In this compelling evaluation of Cold War popular culture, *Pulp Vietnam* explores how men’s adventure magazines helped shape the attitudes of young, working-class Americans, the same men who fought and served in the long and bitter war in Vietnam.

The “macho pulps” – boasting titles like *Man’s Conquest*, *Battle Cry*, and *Adventure Life* – portrayed men courageously defeating their enemies in battle, while women were reduced to sexual objects, either trivialized as erotic trophies or depicted as sexualized villains using their bodies to prey on unsuspecting, innocent men. The result was the crafting and dissemination of a particular version of martial masculinity that helped establish GIs’ expectations and perceptions of war in Vietnam.

By examining the role that popular culture can play in normalizing wartime sexual violence and challenging readers to consider how American society should move beyond pulp conceptions of “normal” male behavior, Daddis convincingly argues that how we construct popular tales of masculinity matters in both peace and war.

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PULP VIETNAM

War and Gender in Cold War Men’s Adventure Magazines

Gregory A. Daddis

San Diego State University, California
For Susan,
who deserves one all her own
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The plate section can be found between pages 180 and 181.
There’s an adage among academics that teaching and scholarship should reinforce one another. This work is proverb in practice, as the central idea for *Pulp Vietnam* first took root in an undergraduate course at West Point. In the spring of 2015, my colleague Jen Kiesling and I co-taught an elective titled “War and Gender in Modern America.” We had discussed the idea for years and after wrangling over course goals, readings, and writing requirements – mostly while swimming laps in Crandall Pool – we started on an intellectual journey that was one of the most satisfying teaching assignments during my entire tenure at the US Military Academy. Jen and I learned as much from our discussions in class with a group of phenomenal cadets as we did from lesson planning with each other.

As we read K. A. Cuordileone’s *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, I started searching for pop culture images of American soldiers in the 1950s and 1960s. It was then that I came across the January 1953 cover of *American Manhood* magazine. A barrel-chested GI, whose bare pectoral muscles rivaled Arnold Schwarzenegger’s in his prime, stands upon a tank while holding a semi-automatic rifle, unsubtly extending forward from his hips. The cover teased some of the exhilarating articles within: “Hell’s Hill in Korea” and “What You Should Know About Sex.” Clearly, this was not the GI Joe I had played with as a child. My interest was piqued.

From West Point, I moved to Chapman University, directing a graduate program in War and Society Studies and eventually procuring funding to purchase a collection of some 250 men’s adventure magazines, now housed in Chapman’s Leatherby Library. I integrated the magazines into our graduate course on war and gender and, once more,
benefited from my students’ insightful reflections on how these postwar “macho pulps” were illustrating a conception of militarized masculinity that suggested something rather profound about the Cold War era.

And, because timing is everything, I had the good fortune to share my ideas on a book project with Beth Bailey, one of my real-life heroes in the historical profession. Along with Andrew Preston, Beth was starting a new series on war and society with Cambridge University Press. Beth invited me to the University of Kansas to hone my ideas with some superb historians and gender scholars before I had the chance to pitch my idea to Cambridge’s Debbie Gershenowitz. Thankfully, all three saw merit in pursuing this project, Debbie more than matching her reputation as one of the finest editors in business. To work with these amazing professionals has been a dream come true. I admire each of them and am so grateful to have had this opportunity to work with the very best of the best.

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himself as “mentor supreme” in the Chapman history department, guiding me through Cold War-era social and cultural history with a scholarly eye and the experience of a true Bronx native. Alex Bay provided wonderful counsel as perceptive historian, talented department chair, Foucault–Danzig lover, and my favorite beer aficionado. Charissa Threat was a phenomenal sounding board from her very first day joining Chapman’s faculty, as were Marilyn Harran, Jeff Koerber, Erin Mosely, Bill Cumiford, and Mateo Jarquin. Shira Klein put together a marvelous reading group in our department, whose members offered sensible and practical feedback in the draft’s final stages. I could not ask for better friends who, luckily, are also my colleagues.

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Finally, this book is dedicated to my best friend. For the last three years, I have been immersed in pulp stories of heroism and courage, of bravery and determination that, to be frank, always seemed just a bit unbelievable to me. No one could be *that* tough, *that* resilient, *that* formidable. As this book was being written, however, I watched my wife battle breast cancer in a way that made the pulp heroes look downright fragile and weak by comparison. Every single day, I was so humbly fortunate to stand next to a companion who showed me the true definition of courage and bravery. I knew long ago I had been lucky in marrying a strong woman. I never fully realized how strong.

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