

**“BROTHERHOOD” IN WAR: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO  
UNDERSTANDING THE UNITY AMONG SOLDIERS**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

JACOB WILLIAM COTTON

Submitted to the Undergraduate Research Scholars program at

Texas A&M University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by Research Advisor:

Dr. Marian Eide

May 2017

Major: English

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	1
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	2
KEY WORDS.....	3
INTRODUCTION .....	4
I.    SOURCE MATERIAL .....	6
II.   MASCULINITY .....	9
Introduction.....	9
To Be a Man.....	9
Masculinity: Rooted in Tribal and Warrior Culture .....	14
III.  A DUAL SOCIETY .....	19
IV.  DEFINING BROTHERHOOD .....	21
Brotherhood by Dogmatism.....	21
Brotherhood by Pragmatism .....	22
A Faulty Brotherhood .....	25
V.   BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD .....	28
A Fleeting Brotherhood .....	28
A Fixed Brotherhood .....	29
VI.  WAR AS THE PERPETRATOR .....	33
WORKS CITED .....	34

## ABSTRACT

“Brotherhood” in War: A Rhetorical Approach to Understanding the Unity Among Soldiers

Jacob Cotton  
English  
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Marian Eide  
Department of English  
Texas A&M University

My research will elucidate the idea of “Brotherhood” as it relates to the soldiers fighting for our country. First, I will attempt to define a clear concept of Brotherhood as it relates to the American Armed Forces. Then I will approach the questions: What does it entail to be enveloped in the overarching promise of Brotherhood? What does it mean to be a “brother” to your fellow soldier? Where did this commitment to the brotherhood develop? Finally, is the Brotherhood gendered? The rhetoric of Brotherhood may date as far back as Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and is embodied in the lines, “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.” Does the current embodiment of the Brotherhood tie back to this early incarnation? More importantly, when does Brotherhood truly begin to affect a soldier’s life? I will investigate possible forms of initiation into this association within the American Armed Forces, whether explicit or not, to begin breaking down the rhetoric of the term. I will explore the rhetoric through the following guiding questions: Is the rhetoric of Brotherhood coherent, or does its meaning possibly transform situationally? More specifically, how does Brotherhood play a role in determining current American masculinity?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my faculty advisor, Dr. Marian Eide, as well as Matt Bizzell, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research.

Thanks also goes to my research partner on the *After Combat* project, Olivia Oliver. Through our shared experience of diving into interviews, stories, and readings about deployment, redeployment, and homecoming, we have together discovered pertinent truths about war as it relates to the human condition.

## **KEY WORDS**

Brotherhood

Camaraderie

War

Afghanistan

Iraq

Masculinity

Gender

America

## INTRODUCTION

What is the true nature of masculinity in modern American society? Today's America is reaching toward a hopeful future, while still clinging strongly to a culture of nostalgia. There exists a muddled and combatant view of gender and belongingness. Just what does it mean to be a man in today's America? Veterans, through interviews in our *After Combat* project, have grappled with this similar question, looking toward literature and tribal cultures to answer this multifaceted question.

*After Combat: The Voices Project* contains numerous interviews exploring the idea of masculinity as it relates to the men serving flag and country. As the project focuses on the two and a half million soldiers who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as part of the United States' war on terror, it isolates a more modern depiction of masculinity.

I explored the archives of interviews that the *After Combat* team conducted with veteran participants who courageously shared their stories about the most recent war. Participating soldiers, Marines, and airmen recounted experiences, relationships, and memories about deployment and the often arduous journey back home. An underlying theme prevailed throughout the stories—the Brotherhood. Veterans depicted experiences at war that they could not have endured without the companionship of soldiers, newfound brothers. In conversations, they described rich, loving relationships between comrades that have endured even beyond the battlefield.

There exists an unyielding tie between comrades that had no counterpart in civilian life. The Brotherhood explored through the stories of *After Combat* veterans, war literature, and nonfiction accounts, illustrated a practical nature to this warrior ideology. Many soldiers are

implicated in this Brotherhood by a pragmatic nature, eradicating innate fear and instilling practical bonds.

As the modern man seeks manhood and keys to American masculinity, war, Brotherhood, and the subsequent connectivity come together to help man find an identity. Yet, challenging the American man at every turn is the stark contrast between the warrior and civilian world.

## CHAPTER I

### SOURCE MATERIAL

The *After Combat* project is a living and ever-growing collection of interviews from men and women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The project provided me with an archive of stories from veterans who both my team and I have interviewed. By working to develop the *After Combat* project, I explored questions relating to an undeniable bond expressed between soldiers. The symbiotic relationship between independent research on this thesis and the development of the *After Combat* project has acknowledged and disclosed pertinent truths related to deployment, service, and the human condition. The website for the project is currently being developed to support the desired goal of the site: a digital space where veterans can share their stories. After researching, conducting interviews, and establishing these veteran “voices,” our team then analyzed and reflected on the shared words. These reflections and follow-up responses are appropriately called “echoes.” Our aim with the project is to narrate “what Vietnam veteran and writer Tim O’Brien calls a ‘true war story:’ one without obvious purpose or moral imputation, independent of civilian logic, propaganda goals, and even peacetime convention” (Eide<sup>1</sup>).

In addition to the stories gathered from the *After Combat* archive, I have looked to war literature as a means of discovering truths about war as they relate directly to the human condition. I explored fictional accounts of war, novels like Philip Klay’s *Redeployment* and Kevin Powers’ *The Yellow Birds*, as well as real accounts of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan, works like Martha Raddatz’s *The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family*, Sebastian Junger’s documentary *Korengal*, as well as his book *War*. Each of these works presented the

---

<sup>1</sup> *After Combat: American Soldiers Return from War in Iraq and Afghanistan* is a forthcoming publication by Marian Eide and Michael Gibler. Hence, page numbers are not yet available.

phenomenon of war in varying lights. For the first time, I was able to view war as not only a destructive entity, but instead as an agent of creation. Within each of my source material's raw, emotional, and oftentimes gritty narratives and stories, one thing was certain: as much destruction and loss that war brought, there was something else that kept reemerging from the havoc. War created bonds. Without engaging in too much metaphor, by illustrating war's phoenix-like abilities throughout the pages and interviews from my research, war created seemingly unalterable bonds amongst soldiers, bonds that at first glance, were constructed through and birthed from the violence of war. I came later to identify these bonds as part of an existing term called The Brotherhood. *The Long Road Home* and *War* depicted this Brotherhood by showcasing the lives of soldiers at war. The film *Korengal* succeeds most at using director Sebastian Junger's embed into a unit in Afghanistan, to truly encapsulate the day-to-day lives of soldiers and this Brotherhood that so easily manifests from war-torn situations. Fictional accounts of war, like Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* aided in re-establishing this strong bond between comrades, but also managed to present Brotherhood as a force beyond the battlefield. By understanding and breaking down the rhetoric of Brotherhood, I hope to present an honest extension of material and insight gained from my personal research as well as the *After Combat* project.

My research through the project, compilation and organization of veteran's stories, and exploration of war literature aided in crafting a realistic image of a soldier's life during deployment. The research also developed and illustrated the Brotherhood that these soldiers embody. Civilians may understand that veterans are changed by combat; however, "as much as veterans are changed by war, it is not always in the ways civilians may expect. Post-combat stress may inspire nightmares or anxious crowd navigation, but no veteran wants to be treated

like a ‘ticking time bomb,’ as one former airman was described.” (Eide). Literature and interviews can help us to better understand the men and women serving flag and country. Through my research, I have gained a greater understanding of the Brotherhood as a whole. More importantly, I can evidence the Brotherhood’s strong roots in American masculinity and my own question of what it means to be a man in our current society.

It is important to note that in subsequent sections of this paper, I will provide some transcribed recordings of various interviews conducted through the *After Combat* project. In an effort to protect the identities of the participants, but not to reduce their individuality, we provisionally refer to all participants as “Dave.” The anonymity of the participants through the use of “Dave” does not in any way imply that every participant in the project was male. But rather, this identification also, retrospectively, accomplishes two tasks: one for the project as a whole and one for my own research stance. For the project, assigning the name “Dave” to each of the participants, allows a certain fluidity for gender. Many experiences at war are universal, and it is part of the human condition to encapsulate them all. But, at the same time, gender does play a large role in charting the Brotherhood. By using “Dave” to describe each of the subsequent soldiers, an important component of the rhetoric of Brotherhood is illustrated: its ties to solely men and masculinity.

## CHAPTER II

### MASCULINITY

#### **I. Introduction**

Before continuing, it is important that we take the time to specifically address a key caveat of my research. The Brotherhood, for all intents and purposes of my thesis, is about men. While there are many females also serving flag and country, none of the women who have participated in our *After Combat* project believed that they were admitted into this ideology of the Brotherhood. Additionally, women do not appear as part of the Brotherhood collective in war literature. My approach to the all-male constraints of Brotherhood does not aim to be negative toward women. Rather, the male-dominated Brotherhood is an essential component of the Brotherhood definition that is necessary to underscore the crucial relationship between men in and after combat. Fundamentally, the Brotherhood is an ideology consisting entirely of male comrades.

#### **II. To Be a Man**

According to R. W. Connell, today's modern man is struggling to find his identity. Schools of pop psychologists argue that men are "suffering from a psychological wound, being cut off from the true or deep masculinity that is their heritage." Connell describes therapeutic techniques that aim to heal this wound by "re-establishing bonds among men, with initiation rituals, retreats, etc." (Connell 5). While psychologists are attempting to "heal" the wound of lost manhood through artificial retreats and gatherings, war and camaraderie come to mind as a real approach to guiding man back to his seemingly lost heritage. If bonds between men are apparently lost in the modern age, it appears that the Brotherhood in war is, in its own right, re-

establishing man's connection. Connection soon becomes a force and necessity of manhood. If connection is arguably what the modern man finds difficult, then the Brotherhood now becomes a substantial ally in understanding masculinity.

In the mid-twentieth century, a new framework became an influential force in driving gender, a concept known as "social role" (Connell 7). This new language used to define gender roles culminated in the creation of "sex roles." These sex roles were "understood as patterns of social expectation, norms for the behavior of men and women" (Connell 7). In turn, social behavior, and therefore masculinity, was deeply rooted in conformity. When viewing gender as "the way bodies are drawn into history [where] bodies are the arenas for the making of gender patterns," understanding masculinity in the frame of the Brotherhood and war proves to be a valuable tool to understanding human nature (Connell 12).

The idea of roles assigned to each gender plagues modern men. If each gender is assigned a certain role to fill, conforming to these roles can prove challenging to a free-thinking man. Yet, according to research, there is "no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct gender differently" (Connell 10). How do we, in modern American culture, construct gender? Within each social group, there exists "different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using a male body" (Connell 10). We can then look to this institution of the armed forces, instigated by war, and propagated with Brotherhood, to identify American masculinity. American masculinity is defined collectively in culture and sustained through institutions like the Brotherhood. If the modern man's dilemma is a lost manhood—wherein one seeks to regain identity through heritage—then war becomes a fitting context through which to study masculinity. The American culture is rooted in nostalgia, in a rich heritage of fighting and

protecting, and the Brotherhood is arguably one successor of the country's masculine identity. The modern soldier grapples with ideas of masculinity and must search through his heritage for an answer.

Dave X contemplated this very question of "being a man" in an interview conducted for *After Combat: The Voices Project*:

I just kind of always thought that's what men do is go to war if there's a war and then come back, so that's what I decided to do. As a kid my dad wasn't there. So I was obsessed with what it means to be a man, and some tribes they cut your back with a razor blade and it looks like alligator skin, and some tribes have a fire thing. I didn't know what it meant to be a man in America. So all the books that I read, they'd all gone to war, so I just thought that that's what you did (*After Combat*).

When Dave X describes his grappling with American masculinity, the transformative process comes into focus: there are activities, rites, and processes an individual must surpass to become a man. Dave X grew up without a father, and, in turn, he showcases an ingrained sense that it is the father's role, and the father's ability alone, to share with their sons the truth of "being a man." Without a paternal role model, Dave X references other, non-American cultures to discover the keys of masculinity requiring rites of passage: is it the razor blade or the "fire thing" that truly makes you a man? Equating these specifics, Dave X recognizes an endemic American masculinity born in service to flag and country, a masculinity central to the United States ethos. Connell might argue that, due to the absence of his father, Dave X is facing the modern man's dilemma of a "lost manhood." Yet, through a nostalgic view of the United States, he begins to isolate his "role" within the institution of manhood. Due to the United States' long-

enduring stance of male enlistment and man's role to "go to war," Dave X identifies what he believes is his own role in the schema of manhood. He will go to war, because *that* will make him a man, a man in America.

Becoming a man in America is an ambivalent experience for many who forgo existing roles, who wish to exhibit individual masculinity in resistant ways. As Paul Theroux notes,

I have always disliked being a man. The whole idea of manhood in America is pitiful, in my opinion. This version of masculinity is a little like having to wear an ill-fitting coat for one's entire life (by contrast, I imagine femininity to be an oppressive sense of nakedness). Even the expression "Be a man!" strikes me as insulting and abusive. It means: Be stupid, be unfeeling, obedient, soldierly and stop thinking. Man means "manly"—how can one think about men without considering the terrible ambition of manliness? (Theroux)

Here, Paul Theroux contemplates a guiding question: what does it truly mean to be a man? Modern society has forced a sometimes-blurred definition of manhood into mainstream culture. Malleable young men fight to peacefully juxtapose the metro-sexuality of a GQ persona with the merit of a Super Bowl-winning linebacker with the nostalgia-driven stoicism of mid-twentieth-century Clint Eastwood. Theroux argues his subversive attitude toward the much-maligned expression to "be a man." Like Dave X, Theroux struggles to come to terms with masculinity in America. Yet, unlike Dave X, Theroux does not come to as peaceful of a conclusion—no, he feels it is necessary to challenge these gender roles. Interestingly, Theroux includes "soldierly" in his list of the attributes of masculinity. He views masculinity as contributing either directly or at least in part to the notion of powerlessness. Man uses the excuse that he is merely "stupid" or "soldierly," aspiring to nothing more. In reality, man is not

powerless, but rather he is a victim of his own choices. Perhaps, instead, Theroux is hinting at the conformity that modern society has burdened man in his quest for manhood. Yet, Theroux does not condemn manhood as much as he condemns the man who falls victim to his gender role.

Through his deconstruction of masculinity in modern culture, Theroux argues that there is “nothing more unnatural or prison-like than a boy’s camp” (Theroux). With the direct attachment of “boy’s camp” to the armed forces and, therefore, an arguably Brotherhood-focused camaraderie, Theroux has once again instilled an unnatural view of masculinity. Yet, it is this masculinity that stands at a forefront to the idea of Brotherhood as a whole. Brotherhood is built upon man, brother, and friend engaging in a bond that arguably helps endure war. Yet what is so “unnatural” or “prison-like” about male bonding or serving in the armed forces? While war can arguably be called “unnatural” and the separation of families back home makes soldiers experience a state of perpetual prison, is there something else unnatural about the Brotherhood? Theroux’s views of masculinity as celebrating “the exclusive company of men” in turn “denies men the natural friendship of women” (Theroux). Theroux, an obvious outsider to the Brotherhood (which will be further explored in subsequent chapters), finds it unnatural to assert that men can only have friendship with other men. While ideas of the Brotherhood in war allow American soldiers to easily connect on their quest for manhood, the male resisting his established gender role, like Theroux, finds American masculinity a troubling concept.

### III. Masculinity: Rooted in Tribal and Warrior Culture

Steven Pressfield has investigated a concept known as the “Warrior Ethos,” a code by which warriors and soldiers live in the fight for their country. This ethos has originated because of soldiers’ need to “defend their children, their home soil and the values of their culture” (Pressfield 6). Returning to Dave X and his quest for manhood, his longing for a rite of passage and his desire to grow up is evident in his turn to war. Pressfield explains how “young men have been undergoing that ordeal of initiation for ten thousand years. This passage is into and through what the great psychologist Carl Jung called ‘the Warrior Archetype’” (Pressfield 83). Upon enlisting in the armed forces, “we’re looking for a passage to manhood...we have examined our lives in the civilian world and concluded, perhaps, that something’s missing” (Pressfield 82).

Pressfield’s *The Warrior Ethos* is in many ways mirroring the Brotherhood in war. He describes the ways in which this ethos lays a groundwork for how a soldier should live his life. The ethos:

...is a code of conduct—a conception of right and wrong, of virtues and vices. No one is born with the Warrior Ethos, though many of its tenets appear naturally...The Warrior Ethos is taught. On the football field in Topeka, in the mountains of Hindu Kush, on the lion-infested plains of Kenya and Tanzania. Courage is modeled for the youth by fathers and older brothers, by mentors and elders. It is inculcated, in almost all cultures, by a regimen of training and discipline. This discipline frequently culminates in an ordeal of initiation. The Spartan youth receives his shield [and] the paratrooper is awarded his wings... (Pressfield 15).

Much like the above depiction of this Warrior Ethos, the Brotherhood constructs a model of right and wrong, a culture by which the American warrior lives. Courage and honor are rooted in manhood and, through basic training, are implanted in the armed forces. As a Brotherhood develops between comrades, an initiation into the American archetype of the male role forms. Jung's "Warrior Archetype" establishes the framework for man's journey to find something more in his life. Veteran interviews for the *After Combat* project are saturated with stories of men joining the armed forces to improve themselves and to find that "missing" something (Pressfield 82). When asked why, Dave Y, another participant in the project, joined the Marines, he replied with the following:

I was about seven when I knew I wanted to be a marine. There are two factors to that. Both my grandfather and my great grandfather on my father's side were marines. They both passed away before I was really old enough to know them well. It was really interesting to me. I always watched the History Channel growing up. I was always watching World War Two videos and such. It seemed really honorable and like a cool thing to do. In high school, by the time I went to high school it was pretty much set in stone, so I didn't really apply to any colleges coming out of high school, I talked to a recruiter. I knew I needed the discipline as well because I wasn't a very good student or ... person, I guess. I was 18 when I went to boot camp; I was 17 when I signed the papers and all that. I deployed to Afghanistan in November 2010 to June 2011 (*After Combat*).

Dave Y's idea of masculinity and his imminent initiation into manhood is directly drawn from his father and grandfather's experience. Dave Y's Warrior Ethos was instilled in him from youth, reaffirmed through media and culture, and finally enacted when he decided to join the Marines.

As Pressfield describes, Dave Y is seeking this journey to manhood and because of his lack of discipline and poor student performance, he recognizes this missing component of his life. The American male's journey, like Dave Y's, is rooted in a desire to grow up and improve. Yet, a key component of this growth is rooted in nostalgia as Dave Y looks at courage, an intrinsic trait of masculinity, through the stories of his elders. Through Dave Y's retrospective path of what is right and wrong in American male culture, Connell's depiction of American masculinity is evidenced: we, as Americans, believe "that solutions to the problems of men can be found by looking backwards" (Connell 6). Dave Y looks to his grandfathers to expose evidence of masculinity and even finds his answer in historical documentaries about war.

More than looking backwards, however, it is necessary to understand why the American male is so drawn to the idea of a Warrior Ethos. The American male is violent, aggressive, and full of honor. Pressfield argues that "the American brand of honor is inculcated on the football field, in the locker room and in the street. Back down to no one, avenge every insult, never show fear, never display weakness. Play hurt, never quit" (Pressfield 54). Hence, it is no surprise that the American male is attracted to serving his country. As this Warrior Ethos is instilled in Dave Y and Americans alike through youth, the warrior's archetype of refusing to back down and show weakness can directly be practiced while at war, defending not only man's country, but man's masculinity and pride.

Fittingly, the Warrior Ethos and Archetype have become a key component of masculinity in America. Like Dave X, the American male seeks a rite of passage. The American rite of passage so often is dictated by a desire to belong, a desire to join and be a part of something larger. The American male's desire to be a soldier, part of a unit, part of a Brotherhood, can be closely tied to a tribal sensibility. The passage to manhood within "the warrior archetype clicks

in like a biological clock sometime in the early to mid-teens. We join a gang, we try out for the football team, we hang with our homies, we drive fast, we take crazy chances, we seek adventure and hazard” (Pressfield 85). More so than anything, we seek out a tribe.

Sebastian Junger traces the earliest depictions of tribal life in his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*. America’s first peoples sought a deeper connection than that of their European colonizers. With connection as a force and necessity of manhood in general, “a surprising number of [colonial] Americans—mostly men—wound up joining Indian society rather than staying in their own. They emulated Indians, married them, were adopted by them, and on some occasions even fought alongside them. Emigration always seemed to go from the civilized to the tribal” (Junger 2). Colonial Americans sought a closer bond than their Euro-centric culture could grant them and, therefore, joined Native American society. The rich camaraderie shared within the tribe met their desire for connectedness. This desire of connectedness, evidenced earlier in the definition of manhood at the beginning of this chapter, aligns closely with what Junger calls the “self-determination theory.” The theory “holds that human beings need three basic things in order to be content: they need to feel competent at what they do; they need to feel authentic in their lives; and they need to feel connected to others” (Junger 22). Connectivity is at the center of masculinity. The contemporary American male, like his colonial counterpart, seeks out a tribe in nearly every stage of his life. In youth, he joins sport teams and clubs, hoping to find a place to belong. Growing up, man longs for camaraderie as he explores his tribal heritage. Pressfield recognizes the importance of tribal life and its relation to the armed forces, noting that “a strong case could be made that what the U.S. military attempts to do in training its young men and women is to turn them into a tribe. Certainly it’s not hard to understand why tribes all over the world make such formidable fighting forces” (Pressfield 18).

It is not hard to envision Brotherhood as a tribe. As a locus of connectivity and masculinity, it stands at the forefront of this tribal metaphor. Pressfield calls tribes the “original us-versus-them social entity,” and he could not be more correct, for “tribes exist for themselves alone. Tribes prize loyalty and cohesion. Tribes revere elders and the gods. Tribes resist change. Tribes suppress women” (Pressfield 18). Tribes are the Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood is a tribe wherein American males engage in their quest for manhood. Soldiers are connected and America’s nostalgic view of masculinity affirms that this path is a common rite of passage for the American male. When Dave X looked through other cultures for rites of passage and eventually honed in on joining the armed forces, he was, without explicitly stating, seeking his tribe. Here exists a bridge for the undeniable gap between Brotherhood and masculinity: The American male seeks connectivity through the tribal conceptualization of the Brotherhood. With this masculinist discourse, the military Brotherhood can now be analyzed.

## CHAPTER III.

### A DUAL SOCIETY

Can I truly understand the Brotherhood? While I may argue that I have researched the phenomenon through narrative accounts and interviews, literature, and history books, I cannot truly proclaim that I *really* understand it. I am, and will always be, barring any future decisions to reinstate conscription in the United States, a civilian. More important to note though is the debate between objective and subjective approaches to research. While in most contexts, an objective researcher, an outsider to the direct material, is preferred, the Brotherhood ideal is hermetic. Thus, the outsider is incompetent by definition. The Brotherhood cannot and is not experienced by a civilian and is, purposefully, not aiming to be understood by the outsider. This ambivalence about the experience both for insiders and outsiders is an important component of the very rhetoric of the Brotherhood.

Steven Pressfield notes the American armed forces' distinct cultural identity: "The American military is a warrior culture embedded within a civilian society" (Pressfield 71). Pressfield presents the warrior culture of the American armed forces as a somewhat antithesis to the civilian society that most take as second nature. Ideas of freedom and identity are starkly different within these two worlds. Pressfield argues:

Civilian society prizes individual freedom. Each man and woman is at liberty to choose his or her own path, rise or fall, do whatever he or she wants, so long as it doesn't impinge on the liberty of others. The warrior culture, on the other hand, values cohesion and obedience. The soldier or sailor is not free to do whatever he wants. He serves; he is bound to perform his duty (Pressfield 71).

Sitting outside this “warrior ethos,” the civilian cannot truly speak of the legitimacy of the Brotherhood. To argue that it is indeed truly real or to call it mere propagandist fuel for American armed forces to enact fighting would discredit so many soldiers’ stories, stories about undeniable bonds expressed in literature as well as interviews within *After Combat*. Therefore, the goal is to not prove or disprove the Brotherhood, but rather to attempt to analyze and understand its impactful presence in the armed forces, and, in turn, hope to understand its ability to connect soldiers together in man’s quest to belong.

The troubles of this dual society are evidenced in Theroux’s “Being a Man.” As his civilian society values the individual, his strong resistance to individual masculinity manifests itself through his strong distaste of the modern man. The “soldierly” and “unnatural” relationship between modern men in the likes of combat described by Theroux does just what the Brotherhood’s rhetoric fulfills—seclusion of the outsider. If connectivity is at the center of masculinity, then a civilian culture of individuality is plagued by the loss of connection. Our tribal urges are not and cannot be met with the ease in which a warrior Brotherhood grants connection. Theroux, the modern civilian man, grows to dislike tribal masculinity because he is pitted against it. It is, as Pressfield argues the “original us-versus-them social entity” (Pressfield 18). Theroux struggles in his civilian society because he is so vehemently against the gender roles that American society has placed upon man. Theroux does not seek a tribe like that sought by the warrior culture of America. As an outsider to the Brotherhood’s rhetoric, he may understand its suppression of women, resistance to change, and deep root in nostalgia. Yet, with a civilian’s, and therefore outsider’s, understanding of the Brotherhood and its aid in American masculinity, Theroux falls victim to disconnection.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DEFINING BROTHERHOOD

#### I. Brotherhood by Dogmatism

A civilian gazing upon this “warrior ethos” of unity and camaraderie may find it difficult not to imagine the Brotherhood as an unyielding truth. Is the Brotherhood that so many soldiers have spoken about, and that is so prevalent in war literature<sup>2</sup>, merely dogmatic by nature? Does the Brotherhood exist because it is the law of the land, and therefore, *has* to and is *supposed* to exist? It is greatly believed by some critics that the Brotherhood exists, in one way or another, to keep men fighting. An overarching connectedness between soldiers was drilled into the armed forces to persuade men to fight. McManus notes that “nearly nine out of ten American combat soldiers in World War II found the strength to endure even the worst combat and continue fighting because they could not bear the thought of letting their buddies down.” He continues that “one cannot help but be impressed by the pervasiveness of the Brotherhood in motivating men to fight” (McManus 275). It is therefore tempting to entertain the notion that Brotherhood was drilled into the inner workings of the armed forces as a motivator to get soldiers to fight. Yet, is there not some basis of this phenomenon in practicality?

---

<sup>2</sup> In Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, King Henry gives his famous speech detailing the Brotherhood of soldiers that sets up one of the earliest incarnations of Brotherhood in literature.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother... (Shakespeare).

## II. Brotherhood by Pragmatism

Months of foreign terrain, heavy gear, penetrating sun, sleepless nights, and 24 varieties of pre-packaged, dehydrated Meals-Ready-to-Eat evolve to form an unbreakable bond between soldiers, a devotion to each other that some rival to romantic relationships between partners. “If you fall in love with someone,” Dave Z remembers as he describes his comrades, “that doesn’t even compare with how in love with your friends you are” (*After Combat*). Many soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in the service of the United States’ war on terror speak of an unmistakable, intimate bond that forms between soldiers, an absolute camaraderie known as the Brotherhood. Many veterans discuss enduring relationships, created in the thick of deployment, that have sustained a newly found fragile life in war. While marriages and relationships back home become tested by the entanglements of a long-distance relationship, Brotherhood cannot end; it is an obligation demanded from the very start of training and carries beyond even an untimely death. The close-quarters endured by comrades appears to create a certain intimacy described so often by veterans returning home from war. Veterans can encapsulate this idea of love shared between soldiers with an effortless array of anecdotes and narratives, yet can civilians truly understand this “Brotherhood,” as they look in from the outside of this intense male bond?

In *The Long Road Home*, Journalist Martha Raddatz depicts the true events of the U.S. First Cavalry Division during a tragic battle in Sadr City, resulting in the death of eight Americans and the wounding of nearly 60. Raddatz uses multiple trips to Iraq to piece together an honest view of these soldiers and to illustrate the relationships they shared between each other and their spouses back home. Notably, Raddatz expresses an initial observation about the military: “Everything in the military seemed to be a shared event, even when you ached for

privacy” (Raddatz 7). Raddatz, albeit an outsider to the bonds of this prescribed Brotherhood, does not initially notice a love between these men, but rather an intimacy built upon a lack of privacy. Raddatz’s reporting of April 4, 2004, details an intense bond between comrades that displays a deeper ideology at play during war. Notably, Staff Sergeant Robert Miltenberger transforms from a “cranky, eccentric old uncle,” who was initially reluctant to fight, to a noble rescuer in the mission to help the stranded platoon. While veterans have depicted stories with great fervor about an intimate love with their comrades in battle, Raddatz, with a journalistic precision, only touches on the surface of these men’s emotions, never truly letting us know if she actually buys the idea of this Brotherhood. But once again, she merely accentuates this isolated rhetoric of the Brotherhood. She includes vivid and gritty dialogue from the soldiers, and the true essence of the “fucks” detailing the brutality of war appear to serve the motif that war is a hellish flight from the exclusionary lives of civilians. Though Raddatz’s omission of an explicit rendering of the Brotherhood may merely denote a journalistic detachment from the camaraderie shared between these men, it can, however, aid in a continuation of truly capturing an understanding of the Brotherhood.

The dominant brotherhood trope in war literature—evident in Raddatz’s *The Long Road Home*—emerges repeatedly in interviews: in war, you are fighting for the man next to you. In *After Combat*, Dave A describes this common war trope: “Everybody has their own motives for doing what they do. But in combat, your motives don’t matter really. You don’t fight for what you...As bad as it sounds, you don’t fight for what you believe in. You fight for the person next to you” (*After Combat*). More important than fighting to defend the Constitution<sup>3</sup>, soldiers fight,

---

<sup>3</sup> This idea of fighting to defend the Constitution is from an interview conducted for the *After Combat* project. This Dave’s testimony is as follows:

“I didn’t take the oath to defend this country. I took an oath to fight and defend the constitution of the United States, which is an idea. When you read the oath, we don’t say

and war literature tells them to fight, for the man next to them. From a young age, man is taught to engage in a buddy-system, an arrangement whereby individuals are paired and are held accountable for the safety and well-being of their partners. This pragmatic approach to ensuring the safety of individuals through self-supervision has seemed to directly channel the very core of militaristic ideologies. The very idea of the buddy system has rooted itself in the rhetoric of war training and within the literature to truly entrust the notion that the man next to you would sacrifice his own life to spare your own. Therefore, when viewing Brotherhood through this lens, we can begin to sculpt a better term, Brotherhood by pragmatism. Under this new light, we can assume that soldiers are engulfed in the Brotherhood because it is practical and gives soldiers hope that their fellow comrade has got their back.

Returning to our earlier discussion of a Warrior Ethos that molded the tribal society of the Brotherhood, Pressfield recognizes the warrior society's pragmatic connectivity. He notes how "every warrior virtue proceeds from this—courage, selflessness, love and loyalty to one's comrades, patience, self-command, the will to endure adversity. It all comes from the hunting band's need to survive" (Pressfield 9). Even early warrior societies developed a close camaraderie as a means of survival. The practicality of the tribe is only as important as its means to enact the survival instinct in its members. A Warrior Ethos, and therefore the Brotherhood, does not rise "spontaneously," as Pressfield questions. No, the Brotherhood is "called forth by the necessity and the needs of the human heart" (Pressfield xi). Yet, the practicality of the Brotherhood allows the connectivity yearned for by the modern man. The Brotherhood, as

---

our country; we say the constitution of the United States. Big difference. We don't say we swear to uphold and defend the United States of America or the country, we say the constitution of the United States, because we support the idea of freedom, that's what we support and defend. It's more of an idea that we swear to" (*After Combat*).

aforementioned, does alleviate the connection difficulties that plagues modern masculinity. But, even further than masculinity, the Brotherhood stands to counter an even more intrinsic human instinct—fear of death. Brotherhood by pragmatism recognizes that “self-preservation is the strongest instinct of all, not only in human but in all animal life. Fear of death. The imperative to survive. Nature has implanted this in all living creatures” (Pressfield 12). The Brotherhood exists because of this fear; self-preservation is a motivator of this tribal culture of camaraderie. Consequently, the interviews and war literature do not spend much time focusing on a soldier’s fear of death. No, the Brotherhood has indeed alleviated this fear. Rather, now, we find soldiers afraid to let down their fellow comrade, their brother in arms. As Dave A previously stated, it is about fighting for that man next to you. The fear of death and man’s intrinsic value of self-preservation changes at the hands of the Brotherhood. The practical interworking of the Brotherhood has eradicated man’s own fear of death and connected him to his fellow brother. He now accepts the sacrifice of his own life for his brother as second nature. Now, “the soldier’s prayer today on the eve of battle remain not ‘Lord, spare me’ but ‘Lord, let me not prove unworthy of my brothers’” (Pressfield 40).

### **III. A Faulty Brotherhood**

What happens when the Brotherhood goes wrong? Sara Cole notes that “in the West, the story of war is almost always a story of male bonds” (Cole 138). The tropes of comradeship and a band of brothers is instilled in American imagery about war, idolized in many media. Cole argues that the expectations for wartime intimacy to inject loyalty, love, community, sacrifice, and valor into mass warfare “did not function as the culture demanded” (Cole 139). Cole wishes

to break down these tropes of war literature and expose a certain weakness that the idea of unwavering love and intimacy between comrades brings:

In the official language of the war, comradeship was meant to sustain the soldier, to provide the possibility for heroic action, to redeem the horrific suffering that the war endlessly inflicted. Yet one of the basic facts of the war was that it destroyed friendship (Cole 139).

Cole argues that war does not bring lifelong friends, but rather presents a mechanized quality where friends are lost just as rapidly as they are found. In turn, the sheer fact that new friendships are made after the deaths of prior friends reaffirms Cole's deconstruction of this trope of a camaraderie buddy system.

In line with Cole's adversarial position on camaraderie, Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* breaks convention with the Brotherhood, and rather than depict a close-knit blossoming relationship between all soldiers in a platoon, it crops the focus to three soldiers: Sergeant Sterling (Sarge), Private John Bartle (Bartle), and Private Daniel Murphy (Murph). War creates bonds with these three individuals, but it soon destructs them all at once. Bartle makes a promise to both Sarge and Murph's mother that he will protect the youthful soldier during deployment. The horrors of war tear away at Murph, and the bond these soldiers shared grows more and more distant. As a bond formed between the two soldiers, it is quickly taken away as Murph becomes distant and eventually dies as a result of his disconnect. War created the male bond between Murph and Bartle, but all at once, destroyed the friendship, leaving Bartle to wallow in the misery of his lost friend. "What are you gonna do?" a sad and angry Bartle asks himself midway through Powers' novel, "but really it doesn't matter because by the end you failed at the one good thing you could have done, the one person you promised would live is dead, and you have

seen all things die in more manners than you'd like to recall...cowardice got you into this mess because you wanted to be a man...and that's never gonna happen now..." (Powers 145). Bartle anguishes over war's inability to grant him manhood. The Brotherhood did not accomplish its ability to connect the American male and protect him through camaraderie. The Brotherhood failed Bartle, took his friend, and left him with a loss that the Brotherhood had earlier promised to each soldier. Pressfield notes this component of warrior culture where brothers return home from war "only to fall apart" (Pressfield 69). Brotherhood, now, becomes a fleeting ideology.

## CHAPTER V

### BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD

#### I. A Fleeting Brotherhood

Returning home, soldiers often find the Brotherhood that they so richly encountered while at war is weaker, transformed, and often fleeting. Below Dave B experiences the tumultuous return home:

Dave and I were getting out at the same time. We were going to open up a gym in Austin, Texas. I'd never been to Austin, but I knew it was in Texas, and it was the capitol so everyone was going to have a gun and cowboy hats and everything. His mom ended up dying, so he had to go take care of his mentally challenged sister in Washington. So I was in Austin by myself with no game plan, and I thought about suicide on a regular basis. I thought, I gotta do something, so I went to college. It's been a huge blessing or extremely lucky, whatever you want to call it, but it has definitely helped me. I just went to the third funeral of one of my buddies who had just killed himself. I really think it's just a feeling of loneliness. I think once you experience being that close emotionally with another human being, it's hard... If you fall in love with someone that doesn't even compare with how in love with your friends, you are. And you lose that (*After Combat*).

A closeness and love that eclipses romantic relationships, the unwavering effects of the Brotherhood are showcased here in Dave B's testimony. An unspoken bond is forged between comrades in the armed forces, a bond that unifies like nothing else can. With three funerals, it is undeniable that the pain from each loss has not diminished. Would each of these deaths have been less affecting to Dave B if they had occurred while fighting overseas? The Brotherhood has

linked these two men together with a love greater than that found in a marriage. As spoken by another veteran, “with every loss of a friend, there is a little loss of the person you were with that friend, the person you were before faced so brutally with your own mortality in the form of another’s death.” The death of Dave B’s friend by suicide signals a loss in Dave B himself, a chunk of him never returning. As that piece of Dave B departs, an unimaginable loneliness ensues. Dave B describes this loss with a greater reverence than the loss of a lover. Here, we can imagine this idea of Brotherhood as a fleeting entity. Bonds formed and molded during wartime suddenly disappear upon the return home, the re-entry into the civilian world. Friends who had your back while fighting have now vanished to be with family, *real* family. The Brotherhood appears to relinquish its grasp on relationships, resulting in depression, PTSD, and too many times, suicide.

## **II. A Fixed Brotherhood**

While Dave B’s testimony indicates a certain fragility in postwar brotherhood, for Dave C, a chaplain, the bond survives those challenges:

Last weekend I took my kids and wife and went out of town for my friend’s baby’s baptism. I would do anything for him. We were together there. He’s about the only person from that experience that I can talk to about it, because I have to talk about the failures, those experiences. When I talk to the soldiers they’re always shocked that I had any problems, because I was the care giver. I was always there for them. So I’m ashamed when I talk about my own failures. And he understands that because he felt the same way; he was a signal officer and, you know, just dealt with it over there and is dealing with it still. And to me that’s the

closest relationship I've had in my life and probably ever will. I get emotional when I think about it. I'm married now, and she knows it too. She jokes about it, but she's also serious about it, because that's real. I think that's the thing about war, that there are all these things that happen that I wasn't aware were happening, and one is that the strength of the relationship was forming; I had no idea that would be the case. Being in the military I thought: "I'll see these guys, then I'll go to another unit, make more friends." But that experience is just unalterable and gets stronger. It's the same with the bad stuff. There are low level things that are happening, that I didn't realize would be the things that would stick and become the things that make life troublesome in the present (*After Combat*).

While the signal officer and the chaplain share an immeasurable bond since their first meeting in combat and subsequent arrival home, their relationship cannot be directly compared to that of the other veterans discussed in this paper. In a sense, the chaplain is separated from the infantry of soldiers immersed in the aforementioned Brotherhood. The chaplain, a man of God amidst a hellish landscape, does not "belong" to a certain cavalry or unit. Any connection amidst a quasi-propagandist Brotherhood of shared living quarters and dogmatic nature can be ruled out. No, the chaplain met his dear friend, a signal officer, in what appears to be a relatively natural encounter; well, as natural as an introduction in an invaded country could be. The chaplain introduced this idea of something "stick[ing]." His friendship with the signal officer had stuck, and he notes how the two of them share such a close relationship that he traveled out of town for the officer's baby's baptism. The previous conception that the Brotherhood is fleeting does not seem to hold up here. The chaplain and signal officer still share an intense relationship even after returning home. Here, rather than witnessing a fleeting view of the Brotherhood, there exists a more fixed

alternative. The experience, Dave explains, is “unalterable and [even] gets stronger.” But, can the chaplain, a somewhat outsider to this Brotherhood, similar to the civilian, be identified as a true witness to the Brotherhood? Then again, does this idea of a true witness just encourage the exclusionary rhetoric of the Brotherhood?

## CHAPTER VI

### WAR AS THE PERPETRATOR

The Brotherhood is a complex, living archetype of male necessity for connectivity among brothers. The Brotherhood can adapt to fit the most extreme needs of war, motivating soldiers to keep fighting by constructing a “small, tight-knit ‘family’ in which they could feel secure and needed” while at the same time using this newfound family as a motivator to keep fighting (McManus 273). Though, in other ways, the Brotherhood has the ability to unite soldiers to become as close as brothers, if, at the very least, giving soldiers the necessary hope that their fellow comrade has got their back. Dependent on the need of this ideology, the Brotherhood can be transformed from a dogmatic Brotherhood into a pragmatic one. The Brotherhood is all at once centered on the unity between soldiers while also becoming the locus of connectivity that the modern American man seeks.

It could be argued that Brotherhood could not occur without the perpetrator: war. War appears to cause Brotherhood. With the aforementioned stories and anecdotes, it is apparent that the strong intense bond, formed on a sliding scale of dogmatism or perhaps pragmatism, cannot exist without the perpetration of war. War is a tool of creation amidst constant loss, building a Brotherhood for practicality of the soldier and expansion of American masculinity. The *After Combat* project centers on war, finding stories and experiences through war. As American soldiers return home from serving a warrior culture and reintegrate into our civilian society, unity and friendship play an ever-important role in their converging of worlds. The “true war story” sought from the *After Combat* project is not only the bloody or violent narrative one may expect; more so it is a tale of connection, friendship, and loss greater than can be imagined by the civilians back home. These honest retellings of warrior life help explain man’s connectivity

through a Brotherhood that has become a necessary force in describing modern American masculinity.

## WORKS CITED

- Coker, Christopher. *The Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Cole, Sarah. *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.
- Eide, Marian and Michael Gibler. *After Combat: American Soldiers Return from the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (manuscript, no page numbers).
- Korengal*. Dir. Sebastian Junger. Gold Crest Films, 2014. DVD.
- Junger, Sebastian. *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2016. Print.
- McManus, John C. *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II*. New York: Presidio, 2003. Print.
- Powers, Kevin. *The Yellow Birds: A Novel*. New York: Little, Brown, 2012. Print.
- Pressfield, Steven. *The Warrior Ethos*. New York: Black Irish Entertainment, 2011. Print.
- Raddatz, Martha. *The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2007. Print.
- Shakespeare, William, and John Philip Kemble. "SCENE III. The English Camp." *Henry V*. London: Cornmarket, 1971. Print.
- Theroux, Paul. "GENDER AND HUMAN NATURE: Being A Man." Norton Reader (2015): 166-169. Essay and General Literature Index (H.W. Wilson). Web. 22 Feb. 2017.