

INTRODUCTION

Real and Imaginary Women

Miss Yourlovin was the name of a B-24 bomber assigned to the Mediterranean theater of operations during World War II. The plane's crew named and decorated it with a pinup girl copied from a calendar or men's magazine. The pinup saunters toward her viewers wearing abbreviated panties and nothing else; an arm coyly covers her bare breasts. To the left of the name and image are three rows of miniature bombs, each denoting one of the forty combat missions completed by the men who served as the plane's crew. What appears to be damage from enemy fire is visible above and to the left of the pinup's head.¹ **1**

This combination of sentimentality, eroticism, and danger was characteristic of GI culture. The women who dominated soldiers' artwork, reveries, and rumors were objects of nostalgic yearning and subject to independent desires. This independence made women fitting mascots for military aircraft; to the men who crewed these powerful machines, heavy bombers seemed to have minds of their own. But female independence, particularly in the case of bombers, also represented danger to the men who depended on them for survival. Should a system malfunction, the members of the bomber's crew were vulnerable to capture, injury, and death. **2**

Real women seldom held such power over soldiers, but many men felt keenly dependent on the wives and sweethearts they left behind when called to serve. Although absent from barracks and battlefields, loved women nevertheless played key roles in the emotional lives of American servicemen. While their soldiers were stateside, wives and sweethearts made their presence felt through loving letters, flattering photographs, and frequent visits to military bases; some followed husbands from one assignment to the next. Once parted by overseas service, loved women seemed to gain a greater hold over soldiers' emotions. They figured prominently in waking and sleeping fantasies, representing the domestic comforts and erotic pleasures—the "way of life"—for which many men claimed to fight and to which they longed to return. **3**

Although strong enough to justify military service, this "romance of reunion" was weakened by doubt.² Many soldiers feared that during their absence from home, the women they loved would prove unfaithful; wartime obligation thus seemed to threaten domestic stability. Again, women's independence was part of the problem. Separated for years and by miles of ocean, men had little control over their wives' and sweethearts' behavior and limited faith in feminine virtue. Some suspicions were merited; plenty of men received "Dear John" letters, a **4**

term coined during this war. Many more worried without ground. Psychiatrists speculated that soldiers' own infidelities were the source of such fears.³ Whatever the cause, this fear of betrayal was widespread.

As seductive and disturbing fantasies became entangled in soldiers' memories of home, the difference between real and imaginary women was sometimes hard to discern. Long separations allowed fears to fester and desires to multiply. Describing this dynamic, psychoanalyst Therese Benedek recounted the case of a shy young soldier who worshipped one woman from afar yet addressed his love letters to another. While overseas, he could pretend that his dream girl was his lover, but this fantasy did not survive the soldier's return home. Learning that his love had married, he suffered feelings of betrayal even though his correspondent faithfully awaited him. Although most servicemen were not so self-deluded, sociologist John Cuber judged "nostalgic distortions," along with imagined infidelities, to be a major threat to family stability among the veterans he studied.⁴

While real women were transformed into dream girls, imaginary women came to seem real. Airmen commonly described the machines that carried them into battle as magnificent and sentient female entities. "Maybe the darn things are just inanimate objects," one pilot wrote in his diary, "but it is hard to believe when you fly them in this racket."⁵ A heavy bomber, if properly tended and treated with respect, would protect "her" crew, returning them safely to base despite heavy damage from enemy fire. This belief in protective, even maternal, bombers helped airmen endure the dangers of combat. Legendary radio announcer *Tokyo Rose* was another imaginary woman who became real to her American fans.⁶ She provided servicemen with a different sort of psychological defense, allowing them to articulate and at the same time externalize their own anger and anxieties by recounting what they purportedly heard. These stories took on a life of their own and, in the war's aftermath, contributed to a real woman's conviction for imaginary crimes.

This book investigates the women who populated soldiers' memories, thoughts, and fantasies in order better to understand how these men experienced wartime military service and what they expected from postwar America. Roughly sixteen million men served in the World War II military, representing more than ten percent of the American population and 75 percent of men born between the years 1918 and 1927. Almost one in every five families contributed servicemen for the nation's defense. Of these men, more than two-thirds were conscripts; others volunteered in the expectation that they would be drafted.⁷ They served willingly, if involuntarily, but in many ways their understanding of national obligation, proper conduct, and the rightful rewards of service differed significantly from that of the state they served.

My study of soldiers' beliefs about and behavior toward real and imaginary women illuminates these differences, in many cases revealing a strong undercurrent of antipathy toward the army in which they served. Writing and talking about their families back home, particularly their wives and children, prompted men to explain why they fought and what they sacrificed to become soldiers. By tying military to familial obligation, they also asserted limits on the state's legitimate claim to their service.⁸ In repeating rumors about members of the Women's Army Corps, servicemen expressed hostility not only toward military women but also toward the Army, which, they believed, overstepped its bounds by recruiting women. To many minds, this act threatened to destroy happy homes, turning otherwise faithful wives and sweethearts into "government-issue prostitutes." Distrust of military officials, as well as of women, was also apparent in the rumor that *Tokyo Rose* warned her American listeners that the antimalarial drug Atabrine would make them impotent or sterile. In recounting these rumors, soldiers indirectly accused the Army of endangering their health and domestic happiness. Underlying this rumor was widespread resistance to the administration of Atabrine; the result was a malaria epidemic motivated in part by soldiers' desire to escape service on Pacific island bases.⁹

Wartime military service evoked feelings of pleasure and power as well as anger and fear. Soldiers' attitudes and conduct in Germany revealed that the men regarded sex as a right of conquest. Despite the threat of punishment and repeated warnings of sinister *fräuleins* who sought to seduce and trap unsuspecting soldiers, many servicemen violated the Army's non-fraternization policy even as they fought the Germany army. After victory, fraternization became even more prevalent, for soldiers believed that their service entitled them to sexual rewards. So widespread and firmly held was this belief that by their behavior soldiers forced the revision of Army policy. Except for restrictions on cohabitation and marriage, the fraternization ban did not survive the summer of 1945. Perhaps more seductive than sexual domination of a conquered people were the aggressive pleasures of aerial combat. Although muted by repeated exposure to danger, these pleasures remained with most men as they completed their tours of duty. Indeed, even airmen incarcerated in German prison camps celebrated the joys of flight and the excitement of combat in their artwork and poetry.

Each chapter of this book examines one of five categories of real or imaginary women: the idealized wife, the promiscuous *Wac*,¹⁰ the seductive *fräulein*, the maternal bomber, and the legendary *Tokyo Rose*. Together they provide a new perspective on the men who served, shedding light on wartime conflicts of obligation and desire. These conflicts, although seldom directly articulated, were never far from the surface of soldiers' thoughts and beliefs about women, family, and home. By looking beneath the surface, we gain a deeper understanding of the nature of military service and consent and of the domestic yearning that drove the postwar marriage and baby booms.

Government Records and Social History

My research draws on the many documents, both private and official, that preserve soldiers' wartime thoughts and experiences for friends, family, and scholars. As poet and former soldier Karl Shapiro observed in his memoir, "writing is a part of soldiering."¹¹ Although poets and novelists were a minority, most servicemen wrote frequent letters home, many for the first and only time in their lives. Some kept diaries, typically beginning with induction or their arrival overseas and concluding just before their return home. Servicemen and their families preserved a multitude of wartime letters and diaries and have donated much of their correspondence to archives. As a result of popular interest in the World War II generation, many of these documents also have been reproduced or transcribed online or in printed memoirs and edited collections. **11**

Participants and their families were not the only ones to preserve wartime correspondence. Army mail censors also reproduced portions of soldiers' letters and recorded the contents of their packages. Documented censorship violations tend show soldiers at their worst: collecting gold teeth from enemy dead or disparaging their female comrades. Some, however, reveal a more romantic side. Through coded messages, servicemen attempted to communicate their current location or future movements to worried loved ones. Sometimes, codes simply hid loving messages from the prying eyes of company officers, who commonly mocked the prose of the lonely, lovestruck GIs they commanded. Like other intelligence officers, mail censors also monitored and reported on military morale and popular rumors. **12**

Censorship reports and other World War II military records are wonderful sources of social history. In their intrusive attempts to manage morale, arrest rumors, treat neuroses, and regulate behavior, military officials documented popular practices, attitudes, and fears. These studies, investigations, and reports, although designed to assist policy decisions or to punish misconduct, also recorded soldiers' words, thoughts, and actions, often with an emphasis on the seamy side of Army life. **13**

Social scientists in the Army's employ interviewed, observed, and surveyed American soldiers. This information, as sociologist Samuel Stouffer predicted in his introduction to *The American Soldier*, has proven as valuable—if not more so—to historians as policy makers.¹² In regard to the Women's Army Corps, for example, surveys documented the depth of soldiers' hostility toward the corps, but analysis of the data provided little guidance on how attitudes might be changed and enlistments thus increased. Rather, it revealed an irrationality that seemed immune to Army publicity campaigns.¹³ To an historian, however, these responses, particularly soldiers' written comments, provide useful insight into the emotions and illogic that derived from military service and nostalgic longing. **14**

Irrationality was less disturbing to the many psychiatrists enrolled in the Army; after all, it was a professional assumption. As a group, however, these doctors were undecided whether the psychological weakness they diagnosed derived from wartime environment or from individual predisposition. Although their primary responsibility was the preservation of manpower, entailing quick treatment and return to service with little follow-up,¹⁴ Army medical officers were keen, and often sympathetic, observers of soldiers and military life. In order to better understand the feelings of anxiety experienced by the airmen he treated, for example, one Mediterranean theater flight surgeon even submitted himself to a fifty-mission tour of combat duty aboard a heavy bomber.¹⁵ **15**

Finally, investigations into wartime misconduct preserve important information about soldiers' beliefs, behavior, and motives. Inspector general and judge advocate case files, for example, typically include transcripts of interviews with witnesses and suspects. These documents allow servicemen to voice complaints and suspicions, justify their actions, or deny culpability. In overseas investigations, they also allow foreign nationals to tell their side of the story. In addition to the Army, U.S. Department of Justice officials contributed to my research by unintentionally acting as folklorists. FBI special agents assigned to Iva Toguri's case recorded legend when they interviewed former soldiers who claimed to have heard *Tokyo Rose*. **16**

Many of the government documents I consulted allow soldiers to speak for themselves, sometimes with the guarantee of anonymity. Others record the analyses of trained observers, providing insight into beliefs and attitudes common to the men who served. Military records also describe events and conflicts seldom reported in the popular press, recounted in letters home, or recalled during oral history interviews. Military historians have long recognized the value of these and other official documents, but it is time for gender and social historians to make more use of them, for in no other circumstances do we have the opportunity to study the majority of the nation's young men in such intimate detail. **17**

Notes

Note 1: The bomber survived World War II but not peacetime reconversion. The art on its fuselage, however, has been preserved by the American Airpower Heritage Museum of the Commemorative (formerly Confederate) Air Force.

Note 2: Magda Fahrni uses this term to refer to popular wartime "narratives of homecoming" that conclude with a "welcoming embrace between the returning hero and the girl he'd left behind." Since the war's end, historians have perpetuated this romantic notion by underestimating or ignoring the difficulties of reintegrating former soldiers into civilian society. Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), chapter 3.

Note 3: See, for example, Albert N. Mayers, "Dug-Out Psychiatry," *Psychiatry* 8 (November 1945): 386; Meyer H. Maskin and Leo L. Altman, "Military Psychodynamics: Psychological Factors in the Transition from Civilian to Soldier," *Psychiatry* vol. 6 (August 1943): 265; Herbert I. Kupper, *Back to Life: The Emotional Adjustment of Our Veterans* (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1945), 101–3.

Note 4: Therese Benedek, *Insight and Personality Adjustment: A Study of the Psychological Effects of War* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1946), 69–72; John Cuber, "Family Readjustment of Veterans," *Marriage and Family Living* 7 (Spring 1945): 28–30.

Note 5: Excerpt from Kenneth Booke's diary, Donald Vining, ed., *American Diaries of World War II* (New York: The Pepys Press, 1982), 306.

Note 6: I italicize *Tokyo Rose* to denote that the name refers to a legendary woman rather than to a real radio announcer.

Note 7: John Modell and Duane Steffey, "Waging War and Marriage: Military Service and Family Formation, 1940–1950," *Journal of Family History* 13 (1988): 196–205; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 634–7; Lee Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987), 4–5.

Note 8: On soldiers' conception of the "limited" nature of their military obligation, see Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, vol. 1, *Adjustment During Army Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), 449–58.

Note 9: On Army medical officers' assessment of Atabrine resistance, see Medical Department, United States Army, *Neuropsychiatry in World War II*, vol. 2, *Overseas Theaters* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1973), 531–2; S. Alan Challman, "Report of Medical Department Activities in Southwest Pacific Area" (13 September 45), File: 730 (Neuropsychiatry) Interviews, Miscellaneous Interviews in the Pacific, Box 1349, Office of the Surgeon General World War II Administrative Records, Entry 31(ZI), RG 112, National Archives, College Park, Md. (NACP).

Note 10: I use Wac to refer to members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC).

Note 11: Karl Shapiro, *Poet: An Autobiography in Three Parts*, vol. 1, *The Younger Son* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1988), 158.

Note 12: Stouffer, *American Soldier*, 1:4. See also Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 74–6; Samuel A. Stouffer, "Some Afterthoughts of a Contributor to 'The American Soldier,'" in Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, eds. *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier"* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950), 106–32.

Note 13: Frederick H. Osborn to Miller G. White, Re: Research on Soldiers' Opinions about the WAC (n.d.) and "Analysis of the Argument That the WAC's Are Bad for a Girl's Character," File: S-90: Attitudes Toward Women in the Service, Box 11, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower, Personnel, & Reserve), Research Division, Reports and Analyses of Attitude Research Surveys, Entry 92, Office of the Secretary of Defense, RG 330, NACP.

Note 14: On psychiatrists in the armed services, see Herman, *Romance of American Psychology*, chapter 4; Paul Wanke, "American Military Psychiatry and Its Role among Ground Forces in World War II," *Journal of Military History* 63 (January 1999): 127–46; Medical Department, United States Army, *Neuropsychiatry in World War II*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1966, 1973).

Note 15: Robert Rehm, "Fifty Missions over Europe: Psychological Study of an Average Combat Tour" in David G. Wright, ed., *Observations on Combat Flying Personnel* (New York: Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, 1945), 4–12.