

Introduction: myths, men, and policy making

From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

Shakespeare, *Henry V*, 1598

The male combat unit lies at the heart of American military identity. The story of a group of men risking their lives to violently defend the United States has been a consistent national narrative. "Bands of brothers," "comrades in arms," and "a few good men" are examples of well-worn tropes that signal men's unique connection to one another and their ability to overcome extreme odds to protect the nation. According to military historian Martin van Creveld, war is "the highest proof of manhood" and combat is "the supreme assertion of masculinity."¹ In his Afghanistan war memoir, US Army Infantry Officer Andrew Exum described the infantry as "one of the last places where that most endangered of species, the alpha male, can feel at home."² These accounts of soldiering depict male troops as the natural and rightful protectors of society.

In contrast, women are often seen as potential spoilers to military culture. There are fears that the integration of women into the military – particularly into combat roles – "feminizes" and weakens

¹ Martin van Creveld, "Less Than We Can Be," 2.

² Andrew Exum, *This Man's Army* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005), 35.

the military. Stephanie Gutmann explains, “I do not think we could have a capable integrated combat arms without real androgyny, without real suppression of male and female qualities.”³ Such portrayals of the military imply that restricting women from the front lines of war is essential to national security. This rationale was at the heart of the combat exclusion – a US military policy designed to keep women from combat units. The policy was founded on the understanding that women were not natural soldiers, were physically inferior to men, and would ruin the bonds necessary for combat missions.⁴

For decades, the combat exclusion was heralded by Congress and the Department of Defense (DOD) as crucial for national security. At the same time, the all-male combat unit was lauded as the key component, or “the tip of the spear,” of US military operations. In other words, American security was directly linked to male-only groups and to the exclusion of women from some military jobs. Given this, the Pentagon’s announcement on January 24, 2013, that it was removing the combat exclusion came as a shock to many Americans and raised two questions: Why now? And what did the change mean? Although there are competing theories as to why the combat exclusion was removed, there is little understanding of how the combat exclusion survived for so long and the role it played in shaping military identity. The intense effort to keep women from combat roles, even in the face of evidence that women were already “doing the job,”⁵ signals that the combat exclusion policy is an important site for understanding gender dynamics within the military.

This book is not a historical account of the combat exclusion or an evaluation of whether women should or should not fight in combat. It also does not predict whether the removal of the combat

³ Stephanie Gutmann, *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America’s Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), 272.

⁴ As discussed in subsequent chapters, a number of other reasons are given for the combat exclusion, including concerns over privacy, sexual violence, and logistics.

⁵ See Chapters 2 and 3 for more discussion on women’s contribution to combat missions.

exclusion will produce positive or negative outcomes for women or for the US military. Instead, the book uses the combat exclusion as a vehicle for a broader analysis of military identity. The foundational argument of the book is that the combat exclusion in the USA has always been about men, not women. There are two pillars to this position. The first is that the combat exclusion was an evolving set of rules, guidelines, and ideas primarily used to reify the all-male combat unit as elite, essential, and exceptional. The second is that the combat exclusion was not designed in response to research and evidence related to women and war, but rather was created and sustained through the use of stories, myths, and emotional arguments.

In particular, the myth of the band of brothers shapes our understanding of what men and women can, and should do, in war. Specifically, the band of brothers myth conveys three key “truths.” First, the myth casts the nonsexual, brotherly love, male bonding, and feelings of trust, pride, honor, and loyalty between men as mysterious, indescribable, and **exceptional**. Second, male bonding is treated as both primal and an **essential** element of an orderly, civilized, society. Third, all male units are seen as **elite** as a result of their social bonds and physical superiority; it is assumed that these qualities render them more capable of accomplishing military missions and defending the country compared to mixed-gender units. The physical differences between men and women are particularly emphasized and cited as evidence of women’s inferiority. In other words, difference is equated with superiority. Moreover, combat units are treated as the most elite component of the military; as van Creveld put it, “warriors . . . occup[y] an elevated position on the social ladder.”⁶ As well as these three truths, the overarching message of the band of brothers myth is that the exceptional, elite, and essential characteristics of the male group depend on the exclusion of women.

In addition to developing and supporting this central argument, one of the broad objectives of this book is to contribute to debates

⁶ van Creveld, “Less Than We Can Be,” 3.

about the motivation and justifications for wars. The book offers a unique answer to the question “Why do we fight?”⁷ Many analyses of the military-industrial complex focus on the economy and overlook the social and cultural justifications for perpetual militarization and war. Building on the work of gender scholars such as Aaron Belkin⁸ and Cynthia Enloe,⁹ I argue that the logic of war depends on the preservation of gendered stories and myths about “real” men, “good” women, and “normal” social order. One could call the constant perpetuation and dissemination of such gendered ideals a militarized-masculinity complex.

The all-male combat unit lies at the heart of gendered depictions of war, and the band of brothers myth serves as a linchpin to social and cultural justifications for war. The ideal of the heroic, brave, masculine, and mysterious all-male unit legitimizes male privilege within the military institution, represents war as “the ultimate expression of masculinity,” and casts violence as a necessary political strategy. In turn, I argue that we fight because the myth of the band of brothers presents war as natural, honorable, and essential for social progress. Moreover, we fight because the band of brothers myth casts outsiders as inherent security threats and presumes that violence is the most efficient way of solving political problems. In light of these broader objectives, this book is not merely an account of the combat exclusion policy; rather, it uses the combat exclusion as a medium for unpacking

⁷ For two interesting perspectives on this question, see Eugene Jarecki’s excellent documentary *Why We Fight*, which traces the military-industrial complex and the inability of governments or American citizens to detect or prevent the pattern of perpetual war, or what, in the film, Gore Vidal summarizes as “the United States of amnesia” [Eugene Jarecki, *Why We Fight*, Documentary, History, War (2005)]. In their book *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2003), Leonard Wong et al. make the case that cohesion, or the bonds between soldiers, is the primary motivation for combat soldiers.

⁸ Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898–2001* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁹ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2000). See also the lecture by Enloe, “Women and Militarization: Before, During and After Wars,” for an excellent summary of the role of “good” women and “real” men in perpetuating wars [“Women and Militarization: Before, During, and After Wars” with Cynthia Enloe, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfCktWyARVo&feature=youtu.be>].

and unraveling one of the greatest – and most destructive – political myths: the myth of the band of brothers.

In addition to unraveling gender norms, this analysis provides an alternative perspective to those who laud the removal of the combat exclusion as a watershed moment. Using historical evidence, I will illustrate that it has been necessary for the US military to regroup and rebrand itself after almost every major military operation, particularly following the Vietnam War. Female soldiers are, and always have been, central to this rebranding and rewriting of history. Restricting women from combat units has served to confirm men's superior role in the military and reassure the public of the masculine identity of the military. This book traces the fluid and evolving stories and justifications associated with the combat exclusion throughout US military history. In doing so, it reveals a pattern in which women's exclusion from combat has been used to shape military identity, support militarization, and uphold male supremacy within the institution.

The removal of the combat exclusion is not a watershed moment and does not signal a new era for gender relations in the military. This characterization discounts women's historic contributions to combat operations – contributions that had been formally recognized in the form of combat badges and combat pay for years before the announcement. This characterization also overlooks ongoing sexism plaguing the institution, including a widely publicized yet largely unaddressed epidemic of sexual violence. Enthusiastic depictions of the combat exclusion policy change could be seen as part of a broader effort to revive a somewhat battered military image at the "end" of two largely unpopular wars, and in the face of ongoing scandals and criticism. This book demonstrates that the policy change did not mark the end of band of brothers narratives; rather, it served to recover and reshape the band of brothers myth, as well as military identity more broadly.

When seeking to understand the issues surrounding women and combat, a vast range of academic and nonacademic resources are available. In terms of nonacademic contributions, there are a number of monographs aimed at convincing readers that women

should not be allowed in combat, or in some cases even in the military. These are largely polemics by former military staff – typically men – including *Co-ed Combat: The New Evidence That Women Shouldn't Fight the Nation's Wars* by Kingsley Browne¹⁰; Robert L. Maginnis' *Deadly Consequences: How Cowards Are Pushing Women into Combat*¹¹; and *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster* by Brian Mitchell.¹² There are also several autobiographies and personal accounts of individual women's experiences of soldiering.¹³

In contrast to the polemics and individual features, there are excellent academic resources that examine the wider issues associated with gender and war,¹⁴ gender and the military,¹⁵ women's experiences of war,¹⁶ violent women,¹⁷ militarization,¹⁸ women in

¹⁰ Kingsley Browne, *Co-Ed Combat: The New Evidence That Women Shouldn't Fight the Nation's Wars*, 1st edition (Sentinel HC, 2007).

¹¹ Robert L. Maginnis, *Deadly Consequences: How Cowards Are Pushing Women into Combat*, 1st edition (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2013).

¹² Brian Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 1st Edition (Regnery, 1997).

¹³ Michele Hunter Mirabile, *Your Mother Wears Combat Boots: Humorous, Harrowing and Heartwarming Stories of Military Women* (AuthorHouse, 2007); James E. Wise Jr. and Scott Baron, *Women at War: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Conflicts* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2011); Kirsten Holmstedt, *Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq* (Stackpole Books, 2008).

¹⁴ Carol Cohn, "Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War," in *Gendering War Talk*, edited by Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 227–46; Carol Cohn, editor, *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*, 1st edition (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012); Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, War, and Conflict*, 1st edition (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014).

¹⁵ Melissa S. Herbert, *Camouflage Isn't Only for Combat: Gender, Sexuality, and Women in the Military* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), and Paige Whaley Eager, *Waging Gendered Wars: U.S. Military Women in Afghanistan and Iraq*, New edition (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014).

¹⁶ Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience: Contributions from International Relations and Feminist Analysis*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2012); Sylvester, "The Art of War/The War Question in (Feminist) IR." *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (June 1, 2005): 855–78; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Robin L. Riley, editors, *Feminism and War*, 1st edition (London: Zed Books, 2008).

¹⁷ Carol Cohn, *Women and Wars* (December 4, 2012).

¹⁸ Cynthia H. Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*; Laura Sjoberg and Sandra E. Via, editors, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, 1st edition (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

combat in other militaries around the world,¹⁹ and women's participation in militant movements and terrorist activities.²⁰ Feminist scholarship on women, gender, and war has challenged mainstream perspectives on war by asking critical questions, providing alternative understandings of key concepts such as security and post-conflict, and employing unique and reflexive methods for studying war and its aftermath.

Despite these valuable feminist contributions to war studies, there is a noticeable absence of feminist scholarship focused on Western militaries. Among the few feminist analyses of American women and combat, liberal feminists often characterize the combat exclusion as an example of gender exclusion and discrimination. For example, Kathleen Jones argued, "The best way to insure women's equal treatment with men is to render them equally vulnerable with men," including within the military.²¹ Some of those who lobbied to have the combat exclusion removed contended that the policy was a "gender-based barrier to service"²² that created a "brass ceiling"²³ for women in the armed forces. From this perspective, the removal of the combat ban is a sign of improved gender relations within the military, an opportunity for women to advance their careers, and even potentially a catalyst for reducing the rates of sexual violence within the military.²⁴

¹⁹ See, for example, Maya Eichler, "Women and Combat in Canada: Continuing Tensions between 'Difference' and 'Equality,'" *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 2 (August 2013): 257–59; Orna Sasson-Levy, "Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in 'Masculine' Roles," *Sociological Inquiry* 73, no. 3 (2003): 440–65.

²⁰ Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2008); Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror Groups* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Paige Whaley Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008); Swati Parashar, "What Wars and 'War Bodies' Know about International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 615–30.

²¹ Jones, 1984.

²² Quoted in Mark Thompson, "Women in Combat: Shattering the 'Brass Ceiling,'" *Time*, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://nation.time.com/2013/01/24/women-in-combat-shattering-the-brass-ceiling/>.

²³ *Ibid.* ²⁴ Service Women's Action Network.

Debates on women's capabilities and the potential impact of removing the combat exclusion tend to focus on physical statistics, historical evidence of women's contributions to war, and the effect of the combat exclusion on the careers of women. Data about women's physical bodies and the "average" physical differences between men and women is deliberated and assessed ad nauseam in attempts to determine if women can or should serve alongside men. There have also been extensive discussions about whether women's essential nature, in particular their presumed sensitivity and propensity for weakness and emotional reactions, presents an obstacle to their ability to serve on the front lines. Although such reflections and resources have merit, they can close off space for broader critical reflections on militarization, military identity, and gender hierarchies. More specifically, such debates ignore the ways that gender is constructed within, and in relation to, the military. By examining the relationship of the combat exclusion to the male combat unit, this book provides a unique perspective on both the policy and the centrality of the band of brothers myth to US military identity.

WHY MYTHS?

Myths are typically defined in two ways. The first – *myth as fiction* – treats myth as an untruth, or something contradictory to "reality."²⁵ The second – *myth as symbolic* – depicts myth as stories or narratives that are widely known to particular communities and that explain, justify, or legitimize certain cultural beliefs and practices. The former understanding of myth is widely represented within the field of international relations (IR). There are a number of IR resources that use myth interchangeably with error or untruth, including titles such as "The Myth of 1648," "The Myth of the Autocratic Revival," and "The Myth of Post-Cold War Chaos." The second definition of myth – as

²⁵ For example, John McDowell described myths as narratives that are "counterfactual in featuring actors and actions that confound the conventions of routine experience" in "Perspectives" on "What Is Myth" in *Folklore Forum*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1998.

symbolic – remains relatively underexamined in IR. This definition treats myth as central to the way that social groups, including nations, identify themselves and make sense of the world around them.

In this analysis this second definition of myth is employed. I argue that myths matter to international relations (IR) and to foreign policy. They are not simply fables, stories, and untruths; rather, they are deeply embedded narratives that shape how we understand the world. Myths send explicit messages about appropriate, ideal, acceptable, and legitimate behaviors, identities, and practices. This analysis builds on a strong body of work examining how myths shape politics and identity. In his book *Political Myth*, Christopher Flood defines political myths as “ideologically marked narratives” that convey explicit norms, beliefs, ideologies, and identities.²⁶ Cynthia Weber’s work is at the forefront of IR scholarship engaged with myths.²⁷ For Weber, the study of myths is not aimed at locating flaws or untruths, so that “more accurate” approaches to IR might be constructed. Rather, myths reveal the unstable and constructed nature of truths that are treated as “common sense” within the field. In other words, the objective is not to “abandon the myth” but to “abandon the apparent truths associated with the myth.”²⁸

MYTH AS SECURITIZING

Drawing on Weber’s work, my objective in this book is to consider how the band of brothers myth shapes “truths” and “common sense” ideas associated with security and women’s place in war. The analysis does not replace these truths with more accurate ones. Rather, it traces the origins of these ideas in order to destabilize them and to

²⁶ Christopher Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (Psychology Press, 1996).

²⁷ Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Psychology Press, 2005). Also, in their book on Harry Potter and international relations, Iver Neuman and Dan Nexon argue that myths “serve as the frame into which other phenomena are fitted and then interpreted.” Daniel H. Nexon, *Harry Potter and International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

²⁸ Weber, *International Relations Theory*.

create space for their critique and unraveling. Myths alone are certainly not capable of securitizing. However, myths are an essential element of the securitization process. Myths inform our understandings of international and social order, group identity, and appropriate norms and behaviors.

There is a particular gendered aspect to the relationship between myth and security. The “order” that is implicit to notions of peace and stability depends on multiple gender constructions, many of which can be traced back to myths. In particular, binaries such as disorder/order and insecurity/security largely stem from the gendered norms that myths evoke. For example, conjugal order is a term I developed in my 2012 book *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security and Post-conflict Development*. The term refers to the multitude of laws, rules, and social norms associated with the family and social order in particular contexts. It concluded that the myth of the nuclear family informed post-conflict security policies and defined female soldiers as a domestic “problem” rather than a security priority. By contrast, men were categorized as “real” soldiers and prioritized as security threats in the postconflict era. The term “conjugal order” helped illustrate how moments of insecurity or crisis are shaped in relation to peaceful, domestic order. This book examines how ideals of peaceful, weak, and vulnerable women help to define a hypermasculine military and are central to mythologies of the military and its bands of brothers. Building on existing work looking at emotions in international relations, this analysis also highlights the significance of, and the value placed on, emotion and “gut” feelings about the policy.

THE BAND OF BROTHERS MYTH

The band of brothers myth is another myth that shapes our understandings of order and security. The band of brothers myth refers to an all-male military unit, uniting to protect each other and defend their country. Although there have been references to “bands of brothers” for centuries, the band of brothers myth attained hegemonic status in relation to American military identity in the decades following the

Vietnam War. Using Flood's definition, the band of brothers is a myth and not just a narrative for two reasons. First, it is an established, well-known story that has substantial resonance and emotional purchase. Second, it conveys clear and consistent messages about natural order, the origins of society, legitimate behaviors, and ideal/heroic/or villainous identities. Particularly in the past fifteen years, "band of brothers" has come to represent and signal multiple ideals associated with the all-male combat unit.

The history of the band of brothers myth

The ideal of the all-male group dominating and protecting society can be traced back to the world of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud. Although the term "primal horde" is most associated with Freud, he borrowed from a reference Darwin made to "primitive hordes." According to Darwin, primitive hordes were prehistoric social formations. Darwin did not elaborate on how these groups were organized; instead, he used the term to signal the unknowable nature of ancient cultures. In *Totem and Taboo* (1912–1913a),²⁹ Freud explains how Darwin's work inspired him: "Darwin deduced from the habits of the higher apes that men, too, originally lived in comparatively small groups or hordes within which the jealousy of the oldest and strongest male prevented sexual promiscuity."

Adapting this reference, Freud developed a narrative surrounding primal hordes that largely drew on mythical ideals.³⁰ In simple terms, the primal horde is a story of the transition from the state of nature to early political, or organized, society. According to Freud, primitive societies were controlled by a single patriarch, who had exclusive access to power and to women within the social group. Driven by jealousy and sexual drive, a group of men band together

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (Psychology Press, 1999).

³⁰ He maintained this idea and returned to it again in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921c), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927c), and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930a [1929]), and especially in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939a).

to kill the father and share the power that he once held. These men become united by their collective violence, their shared sense of guilt, and their newfound access to women. Freud's analysis ties the foundation of society and the birth of humanity to the formation of an all-male band of brothers. This unit propelled social groups forward from the chaos of primitive society because, "united," the all-male unit "had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually."³¹

Although Freud had strong critics who argued that this myth had no basis in reality and overemphasized a flippant comment made by Darwin,³² the story of the primal horde reached iconic status. When discussing primal horde in a written exchange, Freud once said "Don't take this too seriously. It's something I dreamed up one rainy Sunday afternoon." Despite criticisms and his acknowledgment of its fleeting origins, Freud based much of his psychoanalytical theories on the narrative, and other scholars built on various aspects of the primal horde.³³ In turn, many elements to the story have become embedded in the social and political fabric of Western society and came to shape Western understanding of gender roles, family relationships, and the origins of political society.

Popular culture accepted and reinforced band of brothers narratives with enthusiasm, particularly following the Vietnam War. Into the 1990s, war movies shifted their attention from the politics of war, or the historical particularities of a battle, to stories of the bonds between male soldiers. In their analysis of combat movies, Rudy and Gates conclude, "The new Hollywood war film does not present a political war but a moral one – and the hero who fights them is the idealistic youth."³⁴ The authors go on to note that the dominant

³¹ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 141–42.

³² Paul Radin, 1929; Alfred Louis Kroeber, 1920.

³³ Géza Róheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949); Eugène Enriquez (1967); Serge Moscovici (1981).

³⁴ Paul Rudy and Philippa Gates, "Sound Shaping and Timbral Justification in the 'Moral Realist Combat Film' *Black Hawk Down*," accessed February 5, 2014, <http://oicrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/RUDY.P.CIM05.pdf>, p. 2.

theme of this “new” type of war movie is “heroism defined through idealism, moral choice, and self-sacrifice in the interests of the brotherhood – the ‘Army of One.’”³⁵ These war movies seem to treat war as merely the backdrop against which to portray brotherly bonding and relationships. In turn, military defeat or success is defined relative to the relationship between men and their capacity to support one another instead of the actual military mission. In doing so, *Black Hawk Down*, which had the tagline “Leave no man behind,” can recast humiliating military loss as an achievement for the men who fought together on this mission. Sue Williams summarizes: “[*Black Hawk Down* is] an astonishing glorification of slaughter that makes the tragedy look like majestic triumph for the brotherhood of man, rather than a humbling defeat for the United States.”³⁶

One cannot discuss the present-day iconic status of the band of brothers in the United States without referring to the HBO television series of the same name. *Band of Brothers* chronicles one American paratrooper company, known as “Easy.” It draws from Stephen Ambrose’s 1992 book of the same name and features present-day interviews with actual veterans of the unit. The series aired shortly after September 11, 2001, to initial tepid ratings; however, the subsequent DVD set became the best-selling HBO series and the highest grossing TV-to-DVD release.³⁷ Through its dramatization of a “real” group of men during World War II, *Band of Brothers* came to encapsulate a deeper narrative and set of ideals associated with men, women, and American wars. In Debra Ramsay’s analysis, she argues that the series has come to represent “totalizing narratives of World War II that provide primary mechanisms through which to understand the

³⁵ Rudy and Gates, “Sound Shaping and Timbral Justification.”

³⁶ Philippa Gates and Paul Rudy, “Spectromorphology Hits Hollywood: Morphology, Objectification and Moral Messages in the Sound Design of ‘Black Hawk Down.’” CEC 8.3. Accessed http://cec.sonus.ca/econtact/8.3/gates_rudy.html.

³⁷ Debra Ramsay, “Television’s ‘True Stories’: Paratexts and the Promotion of HBO’s *Band of Brothers* and *The Pacific*,” *InMedia. The French Journal of Media and Media Representations in the English-Speaking World*, no. 4 (November 12, 2013), <http://inmedia.revues.org/720>.

war."³⁸ Ramsay outlines several specific messages the series reiterates for the public. The first is that war history can and should be "refracted through the memories of the ordinary soldier."³⁹ The second is that war battles constitute the "defining experience of the war."⁴⁰ Although only a small percentage of soldiers serve in front lines positions and face battle, war is represented as being "about" combat soldiers, their relationships with one another, and their man-to-man contests with the enemy.

The HBO series aside, today, particularly in the USA, the mention of "bands of brothers" evokes a generally accepted and consistent set of narratives linked to all-male units, male bonding, courage under fire, and the protection of the nation. The US military has woven this narrative into the way it talks about combat units. For example, the current Marine slogan "The Few. The Proud." draws directly from the King Henry V speech quoted earlier ("We few, we happy few, we band of brothers"). One of the slogans used by the Marines since 1883 is the Latin *Semper Fidelis*, which they define as "[what] distinguishes the Marine Corps bond from any other. It goes beyond teamwork – it is a brotherhood that can always be counted on. Latin for 'always faithful' . . . It guides Marines to remain faithful to the mission at hand, to each other, to the Corps and to country, no matter what."⁴¹ Finally, troop cohesion, which was largely defined as men's ability to trust each other and form social bonds, became "synonymous" with combat effectiveness following the Vietnam War.⁴² Major Brendan McBreen explains, "Improving infantry cohesion is more important than any combination of doctrinal, organizational, training or equipment improvements."⁴³ Kingsley Browne describes the gendered nature of cohesion, and the problem women pose to it: "Men fight for many reasons, but probably the most powerful one is

³⁸ Ibid. ³⁹ Ibid. ⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ <http://www.marines.com/history-heritage/principles-values>, June 9, 2014.

⁴² Erin Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire: What You Should Know about Women in the Military*, 1st edition (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2006), 297–98.

⁴³ Maj. Brendan McBreen, "The Strength of the Wolf Is the Pack," *Marine Corps Gazette* 88 (February 2004): 2.

the bonding – ‘male bonding’ – with their comrades... Perhaps for very fundamental reasons women do not evoke in men the same feelings of comradeship and ‘followership’ that men do.”⁴⁴ In turn, combat cohesion was heralded as essential to troop effectiveness, but was also defined largely as male bonding, which by definition excluded women from cohesion.⁴⁵

In turn, aspects of the band of brothers myth became operationalized and accepted as common sense within the US military. It is important to note that although women have been consistently depicted as a threat to male bonding and combat cohesion, several other threats to all-male combat cohesion have been identified within the US forces at various times through history. In the 1930s, for example, African American men were seen as threats to cohesion. The institution characterized African American men as untrustworthy and naturally weaker than their white comrades. Similarly, the military justified its effective ban on gays and lesbians in the military until 2011 with the argument that openly serving homosexuals would weaken military cohesion. The band of brothers, then, is not simply a myth about an all-male unit; it is a myth about a white, heterosexual man and his nonsexual bonds with his comrades.

Band of brothers “truths”

As indicated earlier, the band of brothers presents all-male units as exceptional, elite, and essential. Although the details of the narrative may shift over time, the overarching messages remain constant. These include the depiction of male bonding as sacred and mysterious; the perception of a distinct front lines in warfare that is more dangerous than “rear” positions; the association of warrior spirit, unit cohesion, and courage under fire with all-male units; the characterization of all-male units, including Special Forces, as especially “hard core” as a result of their physical fitness and their undying commitment to

⁴⁴ Browne, *Co-Ed Combat*, 7.

⁴⁵ Combat cohesion is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

military missions; and the message that women must be excluded in order to maintain honor and order.

It seems obvious from the iconic name of the myth – band of brothers – that women are excluded; however, it is worth exploring in greater detail how messages attached to this myth require female exclusion. First, the myth requires the exclusion of women’s physical bodies in order to establish the band of brothers. Second, the myth implies that sacred male bonding and relationships depend on the exclusion of women. Third, the myth associates positive group and national emotions such as pride, honor, trust, and loyalty with male-only groups. In turn, the myth links security and order to the establishment and valorization of all-male units as well as the exclusion of women from these units.

Applying band of brothers to the combat exclusion

It is possible to examine the combat exclusion and military identity in relation to the band of brothers myth through the use of discourse analysis. Bottici and Challand note that the “‘work on myth’ involves an analysis of the whole system of production-reception-reproduction.”⁴⁶ The method most appropriate to such “work” is discourse analysis. Lene Hansen argues, “To understand language as *political* is to see it as a site for the production and reproduction of particular subjectivities and identities.”⁴⁷ Discourse analysis, therefore, is a useful tool to use in evaluating the ways that myths influence, and are reproduced within, foreign policies and policy debates.

For this book, the discourse analysis centers on three major types of sources. The first includes official military reports, press briefings, government statements, and policies related to the combat exclusion. Second, news articles and opinion pieces from the

⁴⁶ Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, “Rethinking Political Myth: The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 3 (August 1, 2006): 315–36, p. 320.

⁴⁷ Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2006), 18–19. Emphasis in original.

following top US news outlets are included: the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *USA Today*. I chose these sources because they reach a broad readership across the USA and tend to appeal to different US demographics. I analyzed articles that included “women and combat” or “combat exclusion” published in 2012 and for the first four months of 2013. I chose this time frame because it illustrates the type of reporting, analysis, and debate that took place leading up to the policy change, as well as in the first few months after the combat exclusion was lifted. Finally, I analyzed comments on three online articles on the combat exclusion in order to provide a richer picture of public debates on the combat exclusion policy and the decision to remove it.

Discourse analysis is used to examine the history of, rationalization for, and the decision to remove the combat exclusion through the lens of the band of brothers myth. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the history of the combat exclusion within the USA to support the argument that the combat exclusion is an idea and a fluid set of discourses and stories. Chapter 2 builds on this argument, but focuses specifically on US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here, I argue that these wars eroded any remaining enforceable rules associated with the combat exclusion and, because of the nature of the conflicts, largely rendered the distinction between combat and support roles irrelevant. Next, in Chapter 3, the key emotional arguments expressing opposition to women in combat are presented, followed by an analysis of how these positions relate to the band of brothers myth. The chapter aims to illustrate the way in which emotional positions inform, or are woven through, seemingly objective claims about women in combat, including conclusions about women’s physical nature. From here, physical standards and combat cohesion are discussed as the main research-driven, objective reasons for excluding women from combat. Exploring each in depth, in Chapters 4 and 5, I demonstrate that arguments related to physical fitness and cohesion remain shaped and influenced by emotion and the band of brothers

myth. Finally, in Chapter 6, online comments to three articles on the combat exclusion are examined in order to further illustrate the influence of myth and emotion within wider debates on the combat exclusion.

CONCLUSION

The band of brothers myth is a nodal point from which many military policies stem. The chapter sought to demonstrate the relationship between myth, policy, and national identity and to establish a methodology for evaluating this claim. The band of brothers myth requires the exclusion of women from the “heart” of warfare – the combat unit. The myth also requires and reproduces particular ideas about women, including the assumption that they are inherently different from men, that they lack the natural drive to fight, and that they spoil the bonding required to fight wars successfully. This book moves beyond questions of whether women “can” or “should” fight in combat. It is also skeptical of claims that removing the combat exclusion marks a new era for gender relations in the US military. Allowing women in combat is not a means to address gender discrimination and embedded gender hierarchies and norms within the institution. Instead of evaluating the potential impacts or limitations of removing the combat exclusion, this book asks how the combat exclusion has been used throughout military history to shape ideals of “good,” “honorable,” and “real” soldiers. If indeed the combat exclusion has always been about men and the band of brothers, the decision to remove the combat exclusion should also be treated as a signal of an effort to redefine and revive the masculine image of the military and create a new iteration of the band of brothers narrative.