wild tactics brought the A-Team together. Other teams formed as well.

The Losers is a war comic that emerged inside of the long-running *Our Fighting Forces* (1954) series produced by DC Comics.⁴² *The Losers'* initial run was limited in *Our Fighting Forces*; they appeared briefly in 1970 in issue 123 and between 1974-1975 between issues 151-162, but the series would go on to inspire, and loan its name, to a reimagined *Losers* series in the 2000s and a movie adaptation in 2010. "Losers" was a key identity in both series. The term "Loser" is a self-identifier for members of the Losers team. A "Loser," to put it plainly, is someone who loses. Losers have either lost their units, lost a decisive battle, or lost their way in the military.

As team members joined, they described what makes them "Losers." It was typically a two-part loss. The first loss was personal, and the second loss had some connection to a betrayal from the military.⁴³ For example, when the leader of the team, Captain William Storm, spoke about himself, he said, "Why shouldn't the brass forget about me? Capt. Storm... The P.T. Skipper who lost his whole crew! I'm a Loser...And

⁴² *The Losers* appeared in multiple comic series beginning in first in *G.I. Combat* in 1969. Their longest run was in *Our Fighting Forces* beginning in January 1970.

⁴³ The personal loss typically came in the form of losing comrades and emphasized a familial relationship between soldiers in the same unit. By connecting loss to family, it became more relatable and more tragic.

so were all the guns who served under me!”⁴⁴ Losers saw abandonment by the military as part of their identity as a team. When the characters Gunner and Sarge met Storm in the comic *G.I. Combat* in its 138th issue, Sarge explained, “Gunner and I wuz sent on a special detail! To teach the doughfeet the know-how we picked up in the Pacific! The A-B-C’s of in-fightin’! But instead we got the book thrown at us!”⁴⁵ Even though *The Losers* was set in World War II, the characters’ attitudes toward the military were on par with other post-Vietnam War media. Teams created to share anti-military ideology are only half of the equation in understanding how fictional soldiers in serialized media operated. The other half deals with the individual personalities assigned to each character. The creation of these individuals had everything to do with politics that would come to a head in the 1980s.

By the 1980s, soldier characters in war stories were written as sympathetic figures, in part because conservative leaders were pushing Americans to “atone” for not supporting soldiers during the Vietnam War. Ronald Reagan’s push to gain political favor with conservatives by using a pro-soldier platform was built on shaming the American public. He doubled down on the message that the loss in Vietnam was the fault of the American people for not supporting the troops and the government’s failure to allow the military the freedom to win.⁴⁶ He criticized Americans for feeling shame toward the war and simultaneously made veterans the victims of the public’s “misplaced” guilt. If America was to support her veterans, she had to take pride in their actions. Americans had to return to patriotism. Sandra Scanlon argues that Reagan’s push of

⁴⁴ Robert Kanigher, “Our Fighting Forces: Featuring The Losers,” *Our Fighting Forces*, no. 123, National Periodical Publications Inc., January-February 1970.

⁴⁵ Robert Kanigher, *G.I. Combat*, no. 138, National Periodical Publications Inc., October-November 1969.

⁴⁶ Sandra Scanlon, *The ProWar Movement*, 2-4.

patriotism created a revisionist culture within film and television.⁴⁷ The viewing public, however, would simply not allow blind patriotic feelings toward the government to return. The Americans still had to grapple with the mistrust they felt, and luckily for them, the team dynamic in popular culture provided an outlet to do just that.

The way revisionist narratives played out on screen and in print was not so much a cultural reevaluation of the war but of the soldiers who served in it, and the team dynamic had a crucial role. In the military, a team of soldiers creates a hierarchy that requires a head determined by rank. The leader of the team would be the compass that guided the actions of the unit, and as fictional soldiers became infused with American values in the effort to express patriotism, leaders became increasingly virtuous.

Americans liked to see a moralistic head-on military teams for multiple reasons. First, it allowed them to reintroduce American values back into the military—something they believed the military had lost throughout the duration of Vietnam. Second, it gave them an avenue to celebrate soldiers as heroes and express patriotism. After all, the public had lost faith in both the government and military, meaning they had to find a new way to express patriotism as the traditional avenues had become tainted with mistrust and shame. The characters of *The A-Team* and *M*A*S*H* were deeply sympathetic because they were able to balance traditional American morals with modern political belief. Moral fictional soldiers became the perfect conduit for American values, and in turn, vehicles for patriotic fervor. Being betrayed by the military in some way, but still being loyal to the values laid out in the U.S. Constitution, made them relatable to a public that felt betrayed but still proud to be American. Finally, these moralistic leaders allowed

⁴⁷ Sandra Scanlon, *The ProWar Movement*, 4.

Americans to exercise control of the military. The public, recognizing themselves as moral, could see themselves in leaders predisposed to do the right thing.

There is a difference between how team leaders were described before and after the rise of anti-war sentiments. For example, in the Marvel comic series *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandoes*, first published in 1963, Sergeant Nick Fury is described as, “Six foot two of steel-muscled, iron-nerved fighting man! Fury believes in making his men fear him so much that they would rather face hopeless odds than face his anger! It’s rumored that he’s got a heart, but no one can prove it!”⁴⁸ Fury is a harsh commanding officer, and he demands respect through fear. While the final line of his descriptions hints that he cares about his men, Fury does not outwardly show it. This contrasts with team leaders in comics emerging after the Vietnam War became unpopular.

The comics of the 1980s took a different approach. On biographical cards created for Conrad “Duke” Hauser, the drill sergeant of the G.I. Joe team in the comic series *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* and the accompanying cartoon series, his information is broken down into two main parts. The first part covers his qualifications, and the second includes a quote from Hauser after he denied commission. It said, “They tell me that an officer’s job is to impel others to take risks—so that the officer survives to take the blame in the event of total catastrophe. With all due respect sir... if that’s what an officer does, I don’t want any part of it.”⁴⁹ Hauser outwardly expresses concern for the men under his command. There is no posturing behind trumped-up expressions of masculinity and no

⁴⁸ Stan Lee, *Nick Fury and His Howling Commandoes*, no. 1, Bard Publication Corp., 1963.

⁴⁹ “First Sergeant, Code Name: Duke,” Image provided by Phillip Donnelly. *G.I. Joe: Conrad “Duke” Hauser*, 1983 <https://www.yojoe.com/action/83/duke.shtml>

prioritization of military rank as a goal. Americans created fictional leaders who would stand up for a soldier and do so proudly.

Tom Englehart argues that America had only two surviving elements of its “war story” intact post-Vietnam: “freedom and victory” and “captivity and rescue.”⁵⁰ Duke’s quote hits on both. The quote is about rejecting a military officer’s power to send men into conflict while remaining behind. This small piece of character description emphasized that Duke’s primary characteristics were honor and heroism. He was meant to portray an honest American who took the values of the American people into the Vietnam War. The message of American values was helped by his blue eyes, blond hair, and his hometown in St. Louis, Missouri. His willingness to stand against officers behaving dishonorably conveys freedom within the military—the freedom to do the right thing. His appearance reflected the same message. His uniform was worn less formally than higher ranks, and he was wearing field gear. For example, General Flag and the sergeants that commanded the G.I. Joe team in the first issues wore dress uniforms.⁵¹ Duke, during his introduction in 1984, wore a partially unbuttoned military shirt with a bandolier thrown over his shoulder.⁵² The field gear acted as a message that Duke rejected rank. The drive to join his men in the field showed that Duke refused to leave his men behind. Duke’s version of masculinity emphasized heroism as did his storylines. The same was true for other leaders of the G.I. Joe team.

⁵⁰ Tom Englehardt, "Afterlife (1975-1994)," in *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 13.

⁵¹ Hama, Larry. “Operation: Lady Doomsday.” *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*. no. 1. Marvel Comics Group. June 1, 1982.

⁵² It is also worth mentioning that this was the look he was sporting at a funeral. Hama, Larry. *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*. no. 22. Marvel Comics Group. April 1984.

In the first issue of *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, in June 1982, Clayton “Hawk” Abernathy says, “We each took an oath to defend the constitution of the United States. That constitution guarantees the right of every citizen to disagree with the government.”⁵³ Abernathy, another blond-haired, blue-eyed soldier from the heartland, says this to a member of his team when he asked if they were going to rescue a suspected traitor. American values rooted in founding documents is about as patriotic as it gets. The constitution is treated as a guiding moral philosophy for the leaders of fictional military teams, but the job of the team leader does not end there. The team leader must also actively encourage others to uphold American values.

The unwavering morals of the team leader were also used to guide more reluctant members to morally sound decisions. For example, in *The A-Team*, their leader John “Hannibal” Smith was constantly challenging his subordinates to do the right thing. In the episode “One More Time,” the A-Team is finally apprehended by the military. Before they can be shipped off to detention centers, a representative from the State Department offers them a job to rescue a general and his daughter from a military compound in South America. In exchange for the A-Team’s help, the State Department was willing to release them with a head start on the military police. The general in question, however, was hated by the A-Team. The team’s mechanic and weapons expert, B.A. Baracus, had received disciplinary action for failing to salute him and punching him in the nose after the general called him a liar. Baracus said, “I ain’t going nowhere to rescue no sucka calls me a liar.” Templeton Peck, the team’s conman, argued, “I think we’re putting a lot on the line,

⁵³ Stan Lee, *Nick Fury and His Howling Commandos*, no. 1.

Hannibal, just to get back to being what we already are. Fugitives?”⁵⁴ Smith agreed to take the assignment anyway. American values dictated the general and his daughter be returned, so that is what the A-Team did. Even though two members of the team protested the assignment, the team leader made the decision to go through with a risky rescue operation because it was the right thing to do. The presence of the general’s daughter as one of the victims created an innocent party that forced the A-Team to act. American values controlled the team through the team leader, but if those leaders were stand-ins for the will of the public, who did the team represent?

The A-Team might have had the copyright on the name, but the phrase itself was military terminology for the first team on the ground. In war television and comics, every team became an “A-Team.” This meant that each team started operating in similar patterns as highly specialized military units led by a patriotic head. This brings us back to the subject of control because it is important to recognize who exactly the moralistic team leaders were controlling. Highly specialized team members were used to represent the might of the American military. They maintained the individuality of soldiers, but their skill sets often aligned with one particular asset of military power. For example, the *Hogan’s Heroes* ensemble cast featured Corporal Peter Newkirk, a conman and tailor, Staff Sergeant James Kinchloe, the radio, television, and electronics expert, and Technical Sergeant Andrew Carter, an explosives, chemistry, and bomb-making agent. The A-Team had a planner, conman, mechanic, and pilot. The assets became more technologically and diplomatically inclined over time, and a greater emphasis was placed on education in later teams.

⁵⁴ *The A-Team*, season 1, episode 10, “One More Time,” Directed by Arnold Laven, Amazon video, April 12, 1983. https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000W4Q9TU/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1

The source of early teams' skills was chalked up to natural talent. In May 1963, in the comic *Sgt Fury and his Howling Commandoes*, characters like Izzy Cohen were described with lines such as "This scrappy, tough master mechanic loves machinery the way some men love fame and fortune! He can repair anything." Another, Dine Manelli, was described with, "You might have seen him in the movies, under another name: for this handsome swashbuckler gave up a promising career as an actor in order to repay the country he loves for all it has given him!"⁵⁵ The origin of their expertise comes from natural talent and passion for their craft gives a reason for why they chose their fields within the military. These two characters represent military assets, but the characters themselves are less fleshed out. The focus on individual soldiers in the 1970s and 1980s changed that.

For example, the team in *G.I. Joe* featured Scarlet, who worked in intel and hand-to-hand combat. Her profile stated that, "She began her martial arts training at age 9 and was awarded her first black belt at age 15."⁵⁶ The team also featured Stalker who "was the warlord of a large urban street gang prior to enlistment" making him fluent in Spanish, Arabic, French, and Swahili.⁵⁷ The attention to the source of their skill added to their identities as beings independent from the military. The characters' act of bringing their unique skill set to military service allows the reader to feel like the military is made up of individuals providing something unique.

More fields of expertise arrived with the passage of time. The rapid pace of technological advancements saw the previous position of "electronics expert" break apart

⁵⁵ Stan Lee, *Nick Fury and His Howling Commandos*, no. 1. 1963.

⁵⁶ Larry Hama, "Operation: Lady Doomsday," *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*, no. 1, Marvel Comics Group, June 1, 1982.

⁵⁷ Larry Hama, "Operation: Lady Doomsday," *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*, no. 1.

into communication and field electronics. In the G.I. Joe team, Breaker, the communication expert, was “familiar with all NATO and Warsaw Pact communication gear” and Flash, the electronics expert, was “highly skilled in many aspects of electronic technology and is capable of equipment repair in the field.”

For each one of these characters, they are the best in their field. They became the personification of a military asset. By creating individuals that represented the potential power of the military and then subsequently placing them under a leader guided by American values, Americans could situate the power of the military back under their control. They could essentially view the military positively without outright supporting it because they had turned the military itself into soldiers. Even if this fictional roleplay could not totally heal the shame Americans felt from the Vietnam War, it could at the very least mask it.

CHAPTER THREE

Nebraska saw a very pleasant Monday morning on September 24, 2018, as Loretta Swit made her way to Eppley Airfield near downtown Omaha. Swit, famous for her portrayal of Major Margaret Houlihan in the acclaimed television sitcom *M*A*S*H*, arrived at 4:30 a.m. to meet women taking part in one of the very last “Flights of Freedom” performed by Patriotic Productions.¹ The “Flights of Freedoms” program was established in 2008 and was designed to charter veterans from across the United States to visit war memorials in Washington D.C.² This particular flight is notable because it catered solely to Nebraska’s female veterans. Swit, arguably one of America’s most famous nurses, fit right in despite never having served herself. Since her appearance in *M*A*S*H*, Swit has been asked to participate in many different functions celebrating women in the military from parades to Veterans Day celebrations.³ This begs the question of “why?” The character Margaret Houlihan became a touchstone in American culture as the most recognized representation of a woman in the military, and Swit’s continued relevance almost forty years after the last episode of *M*A*S*H* aired shows the lasting impact of her performance. Her popularity shaped America’s attitude toward female members of the armed forces, because simply put, she was given more screen time than real nurses.

News broadcasts about the Vietnam War concerning women were typically focused on civilians, and the stories of women who served only started gaining real

¹ Steve Liewer, “M*A*S*H’ actress Swit ‘proud of her gender’ for volunteering in combat,” *Omaha World-Herald*, Sep. 24, 2018, https://www.omaha.com/news/local/m-a-s-h-star-loretta-swit-proud-to-accompany/article_9875eeb3-d200-500b-808d-a88ca118cc23.html

² “Flights of Honor,” Patriotic Productions. <https://www.patrioticproductions.org/>

³ Steve Liewer, “M*A*S*H’ actress Swit ‘proud of her gender’ for volunteering in combat.”

traction in the 1980s. Even so, there was no real consensus on what the *true* female experience of Vietnam was—if ever a thing even existed. Yet, the disagreements that arose were less about personal experiences and more about femininity and politics. The conflicts between lived experience and presumed experience would come to blows when women began sharing stories in which their behavior, and the behavior of the men around them, contradicted standard cultural norms. The fight to maintain the image of the “acceptable” American woman in Vietnam would lead to harsh debates in the early 1980s and add new layers to the growing complex relationship between popular culture, the political climate following the civil rights movement, and portrayals of women in media.

In a post-Vietnam America, war stories were at the forefront of American consciousness, and because second-wave feminism placed new spotlights on the female experience, women’s involvement in war could not be ignored. Americans were forced to confront a new idea of womanhood that existed within a *gender limbo*, where the roles they performed were traditional but the landscape around them was not. This struggle between femininity and masculinity was often played for comedy. Yvonne Tasker, in her discussion of *M*A*S*H*, argues that Margaret Houlihan’s “military identity suggests gender confusion.”⁴ Tasker explains that Houlihan’s “manliness” comes from her obsession with military procedure, and it manifests as she attempts to exert control over male surgeons.⁵ Additionally, comedy at Houlihan’s expense comes from the limitations that a masculine military hierarchy places onto her ability to act on or express sexual desires.⁶ Trapped between maintaining the “ideal” American woman and exploring the

⁴ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War II*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 180-181.

⁵ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 181.

⁶ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 181.

realities of war, Americans created fictional military women, like Houlihan, that developed identities coded with both masculine and feminine attributes in a way that distinguished them from previous examples of female representation and from their male counterparts. These fictional female military personnel were able to create a strength and identity rooted in the ideal of self-sacrifice as well as redefine how Americans understood servicewomen. In short, the fictional military women created during and after the Vietnam War provided an easy to swallow narrative for Americans struggling to reconcile traditional and modern concepts of femininity. These fictional women simultaneously catered to past ideas of femininity while introducing the ideas popularized during second-wave feminism. In doing so, the stories of fictional women could operate as stand-ins for the experiences of real women.⁷

Many Americans lived in willful ignorance about the work their daughters performed in Vietnam. For example, Diane Poole, a nurse who served in Vietnam between 1969 and 1970, found that her own family had little interest in discussing her service. She recalled:

People didn't want to hear about it when I came home. They don't even know anything about it. My mother won't even listen. You know what I got for Christmas in Vietnam? Dish towels and potholders. What dishes? I had no dishes. I also got bubble bath. I didn't have a bathtub, exactly. They thought I was on vacation in the South China Sea or something, and they don't want to hear it today.⁸

⁷ A notable exception to this is in comic books. The few reoccurring female characters in comics like *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, were treated less like women and more like men who could use sex as a weapon.

⁸ Diana Dwan Poole in Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam: The Oral History*, (New York: TV Books, 2005), 45.

It was likely Poole's family, and families like hers, associated female military service with negative connotations. After all, a woman choosing to serve was a non-traditional path that was rife with well-attached stereotypes, even before the Vietnam War. For example, it was a long-held belief that women who became nurses for the military were either promiscuous or lesbians.⁹ Both were viewed as a moral failing on the part of the woman and seen as a logical answer to the question "Why would women rather join the military than start a family?"

The women who enlisted as nurses were aware of the negative associations that accompanied their careers, but they were still enticed to join because the American military created convincing ad campaigns to counterattack previous bad representations. Women were promised respectability, job security even if they were to get married or have children, and the ability to maintain their femininity.¹⁰ While the advertisements the N. W. Ayer agency produced offered community for male soldiers, women were promised individuality. While the government never managed to solve Vietnam's nurse shortage, they did attract some volunteers. Women like Lynn Calmes Kohl and Susan Procopio Cartwright joined for financial freedom and with the promise that they would not be sent to Vietnam; both eventually served tours there.¹¹ The new advertisements did not provide women with an accurate window into the life as an Army nurse. Only the nurses who served knew the truth, and so, how the general public and actual nurses saw female service in Vietnam became at odds. The conflict between the two would create hurdles for women attempting to tell their stories and obscure the truth to appease public

⁹ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 8.

¹⁰ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse Woman*, 13-42.

¹¹ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 69.

sentiments. This was the case for women such as Lynda Van Devanter as she faced criticism for her story when she published it in 1983.

Kara Vuic, author of *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, points to Lynda Van Devanter's autobiography *Home Before Morning* as the beginning of one of the more heated debates surrounding the true story of female nurses in Vietnam.¹² In the book, Van Devanter recounts her experiences with drug use as a coping mechanism and her relationships with male surgeons, crafting a narrative that broke down long-held misconceptions about women's lives during war. Van Devanter told the story of a non-traditional female experience and gained both support and backlash from other women who served.

Critics were determined to discredit her, and a good share of them were fellow nurses who served in Vietnam. They claimed Van Devanter could not definitively prove that she was telling the truth, and Vuic argues that this was done in the hope of creating a less controversial, more traditional, alternative narrative.¹³ When Van Devanter spoke of drug use, her critics claimed that the fault rested not in trauma but in her weakness of character and that portraying it as anything different would have the American people believing that medical personnel put wounded soldiers at risk.¹⁴ Van Devanter was also criticized for portraying nurses as "bed-hopping, foul-mouthed tramps."¹⁵ These types of criticisms were more concerned with optics than addressing the realities Van Devanter faced, and her biggest critics did not care if *Home Before Morning* was her truth; they were worried it would be accepted as *the* truth. This could not stand because *Home Before Morning* suggested that traditional femininity could not exist a warzone. So, if

¹² Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 163-169.

¹³ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 166.

¹⁴ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 167.

¹⁵ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 168.

women were inherently feminine, yet traditional femininity could be disrupted by war, what did that mean for the women who served?

Traditional female roles and expressions of femininity were already being called into question by second-wave feminism in the 1960s, gaining serious traction by the 1970s.¹⁶ By the 1980s, Americans were starting to react—a reaction that would be fueled by conservatism.¹⁷ Americans were embarrassed by the inflation of the 1970s, the Watergate scandal, and the failure of the Vietnam War, and they saw these events as evidence of America failing as a nation.¹⁸ Americans wanted a way to return to their former glory. The growing religious right movement, seeking the return of societal morality, identified the nuclear family as the bedrock of their once great country.¹⁹ The nuclear family had come “under attack” from the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and the fight to preserve it would create a conservative push for traditional femininity in stories about women. Yet, Pandora’s Box had already opened, and war stories dominated popular culture.

America’s media always reflects its current culture and political climate, and post-Vietnam America was no different. The war stories created during this time revolved around men and shifted from positive to negative as the war’s popularity changed. The negative outlook held throughout the 1970s, and stories about the tragedy of war and the dire consequences it had for soldiers became popular until the first half of the 1980s. During the 1980s, veterans, rather than soldiers, became the focal point of the American

¹⁶ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 2-4.

¹⁷ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 66-67.

¹⁸ J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, The Politics of Family and the Rise of the Religious Right*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011, 60.

¹⁹ J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 60.

response to the war. Shows like *Hawaii Five-O* (1968-1980), *Magnum, P.I.* (1980-1988), and *Miami Vice* (1984-1990) all featured veterans as main characters. The stories created during this time typically held the soldier up as a hero while simultaneously condemning the morality of the institution of the military. This timeline, however, only truly affected stories about men. There were stories about female nurses and soldiers—not female veterans.

While female nurses and soldiers were involved, there were fewer of them, and men were still the face of the war. Additionally, a woman's work in Vietnam differed from that of a soldier so the stories about them were fundamentally different. First, all the women who went to Vietnam volunteered to be there. Second, women did not serve in combat roles, and the overwhelming majority were nurses or some type of administrators. Third, they were expected to operate as they had done in America and provide comfort and carry some of a soldier's emotional burdens.²⁰ In addition, stories about women had to reflect the level of respectability of behavior that the military had promised they would be able to maintain. All of these factors accumulated together alongside the one-dimensionality of female roles and the return of conservative values to create a fictional female military figure that was a blend of masculine and feminine traits. The archetype that emerged was one of a masculine outer shell with a feminine core underneath, and one of the easiest ways to express this dynamic was through the fictional woman's body.

There is humor in misplaced things, and stories that became popular were ones that found ways to place women in situations where their bodies were a contradiction to their surroundings. There were two distinct ways to do this, and each follows well-

²⁰ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 41.

established patterns for women in American storytelling. A woman could either be innocent or promiscuous, and real women experienced the constraints created by these stereotypes. Historian Heather Marie Stur explains that women occupied two distinct roles in the minds of U.S. servicemen. One was that of a “sexual object” and the other as a “girl next door,” representing the women who Stur states “were expected to fulfill the conventional women’s role of caregivers, mothers, and virginal girlfriends.”²¹ This harsh dichotomy impacted representations of female soldiers in the 1970s and 80s. Even real women like Van Devanter found there was little room left for a middle ground between the two as critics labeled her willingness to have multiple relationships as a byproduct of the sexual revolution.²²

The “girl next door” portrayals of women show them in non-sexualized ways or as the object of male desire, and these characters typically emphasized their naiveté and their roles as caretakers. Naiveté was often displayed by a woman’s inability to complete male tasks. Scholar Yvonne Tasker in *Soldiers’ Stories* identifies a trend in media in which fictional female soldiers are pushed into “masculinizing” activities such as boot camp and combat to show how they are physically unsuited for the roles.²³ It is typically played off as humorous, and it is unsurprising that most of the media created about female soldiers in the 1980s was marketed as comedy.²⁴ These fictional women’s service, much like their real counterparts, was completely voluntary. So, when they were showed to be ill-suited for the jobs they chose, they came across as naïve. In the *M*A*S*H*

²¹ Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

²² Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*, John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2010, 168.

²³ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 237-238.

²⁴ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 237-238.

episode “Edwina,” the nurses in the 4077th band together and refuse to have any personal relationships with male staff until one of them agrees to go on a date with the nurse Edwina. The character Edwina is not like the other nurses in the unit. She is clumsy to the point that it makes her physically undesirable.²⁵ She gives off a naïveté that is accentuated by her clumsiness and her lack of romantic relationships. She even admitted that the only reason she signed up to serve in Vietnam was to meet soldiers. When talking to a fellow nurse, she said, “I am 28 years old, and I have never—had someone to care for me.”²⁶ Later in the episode, she appears unprepared to handle a man’s advances. For example, when one of the doctors directly asked her for a surgical instrument, she was so shocked to be addressed that she handed him the wrong tool. Afterward, the doctor looked back at his regular nurse in an “I told you so” look. She was considered less of a nurse because her naïveté toward relationships made her less than a woman.²⁷

A woman’s role as a caretaker was displayed by placing her in positions where she had to carry the emotional burdens of her patients, and even her coworkers, through her femininity. Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English argue that the profession of nursing, through the training of figures like Florence Nightingale, was designed to make nurses as perfect representations of femininity.²⁸ The nurse’s femininity is then meant to remind patients of female care they receive in their homes. In *M*A*S*H*, nurses primarily provided that comfort to male personnel. Returning to “Edwina,” after the

²⁵ *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 13, “Edwina,” Directed by James Sheldon, Hulu video, December 24, 1972, <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/fc664ea9-033a-4380-8b76-011baa1faaeb>

²⁶ *M*A*S*H*, “Edwina.”

²⁷ Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” is a useful feminist text that discusses a woman’s compulsory need to enter into heterosexual relationships. It is useful in understanding why Edwina felt the need to go to such extremes lengths to find a man.

²⁸ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses (Second Edition): A History of Women Healers*, (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2010), 43-44.

nurses' strike on men was announced, Captain "Hawkeye" Pierce stated, "An attitude like that could destroy morale, weaken the fiber of our brave men in white. These boys depend on their relaxation to renew and refresh their flagging spirits. They must be allowed a moment's respite from the trials of war."²⁹ For the men of the 4077th, women acted as the primary source of comfort during the war. The nursing staff were tasked with not only doing their jobs but also with lifting the morale of the entire camp, and both of these tasks required them to be overtly feminine.

The second type of fictional portrayal has to deal with the treatment of women's bodies as sexual objects by their own will. The femininity these fictional women physically display is an active choice that is relatively easy to accomplish, and this is important to understand because it deviates so heavily from women's lived experiences. In reality, women who actually served in the military found the expressions of femininity much harder to accomplish safely. Kate O'Hare Palmer served as an army nurse in Vietnam between June 1968 and July 1969, and while she was there, she found herself getting an uncomfortable amount of attention. Men watched her so closely that she began to severely alter her behavior to curb exposure to them. For example, Palmer only visited the South China Sea once because being in a swimsuit around the men in Chu Lai made her uncomfortable.³⁰ She also took night shifts at the hospital because she was afraid to sleep alone.³¹ Women understood that they were outnumbered, and whether the attention was viewed positively or not, it was fairly obvious to them that American women were a hot commodity. Jaqueline Navarra Rhoads said it best when she remarked, "You could

²⁹ M*A*S*H, "Edwina."

³⁰ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010, 6.

³¹ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 6.

have been the ugliest woman in the world, but still you were treated special.”³² Others like Lily Adams, who served in Vietnam as a nurse between 1969 and 1970, experienced similar problems, but faced not only an onslaught of sexual harassment but also racial discrimination by fellow service members. She reported, “They thought I was some Vietnamese whore.”³³ Adams, because of her Chinese heritage, was mistaken for a prostitute when not in uniform. The uniform, and its ability to strip femininity, became a shield for these women. In addition, real women were sometimes used as actual commodities. Women were often meant to act as entertainment and distractions for men at parties, and they were invited expressly for that reason. While they were not expected to do anything particular, they were expected to be feminine and be seen. For these reasons, Kate Palmer refused to attend officer parties and saw them as attempts by the army to use her as a sexual object.³⁴ In general, real women were not so much crafting feminine performances but having others thrust them into roles whether they be active participants or not. Men saw all women as feminine because they fell under the criteria of “not men.”

Women in media operated with a completely different set of rules. Whereas real women set about choosing very deliberately when to be noticed, fictional women made it their mission to be seen. For example, fictional women could express the perceived materiality of femininity. The materiality associated with femininity was present on television in a way real-life prohibited. Diane Poole had received a gift of potholders and dishtowels with no use for them. Fictional women like Margaret Houlihan and *Hogan's*

³² Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 161.

³³ Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2011), 1.

³⁴ Kara Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 6-7.

Heroes character Fraulein Helga either owned “girlish” objects or dressed in ways that were feminine.

Television provides a clear lens for observing how Americans dealt with female soldiers over time because of its episodic nature. Television experiences changes in production through the longevity of a program as writers, producers, and characters start leaving or are added.³⁵ The rotation of people and pressure to change as the character’s lifespan extends can give writers and actors the chance to press for alteration to their characters. Female characters in particular, who typically spend the first season of a show fulfilling feminine stereotypes,³⁶ shine when they are given the ability to grow over time and be advocated for by their actresses. An example of this comes from *M*A*S*H*’s only female lead, Major Margaret Houlihan. Loretta Swit stated in an interview that Major Houlihan was “unique straight through, and she became even more unique...because we allowed her to continue to grow.”³⁷ All eleven seasons of *M*A*S*H* included Swit as Houlihan.³⁸

Houlihan falls into familiar representations of female military personnel following World War II. Margaret Houlihan started reflecting the progressive drive of Army recruitment as the show went on. She started off as a representation of stereotypes associated with female military nurses. She was constantly referred to as “sir” to imply she was mannish in correlation with her rank.³⁹ She was viewed as promiscuous through

³⁵ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television since World War II*, (Duke University Press: Durham, 2011), 179-180.

³⁶ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 4-5.

³⁷ Foundation Interviews. Interview with Loretta Swit. “Loretta Swit.” Television Academy. Beverly Hills, August 13, 2004. <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/loretta-swit#about>

³⁸ While set in the Korean War, *M*A*S*H* was a well-known critique of the Vietnam War.

³⁹ *M*A*S*H*, season 7, episode 19, “Hot Lips is Back in Town,” Directed by Charles S. Dubin, Hulu video, January 29, 1979. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/5131d79d-30de-4c0a-9e2d-4da4ed2e0020>

her relationship with Frank Burns and upper brass.⁴⁰ Her physical femininity was hidden behind a constant adherence to army dress. But elements of her character were directly influenced by the new perceptions of military nurses. She craved the companionship of other women.⁴¹ She was eventually married to a handsome male army officer.⁴² Her femininity offered her a unique connection to patients. She had authority and was recognized for her superior skill.⁴³ But Houlihan was unique in how she was able to navigate the relationship between masculinity and femininity due to just how long her character was active. She was also aided by a freedom that fictional women have that real women don't—a freedom from physical and sexual violence. The character has room to breathe, so to speak, and there are no repercussions for displays of femininity. Where real women like Diane Poole, Kate O'Hare Palmer, and Lily Adams faced threats of sexual assault, the nature of past media designed for a large audience prevented the same threats from being translated through fictional visual media like television and comic books.

The fictional military women of the 1970s and 1980s existed in a space free from threats of violence because self-censorship prevented sex crimes from being aired on television. The television codes stated:

(e) illicit sex relations are not treated as commendable. (f) sex crimes and abnormalities are generally unacceptable as program material... (s) The use of horror for its own sake will be eliminated; the use of visual or aural effects which would shock or alarm the viewer, and the detailed

⁴⁰ *M*A*S*H*, "Pilot."

⁴¹ *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 5, "The Nurses," Directed by Joan Darling, Hulu video, October 19, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/13e2682d-d0ab-4900-8f08-7b5d59ad0634>

⁴² *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 24, "Margaret's Marriage," Directed by Gene Reynolds, Hulu video, March 15, 1977. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/0a799e25-1f43-4d01-93a2-be82d973f2a0TV>

⁴³ *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 19, "Aid Station," Directed by William K. Jurgensen, Hulu video, February 11, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/4198be00-f88e-4017-b6b2-ff2ec23b5d58>

presentation of brutality or physical agony by sight or by sound are not permissible.⁴⁴

The first and second restrictions, the erasure of illicit sex and sex crimes, had the potential to limit examples of sexual harassment. Limiting visual displays of sexual harassment was tricky in the 1970s and 1980s because the term “sexual harassment” had a nebulous definition. In the 1970s, sexual harassment was defined by feminist activists whereas in the 1980s it was shaped by the law.⁴⁵ Regardless of how it was defined, in the 1970s, sexual harassment was often treated as a joke. Until the mid-1970s, editorials across the country mocked cases of sexual harassment, downplayed it, and outright denied it.⁴⁶ It was not until the late 1970s that media started taking sexual harassment seriously.⁴⁷ Shows like *M*A*S*H* addressed sexual harassment in a way that ran parallel to reality.

While there were multiple scenes in *M*A*S*H* that indicate some form of sexual harassment, it is played off as comedy. In 1974, in the second season of *M*A*S*H*, the episode “Operation Noselift” featured a cosmetic surgeon named Major Brosh visiting the unit to perform an illegal surgery on a soldier.⁴⁸ Brosh, at first, was reluctant to go to the 4077th but was eventually convinced by Captain Pierce when Pierce told him that one of the nurses would be disappointed if Brosh did not show. Pierce referred to this nurse as the “Barracuda.” In actuality, no such nurse existed, but when Brosh arrived, he believed

⁴⁴ “Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters.” Television Board of National Assn. of Radio & Television Broadcaster. December 6, 1951. <http://www.tvhistory.tv/SEAL-Good-Practice.htm>

⁴⁵ Carrie N. Baker, *The Women’s Movement Against Sexual Harassment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.

⁴⁶ Carrie N Baker, “Popular Representations of Sexual Harassment,” in *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 45-48.

⁴⁷ Carrie N Baker, “Popular Representations of Sexual Harassment,” 50.

⁴⁸ *M*A*S*H*, season 2, episode 18, “Operation Noselift,” Directed by Hy Averback, Hulu video, January 19, 1974. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/348b935a-afdf-4241-8f62-6429950c22a6>

Houlihan to be the “Barracuda.” Brosh would go on to sexually harass Houlihan by grabbing her, stroking her face, and attempting to kiss her while she screamed. Pierce broke up the conflict, but Brosh faced no consequences. Houlihan’s assault ended with her being comforted by a doctor (Captain John McIntyre) while a laugh track played over it. Pierce and McIntyre did nothing to prevent Brosh’s behavior before and after the assault because they needed him to perform cosmetic surgery. The comedic elements of the fallout of Houlihan’s sexual assault made the seriousness of it a joke, downplaying the fact that the men of the unit did nothing to protect Houlihan from an obviously hostile party. In the episode “Are You Now, Margaret?” a congressional aide (Lawrence Pressman) accuses Houlihan of being a communist. After hearing about her reputation as “Hot Lips,” he offers to trade political favor for sexual favors. The nickname “Hot Lips” is how Houlihan is referred to by the upper brass in reference to her flirtations with them. Houlihan plays along with the aide’s demands to secure evidence of his abuse of power.⁴⁹ While Houlihan consents to the plan, the trope of a visiting VIP demanding favors from her is a recurring theme, and despite the fact that there are very few examples of sexual violence against her, whenever present, they are framed as humorous in relation to her promiscuity or as an act of revenge. This type of “harmless” harassment is a far cry from the true experiences of women. For example, Diana Poole, after reenlisting for another year in Vietnam, explains:

I didn’t end up staying a year, I was only there six months because I got beaten almost to death by the guy that I married...I had a really bad brain injury and they slapped me in my own hospital...They sent me home because I couldn’t stand without blacking out.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *M*A*S*H*, season 8, episode 2, “Are You Now, Margaret?” Directed by Charles S. Dubin, Hulu video, September 24, 1979. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/052e46d3-d646-46cb-a482-f456d41e4cf7>

⁵⁰ Diana Dwan Poole in Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 44.

The threat of sexual violence toward real military women threatened their bodies, mental health, and careers. Threats against fictional military women like Houlihan were dismissed outright. Houlihan's body and lack of agency were used as comedic elements and mark a break away from the realism that the show's writers strived for.

The third restriction in the television codes, the removal of any "detailed presentation of brutality or physical agony by sight or sound," dealt the largest blow to on-screen nurses' attempts to be accurate representations of their real counterparts. Visual violence was notoriously absent in *M*A*S*H*. Surgeries were always performed from the waist up. Along a similar vein, triage, a common job performed by Houlihan, never showed a soldier's wounds. Anything that could violate network guidelines was safely tucked away behind dyed bandages and clothing. Examples of violence on *M*A*S*H* had to strike a balance between following television codes while maintaining the gruesome nature of the show's setting without glorifying the gore. *M*A*S*H*, due to its popularity, was able to circumvent some of the restrictions, but violence was a strictly off-screen affair with two notable exceptions—mortars and mines.⁵¹ On-screen mortars, however, never claimed a casualty. To help create a feeling of tension, the creators of *M*A*S*H* strategically used sound, or the lack thereof, to add gravity to scenes that took place in areas such as the operating room. Even with a successful feeling of tension, the show still presents a less than accurate front line hospital. Diana Poole recounts that during her time at the hospital at Qui Nhon:

⁵¹ *M*A*S*H*, season 4, episode 1, "Welcome to Korea, Part 2," Directed by Gene Reynolds, Hulu video, September 12, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/327f48bc-6efc-436e-8982-cd8a796ac363>

I was head nurse in casualty receiving and triage, and that was bad. Just casualties right off the field, still in their uniforms, handing me their boots saying, “Ma’am, my foot is in there, could you sew it back on?” and it was, and we did, we sewed it back on.⁵²

Since stories such as Diana Poole’s assault and her experience with severed limbs could not be shown on television, the stories of military women were fundamentally altered.

Outside of the television codes, a second form of censorship that could have limited Houlihan rested in the show’s writers. Fortunately for the Major, she had strong advocates in her corner pushing her development forward. The call to change Houlihan to allow for personal growth primarily came from the woman who knew her best, Loretta Swit.⁵³ Swit recognized the potential for change in Houlihan and the impact it could have on her character. For example, in the episode “The Nurses,” Houlihan has an emotional confrontation with her nursing staff about how they exclude her, and she admits that it hurt her feelings.⁵⁴ When asked about the impact of “The Nurses,” Swit stated, “She [Houlihan] was one of the first characters, I don’t even know if there were others, but I was allowed to continue to grow. I didn’t bounce back to where I was before you saw this happen to her, and she became a full-blown interesting character because these things had an effect on her.”⁵⁵ Swit wanted Houlihan’s experiences to compound and be grounded in strong personal narrative. Alongside Swit, two recently hired female writers helped bring this idea to fruition, Linda Bloodworth and Mary Kay Place.⁵⁶

⁵² Diana Dwan Poole in Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 35.

⁵³ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 180.

⁵⁴ *M*A*S*H*, “The Nurses.”

⁵⁵ Loretta Swit, “Loretta Swit,” Interviewed by Gary Rutkowski, Archive of American Television, August 13, 2004. <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/loretta-swit>

⁵⁶ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 180.

Bloodworth and Place were most known for their work on the episode “Hotlips and Empty Arms.” In the episode, the subject of Houlihan’s loneliness is explored when she receives a letter from an old acquaintance who married a doctor and settled down. After learning this, Houlihan begins to question her decision to join the army. She declares, “The war can’t last forever, Frank. They’ll declare peace and then where will I be?”⁵⁷ Yvonne Tasker argues this episode marks a distinctive shift away from the show’s prior treatment of military women. She recognizes that the tropes associated with feminine masculinity and regular femininity are still present, but they are addressed differently. As for Houlihan, she can approach features of her identity without engaging with a man to do so. Tasker claims Houlihan’s interactions with Frank Burns and other men trapped her in performing as the “comrade, antagonist, and sexual object” associated with women.⁵⁸ “Hotlips and Empty Arms” begins the divergence of Houlihan’s character away from those roles. The shift would continue as Swit petitioned for her character to end her relationship with one of the show’s primary antagonists, Major Frank Burns (Larry Linville).⁵⁹ Even though the continuation of this growth did not hit its stride until the fifth season of the show’s run, its presence offered a glimpse of a different Houlihan than that of season one.

At the beginning of the series, Houlihan was primarily used as a comedic device. Tasker argues that her comedic value came from two sources. First, Houlihan’s position as a military woman of rank and her obsession with the authority she held creates comedic value because she attempts to use it to control men. The second comedic source

⁵⁷ *M*A*S*H*, season 2, episode 14, “Hot Lips and Empty Arms,” Directed by Jackie Cooper, Hulu video, December 15, 1973. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/e845b73f-5eca-4364-bebe-c57535a9960f>

⁵⁸ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 183.

⁵⁹ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 180.

deals with her nickname “Hot Lips” and her reputation of being sexual with the upper brass. This sexual side of Houlihan emphasizes a contradiction to the military persona she styles herself as.⁶⁰ The space between Houlihan’s military persona and her sexual relationships is where Tasker argues the conflict between Houlihan’s femininity and masculinity takes place. In particular, Tasker points to an ongoing gag throughout the series that in which characters called Houlihan “sir” rather than “ma’am.”⁶¹

However, Houlihan is able to grow out of the joke. Through constructing Houlihan’s past and adding dimensions to her characterization, the show progresses in a way that not only allows the Major to situate herself within the “boys club” occupied by the rest of the main cast, but also has elements of her sexual desires legitimized.⁶² This is an impressive accomplishment when compared to other characters like Captain Quinlan, but it only covers how one part of her feminine attributes were handled in the long-term.

When Tasker explains the mixing of feminine and masculine coding onto Houlihan to create comedy, she does not address aspects of her character associated with femininity beyond sexual desire. A driving force behind Houlihan’s character is her want of a family. A desire to have family is commonly associated with women and aligns with the idea of women as caregivers. Houlihan’s desire begins with this line of thinking but eventually transforms into something heavily influenced by feminism.

This is first explored in “Hotlips and Empty Arms” and pursued further in episodes such as “Margaret’s Engagement.”⁶³ In both, she has a falling-out with Burns

⁶⁰ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 180-181.

⁶¹ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 181-182.

⁶² Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 179-187.

⁶³ *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 2, “Margaret’s Engagement,” Directed by Alan Alda, Hulu video, September 28, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/998701d5-fff2-467a-8014-d6528e6cbf98>

over the subject of family. In the first, she feels like she is missing out on having a husband and children because of the military, and in the latter, she distances herself from Burns due to her engagement to Lieutenant Colonel Donald Penobscott. As the focus of her affection changes, so do her goals. At various moments in the early seasons, Houlihan asks Burns to leave his wife to ensure their relationship will continue after the war ends; he always refuses.⁶⁴ This becomes an issue that strains Houlihan and Burns' relationship throughout the first five seasons until Burns eventually leaves the show. As she loses interest in Burns and enters a relationship with Penobscott, her goals change to remaining in the military with her husband. This plan lasts until her divorce from Penobscott in the seventh season.⁶⁵

It is at this point that *M*A*S*H*'s popularity continued to aid Houlihan's growth. One of the Television Codes was a regulation concerning divorce. It stated, "(d) Respect is maintained for the sanctity of marriage and the value of the home. Divorce is not treated casually nor justified for marital problems."⁶⁶ The Television Codes were eventually struck down in 1982.⁶⁷ Houlihan secured her divorce in 1978. With her divorce behind her, she could enter the space she operated in the final seasons of the show.

The final steps in Houlihan's growth, as identified by Tasker, are in the seventh season episodes "Major Ego" and "Hot Lips is Back in Town."⁶⁸ In "Major Ego,"

⁶⁴*M*A*S*H*, season 4, episode 14, "Mail Call, Again," Directed by George Dyne, Hulu video, December 9, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/series/mash-ae94231d-0f04-482a-b9ee-9911e339e3ed>

⁶⁵ *M*A*S*H*. "Hot Lips is Back in Town."

⁶⁶ "Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters."

⁶⁷ A death blow was dealt to the television codes after "The Family Viewing Hour" was deemed a violation of the first amendment by a federal judge in 1976. "The Family Viewing Hour" was designed to promote family-friendly content in key prime-time television slots. The television codes were able to hold on for longer but without a foundation to stand on after the judge's ruling.

⁶⁸ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers' Stories*, 187.

Houlihan has a one-night stand with Captain Tom Greenleigh (Greg Mullavey), and subsequently does not pursue the relationship because she no longer desires one.⁶⁹ In “Hot Lips is Back in Town,” Houlihan finally receives the documentation securing her divorce and is soon accosted by a general who promises to help her career if she resumes a relationship with him. She refuses, forces him to leave, and toasts herself with “Here’s to me.”⁷⁰ Unlike in episodes like “Operation Noselift,” Margaret is no longer seen as the “victim” of sexual harassment but strong enough to stand up for herself. By Houlihan taking control, she distances herself from playing the role of a victim. The accusation that the feminist movement portrayed women as “helpless victims” was around during Houlihan’s run on *M*A*S*H*.⁷¹ This understanding of victimhood implied a weakness in victimization. For her character to be strong, Houlihan had to remove herself from that role. In later episodes, Houlihan finally places herself at the top of her list of priorities, and with her actions in “Hot Lips is Back in Town,” Tasker believes that “Houlihan is no longer primarily a comic figure.”⁷² However, Tasker also argues that Houlihan still represents the idea that women cannot find love in the military.

While Tasker is correct in arguing that Houlihan’s struggle to find love in the military reinforces the idea that military life is not meant for women, that observation is incomplete.⁷³ Houlihan, over the course of the series, changes her priorities from finding a family to finding love with a career before settling on valuing herself and not seeking a relationship. Simply put, this shows her goals changed from motherhood to wife to nurse.

⁶⁹ *M*A*S*H*, season 7, episode 8, “Major Ego,” Directed by Alan Alda, Hulu video, November 6, 1978. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/747e76f1-66eb-44d5-ad47-359a88c9449f>

⁷⁰ *M*A*S*H*, “Hot Lips is Back in Town.”

⁷¹ Carrie N. Baker, “Popular Representations of Sexual Harassment,” in *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2003, 44.

⁷² Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 187.

⁷³ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldiers’ Stories*, 187.

Houlihan did not have to be either overtly sexual or a pillar of the military through this process; she was allowed to be a woman. In a way, Houlihan reinforces stereotypes surrounding military women, but in another, she follows a trajectory that aligns with feminist thought that prioritizes the individual woman. Houlihan validates herself.

Characters like Houlihan were able to find a balance between soldier and womanhood at a personal level. Despite this progress and even with the help of self-validation, personal growth still does not fully explain how Houlihan was able to bridge the gap created by gender. After all, personal feelings cannot dictate how others viewed her, only how she viewed herself.

Gaining respect through her military persona was done through a slow process that mimicked her personal growth. While her evolution of desires allowed the audience to see her humanity, her skill and professionalism let her earn esteem from her colleagues. Her job was coded as feminine, but because her approach to it was shown in relation to her masculinity and position in the military, the audience could begin to connect her high capabilities to her soldier persona. The sources of this high regard come from not only her skill but from the nature of her profession.

There was little regard for women in the early seasons of *M*A*S*H*, but respect for the nursing profession had a firm place since the beginning of the show with Houlihan acting as the perfect example of a nurse. Houlihan's goal during the war, according to Swit, was to be "the best damn nurse in Korea," and by Swit's account, she achieves that goal.⁷⁴ Nursing is where Houlihan fully connected to the doctors and men of the 4077th *M*A*S*H* because her job explores her dedication towards her duty as a nurse. To

⁷⁴ Loretta Swit, "Loretta Swit."

clarify, her dedication to her duty is not the same as her dedication to the military or its orders. Her duty is to the medical profession and involves responsibility to her patients, and she showcased her dedication through her willingness to volunteer for dangerous assignments. In the episode “Aid Station,” Houlihan volunteers to assist at an aid station on the front.⁷⁵ In the episode “Bug Out,” she volunteers again to stay behind when the camp relocates to help a surgeon watch a patient that cannot be moved.⁷⁶ This push to volunteer displays Houlihan’s ability to sacrifice for the sake of others. She is first and foremost a volunteer, and her status as such is part of what connects her to veterans such as Diana Poole and Lily Adams. Poole explains, “All women volunteered. We weren’t drafted.”⁷⁷ Women operating as nurses were expected to be self-sacrificing, assuming the role of caregivers to the injured. Male soldiers were also expected to show sacrifice, but theirs is considered more physical. Men sacrificed their bodies, while women provided their emotions. This idea of self-sacrifice, built into the identities of nurses and soldiers, is the point where masculinity and femininity intersect. Houlihan was able to connect with the men in her unit because of her work ethic toward caring for the injured was recognized and respected in masculine spaces. No matter the form, self-sacrifice was indefinable. Being feminine allowed her to exist and thrive in a male-dominated space, and it was the only outward expression of femininity that was not played for a laugh.

The female soldier archetype that developed through characters like Houlihan stands almost as a foil to its male counterpart. Where fictional men were infused with morality and used as tools to express shame and betrayal, depictions of women were

⁷⁵ *M*A*S*H*, “Aid Station.”

⁷⁶ *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 1, “Bug Out, Part 2,” Directed by Gene Reynolds, Hulu video, September 21, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/bbbd9acd-05e1-4aca-bd02-cfe81a4c987a>

⁷⁷ Diana Dwan Poole in Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 33.

shaped from feminist ideals and the advancing position of women in society. Women were allowed to be women, even when their femininity contrasted their surroundings. Houlihan's story arcs about her relationships, marriage, and position as head nurse were not stories about a soldier nor a woman but were stories about both. The compassion that is associated with women is what made her a good nurse. Nurses were meant to bring the comforts of home to the war and the very nature of that task required women to make emotional connections. Where fictional men became isolated, fictional women built relationships. Fictional military women were allowed to express emotion, connect with others, and carve a place for themselves that was accepted. Female characters did not embody Americans' feelings toward the war, but their feelings about gender roles. That distinction let these characters craft a dual identity of woman and soldier that was unburdened by the Vietnam War's legacy or the often painful experiences of real women.

CONCLUSION

For Americans coming to terms with the Vietnam War was a process that was played out in the entertainment industry. In his discussion of memory, Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote, “fictional stories are another set of experiences just as valid as established ones.”¹ The fictional portrayals of the military in the 1970s-1980s were fundamentally shaped by the American experience with the Vietnam War. Yet, while there is no shortage of scholarship addressing the films created after the war, analysis of television and comic books shaped by Vietnam are less abundant. The uniqueness of these serialized pieces of media is that they provide a repetitious element to the fictional experience and have the ability to change over time. Serialized media can reflect a changing culture where film acts as a fixed product of it. Television, in particular, acts in this way. John Fiske argues, “The world of television is clearly different from our real social world, but just as clearly related to it in some way. Rather than representing ‘the manifest actuality’ of a society, television programmes reflect, ‘symbolically, the structure of values and relationships beneath the surface.’”² Television was capable of changing with America’s interpretation of the war and its feelings toward its veterans, the result of which was the formation of a new archetype for soldiers in America’s war stories.

The new archetype created for male soldiers saw them isolated from the military and the public. As Americans were dealing with the shame they felt in a lost war, conservative leaders blamed the American people for failing to unify and the government for not “allowing” soldiers to win. This placed the soldier between two fronts of

¹ Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2016), 64.

² Will Kaufman, *American Culture in the 1970s*, 56.

perceived betrayal that left him only able to relate to fellow soldiers. Stories emerged that showed the mistreatment of veterans by civilians with imagery like spitting and name-calling, and the military was often painted as a bureaucratic antagonist at worst and foolish at best. The soldier became fundamentally changed by his experience with war; however, he retained his morality. He represented American values from a time before the Vietnam War and the betrayal he faced from society acted as a metaphor for America turning away from its values to take part in Vietnam. In addition, his morality also represented the American people. Through war stories, Americans attempted to regain control of a military they had grown to mistrust by crafting stories of highly specialized military teams headed by leaders that embodied American values. The skillset of the team represented the assets of the military, while the leader acted as a stand-in for the public. In these stories, the military became the antagonist that stood in the way of the “moral leader” doing what was right. The soldier’s success in rebelling let Americans reintroduce heroes into narratives about soldiers.

For women, however, their changing archetype fell more in line with second-wave feminism than America’s response to Vietnam. If the characters survived long enough, women were able to create a bridge between femininity and masculinity through either self-sacrifice or their bodies. For these fictional women, it was only through embodying feminine attributes that they could exist in male-dominated spaces; and because these women faced no threats of violence for expressions of femininity, they were able to thrive in those spaces and eventually be seen as valuable.

This archetype for military characters is still in use and hints that America’s relationship with modern wars is reflective of the one that existed in the post-Vietnam

War era. The ability of a character to exist both in the 1980s and in the 2010s meant that their relevance was not solely resting on the conflicts in their setting but in the characters themselves. The characteristics that allowed rebooted veterans and soldiers to be relatable 30 to 40 years after their initial runs show that America has not only redefined how it looks at its soldiers but how it heals from war.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

- “1980s Army recruiting commercial,” ScribasDotCom, 1:56. August 2011.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmj3IDvnh4Q>
- Alda, Alan. “Alan Alda.” Interviewed by Michael Rosen. Archive of American Television. November 17, 2000.
<https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/alansalda?clip=chapter1#about>
- Andrews, Travis M. “106 million people watched ‘M.A.S.H.’ finale 35 years ago. No scripted show since has come close.” *The Washington Post*. February 28, 2018.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/02/28/106-million-people-watched-mash-finale-35-years-ago-no-scripted-show-has-come-close-since/>
- Child, Ben. “Mr. T pities the fools who made *The A-Team* film too violent.” *The Guardian*. June 9, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jun/09/mr-t-the-a-team>
- “Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters.” Television Board of National Assn. of Radio & Television Broadcaster. December 6, 1951.
<http://www.tvhistory.tv/SEAL-Good-Practice.htm>
- Farr, Jamie. “Exclusive: Jamie Farr Looks Back on His *M*A*S*H* Days.” Interviewed by Craig Bennett, Studio 10. July 21, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjAYjb8AaDw>
- "First Sergeant, Code Name: Duke," Image provided by Phillip Donnelly. G.I. Joe: Conrad “Duke” Hauser, 1983 <https://www.yojoe.com/action/83/duke.shtml>
- “Flights of Honor,” Patriotic Productions. <https://www.patrioticproductions.org/>
- Gelbart, Larry. “Larry Gelbart.” Interviewed by Dan Harrison, *The Bob Hope Comedy Collection*. Archive of American Television. May 26, 1998.
<https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/larry-gelbart>.
- Kennedy, Robert F. and Ronald Reagan, *Town Meeting of the World*. C-SPAN, 15 May 1967, 53:06. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?428273-1/ronald-reagan-robert-f-kennedy-discuss-vietnam-war-1967>
- Liewer, Steve. “*M*A*S*H* actress Swit 'proud of her gender' for volunteering in combat.” *Omaha World-Herald*. September 24, 2018.

https://www.omaha.com/news/local/m-a-s-h-star-loretta-swit-proud-to-accompany/article_9875eeb3-d200-500b-808d-a88ca118cc23.html

- Mandel, Johnny. "Suicide is Painless," *M*A*S*H* (Original Soundtrack Recording). 1969. By Columbia/CBS. Spotify.
- McGuire, Barry. *Eve of Destruction*. P.F. Sloan. July 15, 1965. By Dunhill. Spotify.
- "National Association of Broadcasters Television Code." Provided by Vinnie Rattolle. c.1970. <https://archive.org/details/1970sTelevisionCode>
- "NBC and CBS Reduce Role of Self-Censors." *The New York Times*. August 20, 1988. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/20/business/nbc-and-cbs-reduce-role-of-self-censors.html>
- Post, Mike. *The A-Team Theme*. Peter Carpenter. 1982. By Elektra Records. Spotify.
- Quitney, Jeff. "Army Recruiting Commercial "You Want Action?" circa 1962 US Army 60-second spot." 1962. 1:01. December 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnRQjCIdmA4>
- Rambo: First Blood*. HBO Video. Directed by Ted Kotcheff. Anabasis Investments, N.V., 1982.
- Rintels, David W. "Why We Fought the Family Viewing Hour." *The New York Times*. November 21, 1976. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/21/archives/why-we-fought-the-family-viewing-hour.html>
- Reagan, Ronald. "Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention." Chicago, Illinois. Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety. August 18, 1980. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/8-18-80>
- Swit, Loretta. "Loretta Swit." Interviewed by Gary Rutkowski. Archive of American Television. August 13, 2004. <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/loretta-swit>
- The A-Team*. Amazon video. Directed by Joe Carnahan. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox. 2010. <https://www.amazon.com/Team-Liam-Neeson/dp/B004DZXC30>
- "The Comics Code of 1954," Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. October 26, 1954. <http://cblmf.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>.
- "This is the Army." N.W. Ayer Advertising Records. 1979. National Museum of American History Archives Center. https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/slideshowViewer.htm?eadrefid=NMAH.AC.0059_ref3801

Wood, John A. *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War*. Athens: Ohio University Press. 2016.

Television

*M*A*S*H*. Season 3. Episode 24. "Abyssinia, Henry." Directed by Larry Gelbart. Hulu video. March 18, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/9fbc342e-5819-467d-83e3-101ce4a5dc6d>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 3. Episode 19. "Aid Station." Directed by William K. Jurgensen. Hulu video. February 11, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/4198be00-f88e-4017-b6b2-ff2ec23b5d58>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 8. Episode 2. "Are You Now, Margaret?" Directed by Charles S. Dubin. Hulu video. September 24, 1979. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/052e46d3-d646-46cb-a482-f456d41e4cf7>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 5. Episode 1. "Bug Out, Part 2." Directed by Gene Reynolds. Hulu video. September 21, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/bbbd9acd-05e1-4aca-bd02-cfe81a4c987a>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 1. Episode 4. "Chief Surgeon Who?" Directed by E.W. Swackhamer. Hulu video. October 8, 1972. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/112b061b-1c18-4f15-bed8-042d44919735>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 5. Episode 7. "Dear Sigmund." Directed by Alan Alda. Hulu video. November 9, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/12458889-4b7d-4d3b-8309-e607e6692a54>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 1. Episode 13. "Edwina." Directed by James Sheldon. Hulu video. December 24, 1972, <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/fc664ea9-033a-4380-8b76-011baa1faeb>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 2. Episode 14. "Hot Lips and Empty Arms." Directed by Jackie Cooper. Hulu video. December 15, 1973. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/e845b73f-5eca-4364-bebe-c57535a9960f>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 7. Episode 19. "Hot Lips is Back in Town." Directed by Charles S. Dubin. Hulu video. January 29, 1979. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/5131d79d-30de-4c0a-9e2d-4da4ed2e0020>

*M*A*S*H*. Season 4. Episode 14. "Mail Call, Again." Directed by George Dyne. Hulu video. December 9, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/series/mash-ae94231d-0f04-482a-b9ee-9911e339e3ed>

- M*A*S*H*. Season 7. Episode 8. "Major Ego." Directed by Alan Alda. Hulu video. November 6, 1978. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/747e76f1-66eb-44d5-ad47-359a88c9449f>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 5. Episode 2. "Margaret's Engagement." Directed by Alan Alda. Hulu video. September 28, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/998701d5-fff2-467a-8014-d6528e6cbf98>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 5. Episode 24. "Margaret's Marriage." Directed by Gene Reynolds. Hulu video. March 15, 1977. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/0a799e25-1f43-4d01-93a2-be82d973f2a0TV>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 2. Episode 18. "Operation Noselift." Directed by Hy Averback. Hulu video. January 19, 1974. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/348b935a-afdf-4241-8f62-6429950c22a6>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 3. Episode 5. "O.R." Directed by Gene Reynolds. Hulu video. October 8, 1974. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/c91cb55c-a13d-42a7-885f-40cd97851477>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 1. Episode 1. "Pilot." Directed by Gene Reynolds. Hulu video. September 17, 1972. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/4045ee04-07e8-4c33-94a6-4244b7b67c5f>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 7. Episode 10. "Point of View." Directed by Charles S. Dubin. Hulu video. November 20, 1978, <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/fd156ec3-04ad-4547-ab6b-beb080c1d9da>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 1. Episode 3. "Requiem for a Lightweight." Directed by Hy Averback. Hulu video. October 1, 1972. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/2ccd2cf5-a013-4501-a689-1ed6b94a9549>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 5. Episode 9. "The Korean Surgeon." Directed by Gene Reynolds. Hulu video. November 23, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/e11c52b8-d21e-4f43-9c0a-df52d1893568>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 4. Episode 4. "The Late Captain Pierce." Directed by Alan Alda. Hulu video. October 3, 1975. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/e0a19f45-56f4-406f-9c26-944743fddfd7>
- M*A*S*H*. Season 5. Episode 5. "The Nurses." Directed by Joan Darling. Hulu video. October 19, 1976. <https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/13e2682d-d0ab-4900-8f08-7b5d59ad0634>

- M*A*S*H*. Season 4. Episode 1. "Welcome to Korea, Part 2." Directed by Gene Reynolds. Hulu video. September 12, 1975.
<https://www.hulu.com/app/watch/327f48bc-6efc-436e-8982-cd8a796ac363>
- The A-Team*. Season 1. Episode 13. "A Nice Place to Visit." Directed by Bernard McEveety. Amazon video. May 10, 1983.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000W4Q9TU/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1
- The A-Team*. Season 1. Episode 5. "Black Day at Bad Rock." Directed by Christian I. Nyby II. Amazon video. February 22, 1983.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000W4Q9TU/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1
- The A-Team*. Season 1. Episode 1. "Mexican Slayride: Part 1." Directed by Rod Holcomb. Amazon video. January 23, 1983, https://www.amazon.com/Mexican-Slayride-Part-1/dp/B000W4Q9TU/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=a+team+show&qid=1587962067&s=instant-video&sr=1-1
- The A-Team*. Season 1. Episode 10. "One More Time," Directed by Arnold Laven. Amazon video. April 12, 1983.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B000W4Q9TU/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1
- The A-Team*. Season 4. Episode 23. "The Sound of Thunder." Directed by Michael O'Herlihy. Amazon video. May 13, 1986.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003Q5CNB0/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s4
- The A-Team*. Season 5. Episode 2. "Trial by Fire." Directed by Les Sheldon. Amazon video. October 3, 1986.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003Q5K3S0/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s5
- The A-Team*. Season 2. Episode 10. "Water, Water Everywhere." Directed by Arnold Laven. Amazon video. November 22, 1983.
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003Q5ANKS/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s2

Comics

- Hama, Larry. *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*. no. 22. Marvel Comics Group. April 1984.
- Hama, Larry. "Long Range Recon Patrol." *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*. no. 43. Marvel Comic Group. January 1986.

- Hama, Larry. "Operation: Lady Doomsday." *G.I. Joe A Real American Hero*. no. 1. Marvel Comics Group. June 1, 1982.
- Kanigher, Robert. *G.I. Combat*. no. 138. National Periodical Publications Inc. October-November 1969.
- Kanigher, Robert. "Our Fighting Forces: Featuring The Losers." *Our Fighting Forces*. no. 123. National Periodical Publications Inc. January-February 1970.
- Lee, Stan. "Nick Fury and His Howling Commandos." *Nick Fury and His Howling Commandos*. no. 1, Bard Publication Corp. 1963.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Baker, Carrie N. "Popular Representations of Sexual Harassment." in *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2003.
- Baker, Carrie N. *The Women's Movement Against Sexual Harassment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2008.
- Bailey, Beth. *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge. 2009.
- Bailey, Beth. "The Army in the Marketplace: Recruiting an All-Volunteer Force." *The Journal of American History*. vol. 94, no. 1. 2007.
- Blumenthal, Seth. *Children of the Silent Majority: Young Voters and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1968-1972*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2018.
- Dolen, John. "Vietnam Vets Tell How They Were Greeted *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam*. By Bob Greene. G.P. Putnam's Sons. \$17.95." *South Florida Sun Sentinel*. April 23, 1989. <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1989-04-23-8901210557-story.html>
- Echols, Alice. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses (Second Edition): A History of Women Healers*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY. 2010.
- Engelhardt, Tom. "Afterlife (1975-1994)." In *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. 1995.

- Flippen, J. Brooks. *Jimmy Carter: The Politics of Family and the Rise of the Religious Right*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press. 2011.
- Foley, Michael Stewart. *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War*. North Carolina Press: Raleigh. 2003.
- Foley, Michael Stewart. *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2013.
- Greene, Bob. *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1989.
- Hall, Mitchell. "Unsell the War: Vietnam and Antiwar Advertising." *The Historian* 58 (1): 69. 1995.
- Hallin, Daniel C. *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1986.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam a History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War*. New York: Penguin Books. 1983.
- Kaufman, Will. *American Culture in the 1970s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2009.
- Lembcke, Jerry. "The Myth of the Spitting Antiwar Protester." *The New York Times*. October 13, 2017. "<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/opinion/myth-spitting-vietnam-protester.html>
- Lembcke, Jerry. *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*. New York: New York University Press. 1998.
- Lopes, Paul. *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, 29-60. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. 29.
- McClancy, Kathleen "Back in the World: The Vietnam Veteran through Popular Culture." Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: *The Humanities and Social Sciences*. vol. 70, no. 12. June 2010.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2016.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs*, vol. 5. no. 4. 1980.
- Scanlon, Sandra. *The ProWar Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press. 2013.

- Stamp, Jimmy. "Now You Know the History of G.I. Joe. And Knowing Is Half The Battle: The evolution of the All American Hero from artist's mannequin to action figure," *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 29, 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/now-you-know-the-history-of-gi-joe-and-knowing-is-half-the-battle-11506463/>
- Steinman, Ron. *Women in Vietnam: The Oral History*. New York: TV Books, 2005.
- Stur, Heather Marie. *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2011.
- Tasker, Yvonne. *Soldiers' Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War II*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011.
- Vuic, Kara Dixon. *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. 2010.