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Serving Those Who Serve?: *Recon*, *Soldiers Journal* and the Priorities of The Pentagon Channel

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Serving Those Who Serve?: *Recon, Soldiers Journal* and the Priorities of The Pentagon Channel

by

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Abstract

Serving Those Who Serve?: *Recon*, *Soldiers Journal* and the Priorities of The Pentagon Channel

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The Pentagon Channel, a media outlet funded and controlled by the U.S. Department of Defense, has continuously disseminated Pentagon approved programming to American audiences since 2004. Although the content created for The Pentagon Channel encompasses a variety of genres, the core justification for the channels existence is its ability to provide members of the armed forces with credible military news and information not otherwise available. At the same time, the channel is expected to function as an advocate of the Pentagon. This thesis is focused on *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal*, two of the news and information programs on The Pentagon Channel. By analyzing the way these programs frame sensitive issues including injury, violence, and death, this project argues that The Pentagon Channel privileges its role as Pentagon advocate above its mandate to provide credible information to servicemembers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> When you think about it, our men and women in the military deserve the best…so our standards should be higher than anybody else's, because our audience is more important…'Serving Those Who Serve' is not just a tagline for us...It's really what we believe every day.[1]
>
> --Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Allison Barber

> It would be propaganda if we tried to spin it.[2]
>
> -- Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Allison Barber

May 14, 2004, Armed Forces Day, marked the official launch of The Pentagon Channel, a 24 hour news and information network created by the United States Department of Defense (DoD). The Pentagon Channel (TPC) was ostensibly created to provide "relevant, timely, and credible military news and information" to servicemembers and their families, both in the United States and abroad.[3] However, in addition to providing a source of news and information TPC served another purpose; it was to be "an advocate of the Department of Defense and its voice."[4] This thesis examines the "voice" of the Pentagon through the analysis of *Recon* (2005-2013) and *Soldiers Journal* (2012-2013), two of the news and information programs created for TPC. It is my hope that by investigating these two series, we might determine the manner in which TPC utilizes its programs as a site of advocacy for the Department of Defense and its policies.

The Pentagon Channel was, from its inception, a unique media endeavor for the Department of Defense. TPC was not the first television channel created by the DoD, but unlike the networks that preceded it, TPC was created with the explicit intent of reaching

a domestic audience. Although TPC was also meant to reach DoD employees deployed abroad, the launch of the channel was in response to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's desire to facilitate communication with servicemembers "spread out throughout the United States."[5] The press release goes on to credit Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Allison Barber as the individual responsible for spearheading the efforts to fund and launch TPC. [6] Initially a part of the American Forces Information Service, TPC started broadcasting from Andrews Air Force Base (Joint Base Andrews, MD) under the direction of Allison Barber.

In the period of a year, TPC received nationwide domestic distribution via DISH network, regional distribution through cable providers such as Time Warner Cable and Charter Communication, and both video on demand and live streams were available on pentagonchannel.mil.[7] Oversees, TPC was available on military bases via the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS), a service which mostly provided Defense Department employees with rebroadcasts of stateside programming.[8]

The network continued to experiment with different distribution strategies in its efforts to increase viewership. By November of 2005, TPC programs were available as download podcasts, and in 2006 the network "launched 'Pentagon Channel In Flight,' a military news and information service that…aired on military charter flights worldwide."[9]

In 2007 and 2008 TPC started to expand its lineup beyond news and information programming by producing two "lifestyle shows": *Fit for Duty* (October 15, 2007-Februrary 20, 2013), a fitness program featuring 30-minute workouts led by servicemembers, and *Grill Sergeants* (December 10, 2007-Januray 4, 2010), a cooking program hosted by "top military chefs."[10] These lifestyle shows, according to a press release marking the four-year anniversary of TPC (May 14, 2008), proved to be "some of the channel's most popular content."[11]

On October 1, 2008 the American Forces Information Service was eliminated, and editorial control of TPC was transferred to Defense Media Activity (DMA), a newly created "umbrella group" tasked with consolidating several DoD media organizations into a more efficient and cohesive whole.[12] Due to this transfer of ownership, TPC was relocated in 2008 to Fort George G. Meade (Fort Mead, MD) where DMA was based.[13] On October 22, *Stars and Stripes* reported that Allison Barber, weeks after assisting in the transfer of her duties as acting director of AFIS to her counterparts at DMA, had resigned from her seven-year career at the Department of Defense.[14]

After the transition to DMA and the departure of Barber, TPC continued its expansion of "lifestyle" programming with series like *Command Performance* (2009-2012), which televised concerts and interviews with musicians like Kid Rock and Toby Keith, and *FNG* (2009- 2012), a "survival guide" aimed at providing young servicemembers with tips ranging from low-cost travel options to proper burrito microwaving technique.[15] By 2012, TPC saw a returned emphasis on news and information programming, with multiple series branded as "television news magazines," including *Soldiers Journal,* debuting in that year.

METHODOLOGY

Recon and *Soldiers Journal* are illustrative of TPC programming that purportedly focus on news and information. Starting its monthly run in 2005, and lasting until 2013, *Recon* spans a total of seventy-nine episodes and is one of The Pentagon Channel's longest running series. As defined by TPC's website, *Recon* was "a monthly half-hour in-depth look at real-world operations, missions, military events, history and other subjects highlighting the accomplishments of U.S. military men and women."[16] Although never

explicitly labeled as such on TPC's website, Department of Defense press releases consistently refer to *Recon* as a "documentary" series.[17]

Soldiers Journal, according to TPC's website, "provides news and information that affects today's soldier."[18] While only lasting a year (November 2012 to November 2013), *Soldiers Journal* is a useful example of the "television news magazine programs" which debuted on TPC in 2012.[19] This project will use these two series to examine the manner in which TPC news and information programming can be harnessed in the construction of narratives that benefit The Pentagon. Through content analysis, I will attempt to exhibit the manner in which contentious topics such as injury, death, and violence are framed over the course of each series. I will then apply close textual analysis to individual episodes to illustrate how the framing of these topics can be used to serve the Pentagon's interests. In Chapter 2, drawing on the concept of American civil religion, first articulated by Sociologist Robert Bellah in 1967, I hope to demonstrate that episodes of *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* which memorialize the nation's war dead and valorize Medal of Honor recipients as faithful war heroes ultimately benefit the Pentagon more than the servicemembers represented. Chapter 3 examines how *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* utilize the tropes of spectacular war, as outlined in Professor Roger Stahl's 2010 book *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media and Popular Culture*, to depoliticize military conflicts and to divert attention from the negative aspects of warfare. By looking at the programs from these perspectives, one can draw conclusions as to TPC's and the Pentagon's priorities in representation.

Chapter 2: Civil Religion, Martyrs and Valorizing the Community

> You have demonstrated the character that The Forefathers bequeathed to you, that made this great nation that we have got today….You are privileged to be born American. I was privileged to serve the greatest nation in the world. God bless you and your service. Never surrender your weapon…and face the enemy.[20]
>
> -- Colonel Robert Howard, "Courage Under Fire"

> If there was something that he wanted me, and other people to take away, it would be patriotism. Because he loved America so much, and not just the country, but the idea…[21]
>
> --Sergeant Robert Howard Jr., "Courage Under Fire"

In 2010 *Recon* profiled the life and exploits of Medal of Honor Recipient Colonel Robert Howard in the episode "Courage Under Fire."[22] Wounded fourteen times, Robert Howard received multiple Purple Hearts, and was eventually presented the Medal of Honor by then President Nixon in the White House Rose Garden. When asked by Nixon what he would do while visiting D.C., Howard responded that, immediately following the ceremony, he would travel to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in memory of his father and three uncles who gave their lives during World War II. Before his death in 2009, Howard traveled across the U.S. passing on "the message of service and sacrifice for country to another generation."[23] One such soldier to receive this message was Robert Howard Jr., Robert Howard's son, who now carries on the Howard "family legacy of service."[24]

In analyzing *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal*, I will argue that The Pentagon Channel, drawing on the tropes and symbols of American civil religion, constructs an image of a

military community faithful to the nations founding myths. Profiles of the Vietnam Veteran Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, and the sanctification of the names therein, help transform casualties of war from lives lost, into lives given to preserve the Republic.

The central importance of the ritualistic honoring of the martyred is reemphasized via the stories of various Medal of Honor recipients. Each soldier's courage in the face of danger is unique, but together, they form a recognizable pattern. These often violent narratives inevitably end with the Medal of Honor recipient rejecting their status as hero, instead dedicating their award to the war dead. Medal of Honor recipients become living symbols of sacrifice for country; their acts of sanctioned violence valorized as feats of heroism. Finally, individuals falsely claiming to be decorated veterans provide an "other" against which the community of the military faithful can define itself. The "others" are characterized as morally and legally dubious interlopers, whose transgressions steal valor from the community as a whole; as such, they are marked for excommunication from the Pentagon. Using the language of civil religion, TPC is able to utilize stories of death, violence, and even misconduct in the construction of the narrative of a Pentagon in service of God and Nation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In terms of the sociological concept of American civil religion, an important precursor to the scholarship is W. Lloyd Warner's "An American Sacred Ceremony," an analysis of Memorial Day rituals, published in 1953. For Lloyd Warner, the "ceremonies and subsidiary rights" performed on Memorial Day, are "rituals" of a "sacred symbol system," that serve to unite communities normally divided on lines of class, ethnicity or denomination.[25] Memorial Day is a "cult of the dead…organized around the community

cemeteries," honoring the lives the town lost in the protection of the nation.[26] The Memorial Day proceedings relied on the laypersons of the community to craft the rituals of the celebration rather than a few religious leaders. Remembering the soldiers, sacrificed on battlegrounds, the "altars of the country," lives "willingly given for democracy," provide the main theme for Memorial Day.[27] Highlighted in the celebrations were the sacrifices of individuals from all social strata, which served to emphasize unity and diminish differences in the community at large. As beneficiaries of the soldiers' sacrifice, it falls upon the living to honor the martyred through rituals, as well as through individual acts of self-sacrifice to benefit the community as a whole.[28]

Robert Bellah is the scholar credited with first articulating the concept of American civil religion, as it is understood by academics today. Published in 1967, Bellah's "Civil Religion in America" explored what he saw as "an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion" unique to America that existed "alongside of, and rather clearly differentiated from, the churches" of the Republic.[29] Far from a mere linguistic flourish, Bellah believed this American civil religion had a history and depth that "require[d] the same care in understanding that any other religion does."[30] Biblical symbols have a storied history in American political thought. The Declaration of Independence locates "Nature's God" as the source of its authority, and Presidents, from Washington to Kennedy, have taken care to acknowledge the role that the "Almighty Being" and the "hand of God" play in American Society. While Bellah concedes that many of the symbols of the American civil religion are "derived from Christianity," he argues it is "not itself Christianity."[31] The Founding Fathers, and the documents they authored, paid deference to a Higher Power, but conspicuously avoid reference to Christ. This omission is offered as evidence that "from the earliest years of the Republic," there

was present a unique system of "beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things," separate from the Christian faith.[32]

For Bellah, American civil religion was not something static and unchanging; instead it was thought to incorporate events and individuals into its system of symbols and myths over time. The Constitution and Declaration of Independence as "sacred scripture"; Washington as the "divinely appointed Moses," delivering his people out of bondage; The American state as a "City Upon a Hill," a "New Israel" that would shine as a beacon to the rest of the world; these were the foundational myths and symbols of the nation's civil religion.[33] The Civil War served as a source of new symbols as Lincoln, the "Martyred President," took up the mantle of Christ, dying so that America might be reborn, freed from the original sin of slavery.[34] The Martyrdom of the President, and the great number of casualties from the war ensured that the "theme of sacrifice was indelibly written into the civil religion."[35]

Additionally, the multitude of casualties necessitated the establishment of "the most hollowed monument of civil religion," The Arlington National Cemetery.[36] Arlington National Cemetery demonstrates the manner in which American civil religion incorporates history into its system of symbols and myth. From World War I came the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and each successive U.S. conflict provides the cemetery with additional patriots to memorialize. John F. Kennedy, another martyr, is interred under the eternal flame.[37] Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and other national holidays, provide the nation with "an annual ritual calendar for the civil religion."[38] Public schools, in giving children time off to celebrate many of these holidays, and in the daily loyalty pledge offered to the enduring symbol of the flag, serve as a "particularly important context for the cultic celebration of the civil rituals."[39] Ultimately, American civil religion, as Bellah interprets it, is a source of cohesion and

national understanding, functioning to unite Americans of all religious traditions in an inclusive expression of common faith.

Marcela Cristi's book *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics,* published in 2001, challenges the assumed "integrative function" and neutrality of civil religion.[40] Cristi argues that those in power have a vested interest in shaping the direction of civil religion, given that a perceived sanctified authority serves to legitimize the domination of the social and cultural groups from which the symbolism is derived.[41] The use of a specific set of religious symbols can then be understood, not as a unifying practice, but instead as one that elevates certain faith traditions and cultures at the expense of others. More explicitly:

> The values of the American [civil religion] have clearly expressed white Anglo-Saxon values- the values of the dominant group in America. This means that either as a dominant culture or as the dominant ideology, civil religion does not successfully incorporate all social groups and segments of society. By arguing that civil religion exists 'out there,' expressing the experiences and aspirations of all Americans, proponents of the tradition have effectively disengaged civil religion from specific groups or carriers...The analysis presented here contradicts Bellah's notion of a well-established American civil religion that expresses the religious self-definition of the American people as a whole.[42]

Cristi's understanding of civil religion largely informs my own. While the symbols and myths that Bellah identifies remain important to any investigation of civil religion, the potential manipulation of civil religion to serve the ideological purposes of a cultural or political elite, as emphasized by Cristi, seems difficult to ignore. Indeed, the

way in which The Pentagon Channel draws on the myths and symbols of American civil religion demonstrates how effectively they can be employed in narratives that serve to endorse those in power and preserve the status quo.

ANALYSIS

Both *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* dedicate a substantial amount of time to providing viewers with valorous representations and memorialization of servicemen and women. *Recon* (2005-2013) dedicates eight episodes to the valorization of war heroes and the memorialization of the war dead. Ten episodes of *Soldiers Journal* (2012-2013) contain segments dedicated to the valorization of war heroes and the memorialization of war dead. Programs highlighting national sites of memorialization, like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, give meaning to war casualties, inscribing the deaths with a sense of religious import. Similarly, by repeatedly celebrating the often violent exploits of Medal of Honor recipients, TPC creates a narrative, which I will call the myth of the Faithful Soldier: A heroic action figure, whose bravery in battle is matched only by their sense of duty to honor those martyred in the name of democracy. Additionally, stories of individuals dishonoring the military community through fraudulent claims of service and awards serve as an antithetical point of reference to the pious example set by the Pentagon and its employees.

"Wall Stories," an episode of *Recon* released in June 2010, which is focused on objects left by individuals at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is steeped in the themes of American civil religion. "Wall Stories," is primarily concerned with the way in which individuals memorialize the nation's war dead. After a brief account of the history of the Memorial, the focus shifts to the "offerings" left "month after month, year after year, decade after decade" at the memorial and elsewhere.[43] "Wall Stories" first accomplishes

this by covering the efforts of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) to create a "formal collection," of the items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.[44] The size and scope of the collection is repeatedly highlighted, as are the spiritual dimensions of the act of leaving offerings. Host, Staff Sergeant Brian Buckwalter, notes that "two times as many items as names on the wall," are contained in the NPS collection, which range "from elaborate, carefully prepared offerings, to notes written on the spur of the moment on brown paper bags."[45]

Reflecting on the offerings that appear more spontaneous in nature, collection Curator Duery Felton opines, "someone probably came to the wall, overcome with emotions, and they had to put this down in Chapter and Verse."[46] The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is thus a potential site of spiritual awakening, sometimes requiring expression in offerings, explicitly described in Biblical terms. Buckwalter continues this theme, suggesting that the Memorial provided a site of "genuine healing power" for a nation that had undergone a crisis of faith during the Vietnam War.[47]

Moving beyond the thousands of offerings in the collection, "Wall Stories" turns to the story of Vietnam Veteran Bob "Hogman" Thompson for a more intimate narrative. "Hogman," once a member of the "Hells Henchmen" motorcycle club, is portrayed as a rough biker and a jaded veteran, initially dismissive of the Vietnam Veteran Memorial. Eventually, "Hogman" was touched by the offerings that he saw at the Memorial while visiting D.C. during the "Rolling Thunder" Memorial Day ride for Prisoners of War and those listed as Missing in Action (POW/MIA). "Hogman" was inspired to create a custom-made commemorative Harley-Davidson motorcycle, made using parts donated by individuals from across his home state. Once completed, the bike was left at the Vietnam War Memorial and eventually incorporated into the NPS collection. The experience of leaving an offering at the memorial is described as a moment of catharsis for "Hogman."

The vignette following "Hogman" ends with Host Buckwalter likening "Hogman's" home to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial:

> 'Hogman' lives in the vicinity of Holy Hill, a monastery and church that can be seen for miles, a Wisconsin landmark. On a roadside scale, 'Hogman's' place is a Shrine to Vietnam Vets and to POW/MIAs. People leave offerings in his yard all the time. He has grown to appreciate the national monument hundreds of miles away that inspired the idea of public offerings.[48]

Memorialization of war dead and POW/MIAs, "Wall Stories" suggests, need not occur only in officially sanctioned locations, such as national memorials, but can occur wherever the faithful are moved to leave votive offerings. The episode ends with a final "story at the wall," that of the annual pilgrimage by fifth graders from South Scotland Elementary School to Washington D.C. and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.[49] Part of this journey involves each student writing a letter to a soldier on the wall, which is then left as an offering. "Wall Stories" provides several examples of letters written by the fifth graders. One student's letter, which thanks a "Vietnam trooper" for giving his life to "save the United States," is indicative of the letters left at the Memorial. [50] The students interviewed in "Wall Stories" are uniformly reverential in their attitude towards the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

If "Wall Stories" shows how laypeople can venerate the war dead at official shrines and elsewhere, then *Recon* episode "Never Falter" highlights the care taken by the United States Military to properly memorialize the martyred at Arlington National Cemetery. "Never Falter," which premiered in 2007, follows the Army's 1st Battalion 3rd Infantry Regiment, known as The Old Guard, whose "primary mission is performing

ceremonial duties."[51] These duties range from drill teams performing at local malls to the ceremonial transportation of caskets to Arlington National Cemetery. The care taken in honoring those that "served their country well, and gave so much for [their] nation" by The Old Guard is celebrated in "Never Falter," but the greatest praise is reserved for The Sentinels; those tasked with guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.[52] Throughout "Never Falter," The Sentinels are characterized as "the best of the best of The Old Guard," and are valorized for the meticulous level of professionalism and their attention to detail displayed while guarding the Tomb of the Unknown.[53] Host Daniela Marchus highlights this commitment to detail in her description of the Sentinel's patrol of the Tomb:

> Part of the precision is inspired by the twenty-one gun salute; the highest military honor. The guard walks twenty-one paces from one end of the mat to the other. A facing movement to look toward the tomb, then a twenty-one second pause, another facing movement, a shift of the M14 rifle so it's on the side away from the tomb, protecting it from intruders and another twenty-one second pause. Then twenty-one paces back to the other end of the mat. This ritual goes on hour after hour, day after day, year after year, in fair weather and in foul.[54]

The Sentinels serve as standard bearers for American civil religion. No longer a simple cult of the dead, the Sentinels function as clergy demonstrating for those watching, the proper deference for the martyred. One Sentinel interviewed during the program characterizes the care taken during these rituals as no less than "a direct reflection of what the military stand for- for the country."[55] Similarly, a retired Sentinel proclaims that for the elite of The Old Guard, "patriotism is not an abstract…honor is not

an abstract, it's very real."[56] The Old Guard are put forward as incarnate symbols of the militaries fidelity to National ideals and manifestations of the Pentagon's commitment to honoring those that died protecting them. Host Daniela Marchus, ends "Never Falter," with a brief statement indicative of the episodes theme:

> One line of the Tomb Guard's Creed says, 'Never will I falter.' Day in and day out, they provide ongoing examples of The Old Guard's quest for perfection, particularly in the honor and recognition given those that have given the ultimate sacrifice.[57]

The concept of the "ultimate sacrifice," is repeated often when TPC addresses the issue of the war dead. Ultimate sacrifice invokes images of savior or messiah; Like Lincoln, the death of the soldier does not only preserve the nation, but serves to redeem it as well. If this is the case, then to die in battle is the single greatest contribution one can make to the nation. Far from a terrible result of warfare, death in battle is presented as the highest source of honor, and deserving of the utmost respect. The obligation to memorialize the dead is repeatedly reinforced through many of the stories of Medal of Honor recipients.

The decorated soldiers interviewed in *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* each provide their own unique tale of heroism. Each recalls their story in a unique way. However, at a basic level, elements of each story contain crucial similarities. These similarities reveal an overarching narrative: An "ordinary" American, often of modest means, is called into military service out of a personal sense of honor or duty. Cast into perilous circumstances, the American acts in an extraordinary manner, usually doling out justified death to a well-equipped foe in order to save U.S. or Allied lives. These actions are taken

at great personal risk, sometimes resulting in significant injuries, and occasionally culminating in "the ultimate sacrifice," death. The American is then recognized by the nation as a Faithful Soldier, symbolized through the awarding of the Medal of Honor. This is then followed by the Faithful Soldier's induction into the Hall of Heroes at the Pentagon. Invariably, the Faithful Soldier, in a public display of humility, rejects the title bestowed upon him, insisting that it is those with whom he served, particularly those who "gave the ultimate sacrifice," that deserve to be honored. Despite the protestations of the Faithful Soldier, he accepts the Medal of Honor, to safeguard on behalf of, and to serve as a symbol of, those who lost their lives to preserve the nation.

This narrative is easily seen in the *Recon* episode "Medal of Honor" (2009). The episode begins with the story of Hershel "Woody" Williams. In 1943 Woody, the "son of a dairy farmer," attempted to join the Marine Corps because he believed "that our freedoms could be at stake," and if that was the case he needed "to be doing something about it."[58] Despite his convictions, he was initially turned away because he was deemed to be too short for the Corps. Soon after, the rules were changed and Woody was able to join. After boot camp, Woody participated in the Battle of Guam where he "took back" the Island from the Japanese.[59] After a short stint on Guam, Woody arrived at Iwo Jima on Feb 21, 1945 as a member of a Reserve division. His division was not expected to be needed in the fight, but as the battle dragged on, Woody and the others were drawn into the conflict. Woody described the battlefield as "total chaos," littered with destroyed equipment and the bodies of his fellow marines.[60] After making slow progress over the sandy beach, Woody took cover with a group of soldiers in a shell crater. A captain soon asked him if he was able to take out a number of enemy guard posts. Although Woody stresses that he is unable to remember his response, the soldiers that were with him at Iwo Jima insist that his response was a simple, "I'll try," to which Woody nonchalantly states,

"I don't know whether I said that or not, I probably did, that kinda sounds like me."[61] Woody's nonchalant attitude is not matched by the host of the episode during the description of the events that followed:

> Woody Williams did more than try, as his citation for the Medal of Honor reads 'He fought desperately for four hours under terrific enemy small-arms fire, and repeatedly returned to his own lines to prepare demolition charges and obtain serviced flamethrowers, struggling back, frequently to the rear of hostile emplacements to wipe out one position after another.[62]

Not one for self-aggrandizement, Woody's main emphasis in relating the story himself is "that I did not do this alone, because there were other marines helping me," adding that he has "not the slightest idea" how he managed to "use six flamethrowers over a period of four hours."[63] Several months after the battle at Iwo Jima, Woody was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Truman. Revealing his humble nature, Woody likens his fear during the ceremony to "a near death auto experience," recalling how President Truman "put his left hand on my right shoulder, and I have always believed that it was to keep my body from jumping up and down [laughs] cause that's what it was doin."[64]

Woody's story ends with a reflection on the medal he was awarded, and all those that fought and died alongside him at Iwo Jima:

> The medal that I so proudly possess really belongs to them, they gave more than I did, they gave all that they had. So when I wear it, I don't wear it for what I did. I was just doing a job for which I had been trained, but I wear it in their honor, not

mine. And I just figure I'm the caretaker of it, I'm gonna take care of it, but it's theirs.[65]

Present in Woody Wilson's story are many of the tropes that, when repeated, constitute the Faithful Soldier narrative. Woody, a farmer's son, diminutive to the point of initially being rejected by the armed forces, fills that roll of the "ordinary" American. He joined the military out of a perceived duty or honor, in this case to "protect freedoms." The Faithful Soldier is often admirably courageous but also human. The actions taken by Woody demonstrate a heroic idyll, while his tremors of fear in front of President Truman during the award ceremony exhibit vulnerability and a humble nature. The Faithful Soldier acts out of a sense of duty and views his actions with humility, rejecting the idea that they performed above or beyond the call of duty. By refusing to consider the Medal of Honor his, instead wearing it in memory of his fallen compatriots, Woody faithfully honors the martyred war dead.

Jumping several years into the future, "Medal of Honor" moves from World War II and Woody Wilson to the story of Ron Rosser and the Korean War. Ron Rosser grew up in Columbus, Ohio during the Great Depression, the eldest of fourteen siblings. He jokingly recalls that upon learning from a sister that his mother gave birth to twins, he decided to join the Army because he had "lost [his] place at the table."[66]

After his brother was killed in the Korean War, Rosser insisted on going to Korea to "finish his tour."[67] Insisting on combat duty, Rosser served with many groups behind enemy lines. Described as "a mission to avenge his brother's death and save American lives," January 12, 1952 saw Rosser storming up a ridge as enemy fire flew past, claiming the lives of many of Rosser's fellow soldiers.[68] Rosser happily regales the

audience with the story of his assault on a network of Chinese trenches. Throwing grenades and shooting with abandon, Rosser cut a swath through the enemy.

Eventually, after running out of ammunition, an armed enemy soldier confronted Rosser, but even this it would seem was not enough to stop the "one man army."[69] Rosser bluffed his way out of the deadly situation by waving his empty firearm and screaming in the face of his opponent, causing the soldier to flee. According to Rosser's citation for the Medal of Honor, after 90 minutes of combat, he had "single-handedly killed at least 13 of the enemy" and, ignoring his own wounds, made several trips across the battlefield to assist "other men injured more seriously than himself."[70] Downplaying the dangers he faced that day, and the dangers of the war at large, Rosser states that he was never very frightened because:

> Most of the time I was just too busy to worry about it. My job was to take care of these people. I was so busy doing that, I didn't have time most of the time to think about myself. I always wanted to be a soldier, and the way I realized it, the more enemy I took out the less Americans died. And one time people asked me, why I did this stuff, and I just said 'that others might live.'[71]

Ron Rosser's family was bussed in to Washington D.C. so that they could witness President Truman awarding Ron with the Medal of Honor. Despite his bravery in battle, he like Woody Wilson, recalls being exceptionally frightened when meeting the President during the award ceremony:

> We walked up the rose garden and I think I was the most afraid I've ever been in my life. I didn't know what was going to happen to me but I knew then that my life was going to be different. I had no idea why, but I knew it was going to be

different and I knew that from that day on, I always had to have a sense of honor and to live an honorable life. I didn't want to do anything to disgrace the medal. I feel that the men that were with me that day earned the medal as much as I did. I just happened to be the most colorful one and I made it to the top. A lot of them tried but didn't make it. I'm honor bound to remember those people.[72]

The story of Ron Rosser, while superficially distinct from that of Woody Wilson, contains many narrative elements consistent with Woody's story. Rosser, growing up during the depression, one child of many, can certainly be considered an "ordinary" American. While Woody was motivated by a desire to protect freedom, Rosser, in going to Korea to "finish" his dead brother's tour of duty, is portrayed as being motivated by a sense of familial duty. Rosser portrays his actions as just a part of his job, denying that his actions were notable or exceptional, demonstrating his humility. He Redistributes the prestige associated with the award onto those that he served with, living and dead, valorizing them as martyred heroes. The Medal of Honor comes to represent not the actions of one man, but instead the valor of all that fought alongside Rosser in Korea. For Rosser, the medal is a call to act honorably in the future, instead of a recognition of honorable acts in the past. Rosser becomes a standard bearer for the ideals symbolized in the Medal of Honor.

Jack Jacob, a Medal of Honor recipient from Vietnam, serves as a sort of middle point between the Soldiers of "The Greatest Generation" and modern servicemen and women. As such, his story, while still steeped in tropes of the Faithful Soldier, provides a more modernized version of the narrative. Jacob grew up in Brooklyn, and was raised in an environment where military service was a foregone conclusion. It was assumed, he said, that when one was old enough to serve "you would do your bit."[73] Jacobs had

originally planned to briefly serve in the Army and then attend law school. Out of a personal sense of duty to provide for his young family, however, he made his way to Vietnam in the Airborne Division because "they paid ya extra."[74] On the 9th of March 1978, Jacobs was part of an attempted assault on a Viet Cong position, unknowingly charging into an ambush that led to incredible casualties in a matter of moments. His citation for the Medal of Honor states that despite being severely wounded, Jacobs engaged the enemy, killing three and wounding many others, all the while searching for wounded compatriots. This "extraordinary heroism" saved fourteen lives.[75] Jacobs frames the situation differently:

> People ask me, 'Why'd you keep going back? You bring a guy to safety, you don't have to go back out.' But I thought, and whether it's true or not doesn't matter, I thought that I was the only guy who could do it. That everybody else was killed or wounded…it's not okay to just do your job, it's got to be the best job you can possibly do. And so if somebody says 'whoa, you did something really extraordinary,' it isn't extraordinary! It's what's expected in combat. You're not allowed to lie back there and, you know, wait for somebody else to do it. You got to do it.[76]

Jack Jacobs, like the other Medal of Honor recipients, consistently downplays claims of heroism. Instead he argues that he was just doing his job. Despite this humble attitude, he recalls being contacted on two separate occasions, by "some Major" informing him that he was to be flown out to Washington D.C. to receive the Medal of Honor:

> It didn't make any sense to me, I just thought I was doing [my job]. And by the way, you will hear this from other, not just Medal of Honor recipients, but anybody who's received any sort of accolade in combat. 'There's lots of people that performed valiantly that day.' There is a Medal of Honor recipient named Brian Thacker, who says quite poignantly, 'There're lots of people who deserve the award. I am the lucky one, I get to talk about it, I'm alive to talk about it…but there are three grieving mothers still whose sons were every bit as brave.' And you'll get that kind of stuff from anybody who's been in combat…'Not me it was him!' Therefore, Medal of Honor recipients do not represent themselves. They represent all those who are not here to represent themselves, and all fighting men and women who are out there right now serving and sacrificing for us. All warriors are in awe of all of other warriors, not of what they've done themselves.[77]

Jacobs, like Rosser, was motivated to serve out of a sense of duty to family. Whereas Rosser was driven by a need to avenge his brother, Jacobs was driven by the need to provide for his family, sacrificing his personal goal of attending law school in the process. Ignoring his own injuries and assisting others, Jacobs is shown as acting heroically and selflessly. Like the others, he rejects the notion that he is a hero, transferring that honor instead onto "all fighting men and women."[78]

During the year that *Soldiers Journal* was in production (November 2012 to November 2013), eight of the twelve episodes featured stories focused on Medal of Honor recipients. The coverage for each recipient followed a fairly consistent formula. In the month preceding the awarding of the medal, there was normally a brief interview with the future recipient, accompanied by a short account of their heroic actions. The

following month would then contain a segment displaying the highlights of the award ceremony at the White House, followed by a portion of a speech given by the recipient during their induction into the Pentagon's "Hall of Heroes." The first recipient recognized on *Soldiers Journal* was Clinton Romesha, whose defense of Combat Outpost Keating during the Battle of Kamdesh earned him the Medal of Honor. Interestingly, unlike the other Medal of Honor narratives from *Soldiers Journal*, there appears to be a concerted effort to establish Romesha's personal history. Interviewed in their North Dakota home, Clint Romesha and his wife are introduced as being "no strangers to the army lifestyle".[79] Tammy Romesha, the daughter and granddaughter of army spouses, was Clint's high school sweetheart and they married after Clint completed basic training.

As the narrative moves to the events that resulted in the Medal of Honor for Clint, images of his kids doing homework and drinking from spill-proof cups fade away, replaced by photographs of bullet riddled vehicles and the damaged remains of the outpost in Afghanistan. Acknowledging the abilities of his assailants, Clint states, "These weren't your average up in the hill cave dwellers. I'll give them all the respect, they were well trained. And they had a mission to do."[80] The narrator counterd, "Clint *also* has discipline. Using his army training, he calmly assessed and reported the situation while under attack."[81] As Clint and his compatriots engaged the enemy and made attempts to rescue the wounded "half way across the globe, Tammy heard from a friend that their men were in serious trouble."[82] The narrative then leaves Afghanistan, returning to Tammy who tearfully recalls the ever-present fear of "the knock" at the door that all too many military spouses receive. For his part, Clint says that it is the strength of his wife that allowed him to survive and return home. The segment ends with Clint, back home with his family, "enjoying a pretty normal life" working in an oilfield.[83]

Just as the interview's inclusion of Romesha's family deviates from the way *Soldiers Journal* normally represents Medal of Honor recipients, so too does the coverage of Romesha's ceremony and his induction into the Hall of Heroes. Both the ceremony and his induction are treated with much greater brevity than usual, with only a few brief sound bites provided from each. Even with the minimal coverage, a familiar theme appears in the snippet captured from Clint Romesha's speech at the Pentagon:

> Some say I'm a hero, but it doesn't make sense. Because I got to come home with few scars. Eight of my friends did not have that fortune. They are the real heroes here today.[84]

The story of Clint Romesha, while unlike the coverage of his contemporaries, touches on the main themes of the Faithful Soldier narrative that The Pentagon Channel has created. By placing a focus on his family, the narrative both highlights the sacrifice that Romesha made and the sacrifices of the family themselves. Romesha, as a family man and an oilfield worker is an "ordinary" American, who acted exceptionally in the face of danger. Romesha, following in the footsteps of those interviewed in "Medal of Honor," denies his status as a hero, redirecting that honor to his fellow soldiers, martyred on the battlefield.

The "August 2013" episode of *Soldiers Journal* includes the story of another Medal of Honor recipient, Staff Sgt. Ty Carter. Fighting in the same frantic battle as Clint, Carter faced an "immeasurable" amount of enemy firepower as he attempted to provide support to others in repelling an attack of over 300 enemy fighters.[85] President Obama, while awarding Carter with the Medal of Honor described the battle:

> As dawn broke that October morning, with Ty and most of our troops still in their bunks, their worst fears became a reality. 53 American soldiers were suddenly surrounded by more than 300 Taliban fighters. The outpost was being slammed from every direction. Machine gunfire, rocket propelled grenades, mortar, sniper fire, it was chaos. A blizzard of bullets and steel, into which Ty ran. Not once or twice, or even a few times, but perhaps 10 times. And in doing so he displayed the essence of true heroism. Not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.[86]

The language is epic, sounding more like the synopsis of an action film than the description of a real-world event. The description casts Ty as a selfless hero, ignoring risk of life and limb to save his fellow soldiers. The Faithful Soldier narrative always places significant focus on the life saving aspect of the soldier's ordeal. Yet, the narrative of the Faithful Soldier sets itself apart from other representations of war by willfully highlighting the life ending capacity of the hero, a topic usually ignored or minimized in both *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal*. An example of this willingness to discuss the violence of battle comes from Ty Carter's speech given during his induction into the Hall of Heroes, documented in the "September 2013" episode of *Soldiers Journal*. During his speech he recounts the events during the Battle of Kamdesh. He suggests that the Taliban fighters had likely been preparing for the attack for some time; learning the schedules of the soldiers at the outpost in the hopes that the information would aid them in their attack. Ty recalls:

> Turns out they were dead wrong. Dead wrong in the tune of more than 100 of their fighters, bodies withering in the same hills and passes they used to ambush

> us. Out positioned, outnumbered, and outgunned, we fought back. When the dust settled on our makeshift home in the Hindu Kush we were left with the ashes from a fallen sky, torched trinkets from our lives back home, and as fate would have it, we would never be the same.[87]

The description is poetic and evocative, but also shockingly brutal. Although Ty's speech provides a stark example of the celebration of the death of the enemy in Faithful Soldier narratives, it is far from unique. Woody Wilson was celebrated for his incineration of enemy combatants, burning through the fuel of six separate flamethrowers in the process. Rosser is recognized for his efficient use of grenades and guns to "single-handedly" kill thirteen.[88] Even Jacobs was commended for killing three in his efforts to save allied lives. Although the killing of oppositional forces is still framed as a defensive action (The more enemy I took out, the less Americans died"[89]), the taboo of death and violence is lifted in the service to the Faithful Soldier narrative as a part of civil religion. Finishing his speech Ty reflects:

> The Medal of Honor is prestigious, it's wonderful. To get it you have to go through something where people lost their lives or people are in significant danger. If I could, I would distribute the fame and the respect and honor to the families of the fallen because they deserve it, I believe, 10 times more than I ever will. I give you my heart, and I hope that you understand if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here. Thank you.[90]

Death is "the ultimate sacrifice" in the Faithful Soldier narrative. When the Medal of Honor recipient compares himself to the martyred, the narrative dictates that he memorializes the war dead by symbolically offering the Medal of Honor to their memory.

The final contemporary of Ty Carter and Clint Romesha covered by *Soldiers Journal* is William Swenson during the "November 2013" edition. In 2009 Swenson and his men were attacked in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. During the attack, Swenson repeatedly put himself in the line of enemy fire as he attempted to save the lives of fellow soldiers. During the Medal of Honor ceremony, President Obama reflected on one such moment:

> As the helicopter touches down by a remote village, you see out of a cloud of dust an American soldier. He's without his helmet, standing in the open, exposing himself to enemy fire, standing watch over a severely wounded soldier. He helps carry that wounded soldier to the helicopter and places him inside. And then amidst the whipping wind and the deafening roar of the helicopter blades he does something unexpected. He leans in and he kisses the wounded soldier on the head, a simple act of compassion and loyalty to your brother in arms. And as the door closes and the helicopter takes off, he turns and goes back the way he came, back into the heat of battle.[91]

The description is evocative and stirring. The mixture of compassion and heroism create a moment that seems strikingly cinematic and unreal. During his induction into the Hall of Heroes, Swenson gave his own speech:

> I look in this crowd and I see the strength of a nation. And I see the strength of a fighting force, one that I fought proudly with. I look to my fellow Marines, Army, Navy, and Air Force; the team that I fought with side-by-side as brothers. It's the proudest moment of my life. I'm honored and privileged to know these men. And I thank them all. And then I look at the strength of the nation. I look at the Gold

> Star families who picked up where their servicemembers left off, and I see true strength. Fathers, husbands, sons lost. But their mission continues through those families. I find strength in their strength. Our nation should find strength in their strength. I thank you for being here. I thank you for recognizing my team. Thank you.[92]

Swenson extols both the virtues of all the armed services and the families of soldiers that "gave the ultimate sacrifice" in the line of duty (Gold Star families). The stories of Romesha, Carter, and Swenson, each contain similarities to the stories from the *Recon* episode "Medal of Honor," providing continuity between those that served and those that now serve.

The "April 2013" and "May 2013" episodes of *Soldiers Journal* highlight the posthumous awarding of the Medal of Honor to Father Emil Kapaun, an army Chaplain who served during the Korean War. Celebrated as "a soldier's Chaplain" that did not consider himself to be above any other man, Kapaun received fond remembrances from both his fellow clergy and his fellow servicemen.[93] During the award ceremony at the White House, President Obama honored Father Kapaun with these words:

> This is an amazing story. Father Kapaun has been called a Shepherd in combat boots. His fellow soldiers, who felt his grace and his mercy, called him a saint. A blessing from God. Today we bestow another title upon him: recipient of our nation's highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor…I can't imagine a better example for all of us, whether in uniform or not in uniform, a better example to follow. Father Kapaun's life, I think, is a testimony to the human spirit, the power of faith, and reminds us of the good that we can do each and every day, regardless

of the most difficult of circumstances. We can always be an instrument of His will.[94]

As a Medal of Honor recipient and a saint, Father Kapaun is both a Faithful Soldier and a martyr worthy of memorialization. Both *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* worked to define the Faithful Soldier, and each hero denied his own accomplishment, instead highlighting the virtues of those with whom they served. The Medal of Honor recipient's proclamation that their fellow soldiers, those that "gave the ultimate sacrifice," and the families of the fallen are all true heroes, helps create an image of a Military of the Faithful; a military community made up entirely of heroic Faithful Soldiers. To maintain the image of the Military of the Faithful, those that fail to live up to the core virtues of American civil religion must be expelled from the community, if only symbolically.

The 2014 *Recon* episode "Stolen Valor," highlights the efforts of "veterans and other Americans" that dedicate their time to exposing individuals making claims "on medals they didn't earn or don't deserve."[95] Doug Sterner is introduced as one such vigilant veteran. After two tours of combat in Vietnam, Doug Sterner understands the importance of remembering those that "gallantly…laid down their lives in the line of duty often for their comrades, for another people, for another nation, and for a cause that was greater than themselves."[96]

In service of this end, Doug spent fifteen years creating a database of "Real Heroes: servicemembers who have received valor awards above the Bronze Star."[97] The search for medal recipients unintentionally "uncovered a dark side, a world of stolen valor by fake heroes, claiming honors and awards they have not earned."[98] According to

Sterner, he daily receives multiple emails regarding someone suspected of being a "phony."[99] Sterner argues that for impostors:

> It's not enough to have a Silver Star and one Purple Heart. Soon they've got five Silver Stars. I've got one guy with fifteen Purple Hearts. And so it grows, and it grows, and it grows. So in that regard they are causing great harm to the overall award system, and to the individual legitimate recipients of those awards.[100]

Here, stolen valor is understood as an individual making a false claim for an award. At first, the efforts of retired FBI agent Tom Cottone to protect the integrity of the Medal of Honor from imposters seem to rely on a similar notion of stolen valor. As an investigator, Tom Cottone provided security at Medal of Honor conventions in addition to pursuing cases of individuals falsely claiming to be Medal of Honor recipients. In 2002 Tom was recognized as an "Honorary Marine" during an event in Washington D.C. Tom was recognized alongside a highly decorated Navy Captain Roger Edwards, whom Cottone initially viewed with admiration. Cottone eventually became suspicious and after an investigation, he discovered that Roger Edwards had lied about receiving Valor Awards including a Silver Star, multiple Purple Hearts and more. In 2004 Edwards was found guilty during a court-martial of wearing unearned service ribbons and medals, including the Silver Star. Cottone decided that he would testify against Edwards:

> …as a witness and as a victim. So when I get to meet an individual that I initially perceive to legitimately be a true hero, I mean I was impressed. And when I found out he did that, not only that he did it, but did it at that ceremony, and did it basically to me![101]

The meaning of stolen valor has now become slightly more complicated. Cottone, in counting himself among the aggrieved parties, expands the scope of whom cases of stolen valor may effect. No longer only harming legitimate Valor Award recipients, fraudulent claims harm even Honorary Marines.

"Stolen Valor," continues to renegotiate the concept of stolen valor during the profile of Don Shipley, a retired Navy SEAL "on watch against a growing plague of phonies."[102] Shipley uses his access to a "sensitive" Navy database of SEAL servicemembers to expose imposters.[103] Shipley characterizes the act of impersonating a SEAL as a case of stolen valor. Shipley and his wife Diane, also a Navy veteran, argue that phonies steal valor, not only from "the young army" soldier injured in action, but also from the "children that are without their fathers" during deployment and the military spouses that "display valor everyday of their lives."[104] Valor, once the purview of the decorated soldier, has been greatly expanded, now encompassing all in the faithful military community. This begs the question, who then, is not counted among the valorous? Don provides one answer:

> Some of these guys that do this, that do seek that limelight, that…do that are terrible. You got phony SEAL pedophiles, phony SEALs on death row. They use that word SEAL, to uh, you know, 'my hands are lethal weapons,' instill fear in a lot of people.[105]

Diane recounts phone conversations with "women that have been threatened with their lives, that have been hit, abused, they are scared for their children, and it's phony SEALs."[106] Her condemnation continues:

> They seem to be abusive, they seem to be controlling. They will lie to their children and their wives, their parents. Some of these guys have lied to their entire families for years. You wouldn't tell a lie that strong, then what else in your life would you lie about?[107]

The phony now emerges fully formed, inextricably linked to a bevy of sins and transgressions. The phony is not merely guilty of fraud; the phony represents the antithesis of the Faithful Soldier. Unjustified and senseless acts of violence, abuse, and sexual misconduct are all inscribed onto the phony. The phony steals valor from the "real heroes," which has expanded to include the entire military community. Soldiers, both decorated and undecorated, their families, and even those that support the army (like honorary members of the services) are all members of the faithful military community. When individuals violate the values and norms present in the myths and symbols of civil religion, they betray the faithful military community, marking themselves as apostates. This allows the Pentagon to distance itself from individual soldiers accused of less than honorable behavior, as they have already proven themselves to be phony members of the community by virtue of their actions.

CONCLUSION

Civil religion provides a particularly useful system of symbols and myths for a military organization like the Pentagon. American civil religion holds the war dead, the martyr for democracy, in the highest esteem, and the Pentagon holds a monopoly on the creation, burial, and memorialization of these martyrs. Civil religion gives meaning to the war dead and portrays their employer as dutifully recognizing their sacrifice. Violence too can be re-contextualized as heroic actions, when placed in a narrative like that created around the Medal of Honor recipient. As long as violence can be understood as a means

to save American brothers in arms, bloodshed is transformed from a matter of self-preservation, to a valorous act of life saving heroism. Finally, narratives of phony heroes, those who steal valor, and betray the tenants of civil religion, allow for the Pentagon to distance itself from soldiers that risk to harm the legacy of the Armed Services by effectively excommunicating them through legal proceedings. Although the myths and symbols of civil religion do serve to valorize and memorialize the military community as a whole, it is the Pentagon itself that has the most to gain. When the lives lost and the violence committed on its behalf become sanctified, the real price of what the Pentagon requires of its employees becomes hidden in the layers of myth and symbol. The Pentagon also distances itself from negative behavior by forging an association between phonies and criminality.

However, while it may be possible to dismiss and distance the criminal acts of individuals like Patty England, infamous for her role in the Abu Grhaib torture scandal, and others as the actions of pariahs and phonies, the Pentagon may find that scandals at the institutional level prove more difficult to reconcile. Navy trainers and Air Force officers in exam cheating scandals, accusations of senior officers in the National Guard receiving kickbacks for signing up recruits, and a growing list of high ranking officers in sexual assault or misconduct trails could very well undermine efforts to portray the armed forces as protectors of the nation's most sacred myths and symbols.

Chapter 3: Military Entertainment and the War Spectacle

> If a picture paints a thousand words, then the men and women of combat camera have written more than a few best sellers…. Theirs is an assignment that requires them to carry not one, but two weapons: their firearm and their camera. Their mission? To document military activity, from combat operations, to bringing their brothers in arms back home.[108]
>
> --Staff Sergeant Brian Buckwalter, "Combat Camera"

> I've been looking so long at these pictures of you
> That I almost believe that they're real
> I've been living so long with my pictures of you
> That I almost believe that the pictures are
> All I can feel[109]
>
> --The Cure, "Pictures of You"

In 2010 *Recon* profiled the efforts of military photographers and videographers in an episode entitled "Combat Camera." The two quotes above essentially bookend the episode, with host Brian Buckwalter introducing the purpose of combat cameras at the episode's start, while The Cure's "Pictures of You" served as the closing music, playing over a montage of still photos taken by the soldiers interviewed in the program.[110] While the episode does contain some interesting stories of the soldiers behind the lens, the concepts highlighted by the opening and closing quotations are indicative of The Pentagon Channel's attitude towards image, influence, and truth.

The camera and the images it creates are weaponized, with the image supplanting reality as the site of truth. The Pentagon Channel demonstrates, throughout *Recon* (2005-

2012) and *Soldiers Journal* (2012-2013), that use of images in this way is central to its own strategy of managing the reputation and perceptions of the Pentagon. Stories of the working relationship between Hollywood and the branches of the armed forces are portrayed as mutually beneficial sites of collaboration, intended to provide Hollywood with realism and the Pentagon with positive media portrayals and even recruiting opportunities.

Stories related to actual images of military services and operations demonstrate a preoccupation with the managing and presentation of those images. Sleek aircraft and smart bombs are celebrated, while images of person-to-person conflict are conspicuously absent. When unpleasant realities of war, like death or dismemberment of U.S. servicemembers are not avoided, they are used in appeals by various Pentagon funded Research and Development teams to justify the often expensive work that they conduct as a means to save troops' lives in the future. By negotiating the "military-entertainment complex" and utilizing the tropes of spectacular war, including clean war, technofetishism, and support-the-troops rhetoric, *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* are deployed in managing the reputation of the Department of Defense. [111]

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several academics have addressed concepts central to the discussion of the military entertainment industry and the spectacular war. Roger Stahl's *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (2010), tackles issues of how images of warfare are represented and celebrated in contemporary media. Stahl defines the concept of "militainment" as "state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption."[112] Military entertainment normalizes the presence of the military as a fixture of everyday life. The Pentagon and Hollywood are two of the major players in the militainment

complex. As cinematic and journalistic coverage of warfare grow increasingly similar in form and content, the ability to differentiate between reality and unreality becomes increasingly difficult. War becomes "malleable and plastic" as "the screens of public perception," the images of war on television, replace the events on the ground as the location of the real narrative.[113] As the image increases its hold as the primary site of meaning, the ability to frame the image grows ever more important.

Philip Hammond (2007) argues that western military interventions are spectacles primarily concerned with the "creation of an image of purposefulness."[114] Rather than "the acquisition of territory or the achievement of some strategic goal," military endeavors are conducted for their image value.[115] Hammond posits that with the U.S. invasion of Iraq "the preoccupation with image and presentation reached new heights."[116] Bush landing on an aircraft carrier and declaring "Mission Accomplished" provided the image of victory without actually ending the conflict.[117] When Saddam Hussein was not immediately captured, "troops simulated his defeat by defacing his image and pulling down his statues."[118] When Hussein was finally apprehended, "humiliating pictures of him having his teeth examined" were widely circulated by the coalition forces. [119]The image was deployed as a weapon.

Douglas Kellner (2005) envisions the war spectacle as "military extravaganzas" used to project power by U.S. administrations in order to gain support domestically.[120] Referring to the Iraq War, Kellner argues that U.S. news networks, in ignoring civilian casualties and presenting a "sanitized view of the war" served as "weapons of mass deception," for the Pentagon.[121] The war was framed in a manner that promoted "pro-military patriotism," by lavishing over "the weapons of war and highlighting the achievements and heroism of the U.S. troops."[122] The primacy of the image can prove to be a source of difficulty if control of the narrative is lost. In what Kellner describes as a

"semiotic slip," the momentary placement of a U.S. flag over the head of a statue of Saddam Hussein provided an "iconic image" for "Arab [news] networks" that saw the invasion of Iraq as occupation instead of liberation.[123] What was supposed to be a spectacular victory for the U.S., instead became an example of the ease with which such a reliance on image can "backfire, spiral out of control and, generate unintended consequences."[124]

This unstable nature is why the three tropes of the spectacular war: clean war, technofetishism , and support-the-troops rhetoric, as defined by Stahl (2010), are so important. Clean war involved the erasure of death from the screen. The minimization of U.S. casualties, coupled with a refusal to acknowledge enemy casualties, results in a far more palatable viewing experience.[125] "Collateral damage," "theater of operation," and other such language mitigated the destructive aspects of the event even further, as did the institution of a ban on media displays of U.S. soldier coffins in 1991.[126]

Technofetishism is the celebration of the form and function of technology, nearly to the point of worship.[127] High-tech weapons were presented as being inherently more ethical tools of destruction when compared to their older counterparts; smart weapons reduce the potential for collateral damage, providing an additional dose of antiseptic to the clean war.[128] Technofetishism provides for a media environment in which:

> Weapons not only take center stage, but also become the primary symbolic currency through which war negotiates legitimacy, righteousness, and a host of other related values. Such values would normally be the providence of deliberation and debate. Repeated inscription of these values onto high-tech weaponry displaces the process of democratic deliberation with the material fact of the weapon in all of its self-justifying glory.[129]

The third trope of the spectacular war is support-the-troop-rhetoric. It serves to depoliticize war, disallowing dissent by framing protest as a malicious act against the individual men and women in combat situations.[130] This rhetoric forces one to choose between supporting the war and betraying the troops. Conflict is placed on the personal, micro-level, eliminating the need to consider the purpose of the war; the moral imperative to provide support for the troops overrides the need to deliberate the justification of a conflict. [131]

Jean-Michel Valantin's book, *Hollywood, the Pentagon and Washington: the Movies and National Security from World War II to the Present Day* (2005), covers the relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon, and demonstrates that a film like *Black Hawk Down* (2001), which focuses on the desperate struggles of a special operations team downed in Somalia, can employ support-the-troops rhetoric as effectively as any news pundit. The desperate nature of the narrative "depoliticizes warfare" by "highlighting the solidarity between soldiers under fire."[132] Concerned only with the question of "how" the soldiers will survive, and not "why" they are there, the film coaches the audience to encounter war as a "hyper individualized" event.[133] War is no longer associated with state violence for political ends; instead it is a "'natural' state, which is not subject to any questioning, where bravery, even the sanctity of American soldiers, and the cause they are fighting for, is laid bare."[134]

ANALYSIS

Recon's 2008 episode "Reel Military," a celebration of the Pentagon's relationship with Hollywood is simultaneously a narrative about, and an example of, militainment:

> Over the years Hollywood has mined a rich vein of action and adventure in military subjects. The Department of Defense provides access to equipment and personnel for many film and TV projects. The goal: present a positive public image of the Armed Forces and enhance recruitment. Over the course of 2007, *Recon* got the opportunity to visit several movie sets and sample the 'reel military.'[135]

Throughout "Reel Military," the past and present relationship between the Pentagon and Hollywood are presented as a common sense, benign, and mutually beneficial arrangement. This is not an arrangement between equals, however, as productions are required to follow "certain ground rules," unilaterally dictated by the Pentagon, beginning with DoD script approval.[136] Once a script receives approval, a Project Officer is assigned to assure that the "Pentagon [gets] what it wants" from the on screen representations of soldiers and hardware.[137] Far from censorship, these interventions are presented as being welcome sources of authenticity that help ground the project in reality, particularly when dealing with works of science fiction.

Stargate SG-1 (1997-2007), a science fiction program that follows "an Air Force team that travels throughout the galaxy to find and defend the earth from potential enemies" is held up as a particularly fruitful partnership.[138] According to Brad Wright, one of *Stargate's* co-creators, the ten-year relationship between the series and the Pentagon (and particularly the Air Force), began after an attempt to procure stock footage for the pilot episode. After being informed of the Air Force's need to "vet the script" before any representations of the Air Force were to be considered, Wright asked if the Air Force would "mind reading the script for authenticity."[139] Air Force control over the script is presented as not a hindrance, but a source of support "from word one."[140] The

Project Officer assigned to *Stargate* describes an "inherent relationship" that formed over time, characterizing the Air Force as "part of the family."[141] Over the course of the series collaboration increased. Air Force Chiefs of Staff General Michael Ryan and John Jumper each provided cameo appearances, and in 2001 the Air Force used an episode of *Stargate* to début their new logo. In exchange for the "realism" provided by the close involvement of the Air Force, *Stargate*, as a "world wide franchise", provided a "great opportunity for the Air Force to get their message out there from a recruiting standpoint."[142] According to Project Officer Capt. Mary Danner, many enlistees explicitly stated that the *Stargate* franchise is what led them to military service. Actress Amanda Tapping corroborates this claim stating,

> Apparently I have had an impact on recruiting. I have met countless men, and mostly women, who have come up to me and said that they have joined the Air Force because of my character.[143]

While *Stargate* may be an extreme example of involvement from the Pentagon, it serves not as an aberration, but as an ideal use of Hollywood. The Pentagon has long maintained a tight grip on representations of the military. Film and Television productions that wish to make use of military personnel or equipment are required to craft narratives that portray the military in a positive light. While "highly successful, Technicolor recruiting ad[s]" like *Top Gun* (1986) and mythological renditions of historical events like *Pearl Harbor* serve as extreme examples of the propagandistic value of the Pentagon's relationship with Hollywood; it is the science-fiction genre that seems to currently best serve the purposes of the DoD.[144] This is because, while films like *Blackhawk Down* allow for a useable past to be reclaimed from seemingly irredeemable

events, science fiction provides the Pentagon with a tabula rasa on which to valorize itself. Project Officers ensure that the actions of the military in films like *Transformers* (2007), *I am Legend* (2007), and *Iron Man* (2008) are "carried out in a manner that reflect current practices and doctrine" while making allowances for the otherworldly or supernatural aspects inherent to films about giant robots or vampire plagues.[145] By dictating what constitutes an accurate or realistic response to threats from patently unrealistic sources, the Pentagon can ignore reality while claiming realism. It is in this context that a meaningless statement like "The Army has never fought giant robots, but if we did, this is probably how we'd do it," can be stated authoritatively. [146]

Management of fictional images is one important part of militainment, but so to is the ability to manage images from daily life. The importance of image management is stressed in the 2008 *Recon* episode titled "Image Matters." The episode is ostensibly about the tattoo guidelines of the various services, explaining that regulations on the size and placement of body art, like all other uniform requirements, are in place to ensure that soldiers present themselves professionally. The majority of the content discussed in "Image Matters" does focus on tattoos, ranging from statistics from the American Academy of Dermatology about the increasing number of adults with tattoos, to a brief history of tattoos and sailors. Given that the episode was produced at a time that many of the services were altering the regulations regarding tattoos, a discussion of image and the military is not surprising. However, the topic is framed in a manner that seems to go beyond the effects that a tattoo has on a soldier's personal image. The introduction of "Image Matters" is a rapid montage of military images including helicopters, automatic-weapon fire, fighter jets and explosions, as well as an image of a tattooed arm, a boot being polished, and clips of guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Over this montage hovers a block of text providing the definition of "Image" from the Merriam-

Webster Dictionary: "A popular conception, as of a person, institution, or nation, particularly as projected by the mass media."[147] If this is indeed how *Recon* defines image, the message of the episode undergoes a dramatic shift. "Image Matters" ends with the narrator reiterating a theme repeated throughout:

> But, as the saying goes, perception is reality. And for military men and women that perception, and how it affects image, does matter. When it comes to how the American public feels about its military forces, the key player is image.[148]

While this statement certainly can apply to issues of physical appearance, it is incredibly reminiscent of the spectacular war. What the public sees on their screens is what they understand to be true. Control of images is as important, if not more, than the actual situation on the ground.

Beginning in May of 2007 *Recon* released the first in a series of episodes that dealt heavily in the tropes of the spectacular war: clean war, technofetishism, and support-the-troops rhetoric. Setting the tone for the episodes that follow, *Recon's* "Inventing for the Future," begins:

> Today thousands of American men and women are in the midst of wars. Yes they're better equipped than ever before but there's always room for improvement. One key organization improving technologies and developing new ones is headquartered here at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.[149]

What follows is a bombastic orgy of military tech images; a prime example of technofetishim. Stealth Bombers dropping dozens of missiles are juxtaposed against fiery explosions in empty fields. Microscopes and lasers are intercut with jet fighters

performing a series of sickeningly fast barrel rolls; close ups of missiles attached to fighter wings are intercut with images of unmanned aerial vehicles as scientists from the Air Force Research Laboratory discuss the importance of researching "affordable war fighting technologies," such as stealth technologies and cleaner burning fuels.[150] Over the course of the 30 minute episode, nanotechnology, as well as biomimetic and advanced wing technologies are highlighted as examples of "present-day" technology that "have the sound of science fiction" used "every day to create new tools and capabilities for today's men and women in uniform."[151] Although no evidence is produced of benefits these three technologies have been able to provide present day soldiers, the Air Force Research and Development wing justifies its $4 billion annual budget spent largely on visually stimulating, but speculative, technologies through support-the-troops rhetoric and the promise of a clean war.

Recon's 2007 episode "To Arm and To Shield" focuses on the technology tested at the Picatinny Arsenal, a military research center based in New Jersey. It should not be surprising that, as an arsenal, most of the military technology exhibited during the episode is decidedly lethal. In the words of one staffer, "If a soldier uses it, and it goes boom, Picatinny made it."[152] Although "To Arm and To Shield" features a semi-automatic sniper rifle, Howitzers, Smart Bombs, and a modified tank equipped with non-lethal shotguns, the narrative that unfolds casts the United States soldier as the perennial underdog:

> Arming the war fighter. It's a task that can be both intimidating and inspiring for modern-day innovators and scientists. In their efforts to counter a present-day enemy who's constantly adjusting tactics and creating weapons such as the deadly

> improvised explosive device, today's U.S. military scientists and engineers face endless challenges.[153]

Improvised explosive devices are of course cruel, deadly, and undiscerning in their effect. A large portion of lives lost in the War on Terror have been due to the lethal capabilities of IEDs, however, only a single segment in "To Arm and Shield" deals with technology used to preserve lives, remote controlled robots used in bomb disposal. The remainder of the episode is entirely focused on offensive capabilities, but the program frames these weapons as tools of defense. This is exemplified in a segment focused on the M777A2 Howitzer, which draws on a direct comparison to the lifesaving promise of robotic bomb disposal

> Part of what makes robots an asset on the battlefield is the ability to operate them from a safe distance. Likewise…engineers are driven by the challenge to successfully shoot artillery and deploy weapons from a safe place far away from the enemy.[154]

The Howitzer (when utilizing "Excalibur Precision Guided Munitions"), capable of accurately striking targets up to 22 miles away, is thus presented not as an incredible tool of destruction, but a measured defensive response to the dangers of improvised explosive devices.[155] When dealing with the clean war trope, IEDs provide the ultimate enemy. Whereas "munitions like Excalibur and other precision guided rounds are basically like bullets with brains," IEDs are barbaric and unethical.[156] PG kits, technology that can be placed on regular munitions in order to "almost immediately smarten it up," are presented as important steps in reducing "collateral damage."[157] These smart weapons are presented as the tools of a military concerned only with preserving the lives of their

soldiers while simultaneously keeping local populations from harm. This is juxtaposed against footage shot from a tank capturing the moment an IED is detonated when triggered by another vehicle in the convoy:

> Words cannot always adequately describe the lethality of the improvised explosive device but pictures and video sometimes can, as can the faces and the memories of the American lives lost to the IED.[158]

As a photograph of a soldier killed by an improvised explosive device hovers over the screen, a member of the Picatinny team cites the death of this specific soldier as the reason their work is so crucial. Later, the tragic death of another soldier is memorialized by having one of the buildings on the base emblazoned with his name, so that all might remember the "soldier on the ground" that the Picatinny team members "are working for."[159] Like the Air Force Research Lab before it, Picatinny legitimates itself through the deaths of U.S. servicemen and women. Supporting the soldier on the ground is presented as being synonymous with supporting a facility that uses a $3.4 billion budget to research ballistics. At the same time, juxtaposing the indiscriminate nature of IEDs against precision weapons plays into desires for a clean and virtuous war where collateral damage is minimized. Even the M1 10, a semi-automatic anti-personnel sniper rifle, avoids the stigma of death. An anecdotal story is provided of a sniper that "engaged" five "targets" planting an IED. Although all five combatants were shot, one was only hit in the shoulder and managed to escape. With the M1 10 the audience is told that the sniper will have "additional rounds" with which to "engage" such enemies in the future.[160] And so the ability to efficiently kill five, transforms into the ability to engage targets to save American lives; an effective combination of clean war and technofetishism.

"Life and Limb" (2009) is perhaps the episode of *Recon* that best illustrates the tropes of spectacular war. The episode focuses on the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, better known as DARPA, in their efforts to advance prosthetic technologies for amputee soldiers:

> By now it is well known that more servicemembers are surviving battlefield wounds in Iraq and Afghanistan than ever before. But now more are returning home as amputees. And for those that have lost an arm or a hand, the core technology is useful, but it's dated. DARPA…is working to fix that. They have assembled a high level team of neuroscientists and engineers from across the country to restore both life and limb.[161]

"Life and Limb" creates a narrative in which modern warfare can be cast as a comparatively clean endeavor, while simultaneously utilizing support-the-troops rhetoric in their efforts to create technologically sophisticated equipment. DARPA contracted DLKA, the inventors of the Segway, to create an electronic arm with unprecedented "degrees of freedom."[162] DLKA, described as "a Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory for High Technology," named their efforts the "Luke Project" after the artificial arm given to Luke Skywalker after it is cut off during the *Empire Strikes Back*.[163] In the film, Luke's prosthetic arm was indistinguishable from the real thing, and functioned just like a real hand. While it does not quite live up to its name, the arm from DLKA does have an impressive 13 degrees of freedom (meaning individual motion). After only a few weeks, one test subject was able to unlock a door, operate a power drill, eat skittles, and even play a game of Jenga. "Life and Limb" concedes that there is little demand for advanced upper amputee prosthetics outside of the military, and unsurprisingly, the cost is

substantial. This is why the Pentagon has funded these projects, with DARPA having spent $100 million on development at the time of the episode. Fred Downs, the chief prosthetics consultant at the Veterans Administration, justifies the expense in classic support-the-troops rhetoric:

> I always say to the budget folks, 'We spend millions of dollars every day to blow things up, then we can certainly spend 100 thousand dollars to replace a limb for one of our soldiers out there who's putting their life on the line.' That's the kinda logic that makes good sense to me, and I think to the American taxpayer. So those dollars are well spent.[164]

Col Geoffrey Ling, DARPA Project Manager, employs similar rhetoric:

> Our focus of course is on the injured warfighter. We owe them a debt that can't be repaid, can't be measured in dollars and cents. So if they need something, a prosthetic eye, a prosthetic arm, a prosthetic leg, then we should, I believe, have the commitment to provide it to them because of what they have given to us and to our country. These are young people in the military service; this is the flower of America. These are our future leaders. If we can give them back that level of function, think of the great things that they will do; they are the next World War II generation in my mind, look at what they will do.[165]

"Life and Limb" is thus an exceptional example of spectacular war tropes. The efforts of DARPA fetishize technological advancement, holding up the development of advanced prosthetics both as a means to support the troops, and to promise a future of a

perfectly clean war, in which conflicts are inoculated not only from death, but also the effects of injury.

Soldiers Journal also utilized the tropes of the spectacular war to provide a positive image of the Department of Defense, as well as a more palatable perception of the conflicts in which it was engaged. During the show's year in production, from November 2012 to November 2013, twelve out of the twelve episodes of Soldiers Journal contained at least one segment utilizing the tropes of the spectacular war. This included eighteen separate stories that rely on clean war narratives. Thirteen of these stories focused on medics, advances in medicine, or the training of U.S. and Afghan soldiers in basic medical techniques. Out of these segments, seven explicitly discuss the life saving potential of the techniques. The five additional segments were examples of erasing death from combat through euphemism for lethal force. "Engaging" the enemy or providing "indirect fire," are not uncommon euphemisms when discussing clean war, but some examples bordered on the absurd. In particular, a segment from the "May 2013" episode on efforts to make the Afghan National Army self-reliant, focused on the efforts of Afghan soldiers to receive their certification for the use of Howitzers. Once certified, it was said, the soldiers would be able to use the "deadly lethal" Howitzers to "engage" the Taliban.[166] The Afghan soldiers were portrayed as quick learners, providing hope for a self-reliant military after U.S. troops departed. The segment concluded stating that, mastery of artillery would allow Afghans to "launch rounds of success with confidence."[167]

Technofetishism proved to be the most common spectacle trope in *Soldiers Journal* with a total of 22 segments dedicated to the celebration of military might and technological prowess. Many stories drew a direct connection between the ability of the Afghan National Army to use artillery to their potential to project power across the still

unstable nation. Through live fire exercises, the destructive potential of the U.S. trained forces could be symbolically demonstrated. Air superiority was another major theme, with multiple segments focusing on images of helicopters and drones that provide tactical and intelligence advantages.

CONCLUSION

The spectacular war can be used as an incredible tool in the battle of the image. TPC, through *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* utilized narratives of clean war to present a conflict where death has almost disappeared. Instead, it would seem that the United States armed forces are concerned only with life saving efforts, such as medical training and nation building. Technofetishism facilitates these narratives, through the dedication of large amounts of programming to the technological developments and machinery employed by the United States and its allies. Finally, support-the-troops rhetoric allows for the calculated utilization of soldier death as a way to justify research and development budgets in the name of protecting our troops. In large part, this is facilitated by the comfortable relationship between the Pentagon and media as demonstrated in *Recon* "Reel Military." Military entertainment remains alive and well, as films and television shows containing Pentagon-approved content continue to populate American screens with images and narratives that serve to valorize and normalize the current military complex.

Conclusion

Considered together, *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* provide a snapshot of content provided by The Pentagon Channel for roughly a period of nine years. Although this may not provide a complete picture, it does help in understanding how The Pentagon Channel balanced its dual roles as a source of news and a source of advocacy. The traditions of civil religion provided TPC with a way in which to elevate the nation's history of state violence and the deaths of young men and women with sacred import. The spectacular, depoliticized war downplayed the cost of conflicts and allowed the Pentagon to use the death of soldiers to serve as justification for inflated research and development budgets. When balancing roles of news provider, and Pentagon advocate, The Pentagon Channel privileges advocacy over informing.

While it may prove interesting or useful to investigate other Pentagon Channel Programs as sites of ideology or media management, it may prove increasingly difficult to find a "voice" of The Pentagon Channel going forward. In the face of military drawdowns and sequestration, The Pentagon Channel seems to have an uncertain future. Once boasting an impressive social media presence, its twitter account, Facebook pages, and other online excursions outside of its own website, are no more. After production on both *Recon* and *Soldiers Journal* ceased, the channel has started to rely increasingly on programming from other media operations within the military. As such, although the Pentagon Channel may remain, it seems probable that it faces a future of rebroadcasts, press conferences, and Public Service Announcements. Regardless of the specifics, the efficacy of The Pentagon Channel seems destined for decline. Thus, more than any lasting influence on public perception or military morale, the most noteworthy aspect of The Pentagon Channel's legacy may prove to be, that for over a decade the Pentagon

broadcast a 24-hour network across the United States, disseminating messages that it considered advantageous, and few seemed to notice or care.

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