PERCEPTIONS OF AN AIR CAMPAIGN:
THE 1991 PERSIAN GULF WAR AS PORTRAYED BY MAJOR AMERICAN PRINT
MEDIA SOURCES


by


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**Abstract**

On 16 January 1991, a coalition of nations led by the United States launched a series of air strikes against Iraq to force that country to withdraw from Kuwait. What followed was an intense aerial bombardment of Iraqi military and civilian infrastructure which lasted until 24 February when the coalition began a ground offensive. After four days of ground fighting Iraq withdrew from Kuwait. American pictorial print media created a historical interpretation of the 1991 Persian Gulf War in the sense that selected images were immediately published to a broad audience and these images provided an acceptable story of the war. *Perceptions of an Air Campaign* examines the cultural meanings of the air war and how these meanings took shape in the narrative pictorial print media produced. The narrative is intricately related to the legacy of the Vietnam War. For generations, Americans viewed contemporary war, politics, foreign affairs, and culture through their memories of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. President George H.W. Bush guaranteed the U.S. public that the Gulf War was consciously being constructed to avoid a conflict similar to Vietnam. According to the president, the United States was going to war with enough resources for a swift and decisive victory, thereby avoiding the Vietnam pitfall of an open-ended conflict. Pictorial print media articulated a narrative displaying U.S. military strength and dominance that fulfilled Bush's promise.

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Andrew J. Padavich
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**Introduction**

The 1991 Persian Gulf War may be widely regarded as being an unprecedented television spectacle. Thanks to enormous advances in communication technology American television news networks were able to provide live "real time" reporting, bringing the scenes of war directly to American living rooms. Sometimes live without pictures, sometimes with, television war coverage seemingly gave audiences immediate access to a real event as it unfolded. Perhaps few other events in American television history have so fascinated media and cultural critics. Almost immediately, the televised coverage of this war became a subject of extensive scholarly discussion and controversy. But despite the wealth of insight into various aspects of the war coverage in the writings of John MacArther, Jean Baudrillard, Douglas Kellner, Philip Taylor, and others, the war as it was reported by pictorial print media is often neglected. *Perceptions of an Air Campaign* is my analysis of the forgotten narrative pictorial print media produced. While this study focuses on describing and analyzing the portrayal of the coalition air campaign by pictorial print media, it will not provide a historical explanation of the air war. It neither aims nor claims to reveal the "truth" about what actually happened. Rather than attempting to stabilize some "truth" about the air war, this study investigates the cultural meanings of that war and how these meanings took shape in the narrative pictorial print media produced.

The basic facts established by the pictorial print media narrative of the Gulf War can be summarized. On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded and occupied its southern neighbor Kuwait. The United Nations (UN) Security Council condemned the invasion by a unanimous vote and demanded an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This was the first of twelve UN resolutions concerning the crisis in the Gulf which culminated in the 29

November authorization for member states to use force if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait on or before 15 January 1991. Following Iraq's failure to comply with the UN resolutions, a coalition of 28 nations led by the United States launched an air campaign on 16 January 1991 to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. On 24 February, the coalition began a ground offensive which after four days resulted in a total Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and a temporary ceasefire.

Scholars have developed a variety of interpretations of the war coverage. Some have detected a conspiracy theory, that is, media wittingly worked with the Bush administration to win public support for a war.[1] In this interpretation media firms are shown to be controlled by military contractors. Consequently, when news outlets such as NBC News were boosting military technology and U.S. military intervention as a solution to the crisis, they were acting in the interests of the corporate elite who controlled the news outlets. Others have documented the Pentagon's implementation of war coverage censorship.[2] These studies often chastise the press' failure to respond effectively to the Pentagon's control of reportage and images. Several have analyzed the war coverage by using postmodernist theories. Postmodernist theories often proclaim the end of the real. While this claim may be something of an exaggeration, postmodernist theorists do raise doubts about how "reality" or "actuality" is represented. Claiming the end of the real does not mean that nothing is real. Rather, it signifies no simple, direct relationship between "actuality" and its supposed expression in words and images.[3] In these studies, "actuality" is subservient to representation. Editorial choices, censorship,

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[1] See, for example, J. Timmons Roberts, "The Military-Industrial-Media Complex: Old Biases, New Linkages" in *The Gulf War as Popular Entertainment: An Analysis of the Military-Industrial Media Complex,* ed. Paul Leslie (Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd.); Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

[2] See, for example, John MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the 1991 Gulf War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004 [1992].

[3] See, for example, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: The Guilford Press).

unexamined assumptions, and other influences shaped how the war was presented.  Observers did not simply report the war but actually reproduced it, an unavoidable phenomenon in media. Philip Taylor, for instance, has claimed that the representation of the real war served a variety of political and strategic purposes on all sides.[4]  Theorist Jean Baudrillard took a more extreme position.  He stated that we cannot know what really happened, that is, the real war of the Gulf War was lost to the reportage process and state interference.[5]

My analysis builds on the research and interpretations advanced in prior media studies that used postmodernist theories.  One of the key points of analysis for interpreting the media's role in the formation of the war narrative is visibility.  Here, visibility refers to the literal seeing in terms of images and descriptions, and to the distinctions between what can be seen and not seen.  In *War and the Media*, Philip Tyler notes that the Gulf War was essentially two wars: the war itself and the war as portrayed by the media.  The latter did not necessarily reflect the "actuality" of the former.[6]  In addition to studying the air war narrative pictorial print media produced, I examine the "actuality" of that war.  I contend that the discrepancies between the "actuality" and what is seen in the air war narrative defined how pictorial print media articulated the prevailing social and political perspectives of a culture through a visual narrative.  In order to show how American print media produced a cultural representation of the air war I have chosen five print media sources to create a visual archive.  The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are two of the nation's most prominent daily newspapers.  *Newsweek* and *Time* are two weekly

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[4] Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[5]  Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War did not take place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[6] Taylor, 8.

news magazines that capture America's mood swings. Gulf War pictorial books published immediately after the war by national print news organizations expand the visual archive.

What I found has led me to develop an examination of the cultural representation of the air war that places it firmly in the context of its very specific time: the United States engaged in its first major post-Vietnam conflict. The mere fact that the United States had been unable to defeat the small Third World communist nation made America's experience in Vietnam important in the Gulf War. Vietnam had entered popular perception as the first time the United States had lost a war. When the Gulf War began most Americans were still coming to terms with their nation's failures in Vietnam. The military defeat eroded public confidence and some Americans wondered if the United States might be a superpower in decline. *Perceptions of an Air Campaign* contends that the pictorial air war narrative can be fully understood only by viewing it as intricately related to the legacy of the Vietnam War.

I have learned from John MacArthur's *Second Front* that many public officials, military strategists, and ordinary Americans remained convinced that media (primarily in the form of television news) alienated American public support for the war in Vietnam. It was not the U.S. military that lost the war, but journalists. Regardless of the validity of this claim, it dominated the Pentagon's public relation planning for the Gulf War and contributed to a level of wartime censorship never before seen in the United States. According to MacArthur, the George H.W. Bush administration never intended to allow the press to cover the Gulf War in any real sense. The administration tightly managed what coverage it would permit for the purpose of controlling the information flow in a way that supported political goals. The Gulf War was the first major U.S. conflict where the policy was to confine correspondents to military escorted pools that

sharply curtailed what and when they could report.  In the words of *Time* magazine Washington

bureau chief Stanley Cloud,

> They [the Pentagon] figured out a way to control every facet of our coverage.  They
> restricted our access to a point where we couldn't do any of our own reporting.  They fed
> us a steady diet of press conferences in which they decided what the news would be.  And
> if somehow, after all that, we managed to report on something they didn't like, they could
> censor it out….It amounted to recruiting the press into the military.[7]

The pool system gave the Pentagon the opportunity to control everything reporters did in the

Gulf War and caused the America public to be treated to antiseptic warfare minus scenes of

graphic destruction or incompetence.

When I started my research, I expected that MacArthur's research would prove to be

important for my analysis, but I did not expect that this study would become what it has: an

analysis of post-Vietnam American cultural.  The more I examined the documents, the more I

realized the extent that America's experience in Vietnam played in the construction of the air

war narrative.  Scholars have touched on connections between the Vietnam War and the Gulf

War.  Robert Schulzinger and Trevor McCrisken have concluded that some generations of

Americans have viewed contemporary war, politics, foreign affairs, and culture through the

prism of their memories of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam.  The American experience in Vietnam

haunted contemporary America with its open and unresolved features.  To gain public approval

for the application of military force, each post-Vietnam administration had to justify military

intention in terms consistent with the apparent lessons learned in Vietnam.  The Gulf War was

one such event.  President George H.W. Bush stressed that the Gulf War was consciously being

constructed to avoid a conflict similar to Vietnam.  For President Bush, the lesson of Vietnam

was to send enough force to definitively win a military engagement.  He regularly assured the

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[7] Quoted from MacArthur, 155.

public that the United States was going to war with enough resources for a swift and decisive victory, thereby avoiding the Vietnam pitfall of an open-ended conflict.

Other scholars have observed that the military operations undertaken by the Coalition did not constitute a war in the traditional sense. Jean Baudrillard defined war as a destructive confrontation between adversaries. War, then, is a dueling relationship between opposing parties. The Gulf conflict did not fit Baudrillard's definition of war in several respects. In regard to method and military technology the disparity between Coalition and Iraqi forces was so great that the outcome was entirely predictable. Iraq was prepared to tolerate the massive casualties which would result from a ground war of attrition as it had done during its previous war with Iran. The United States and its allies sought a rapid conflict that relied upon air power and advanced technology. The dismal performance of Iraqi planes, the fate of inferior Iraqi tanks, and 8,000 to 27,000 Iraqi deaths compared to the Coalition deaths of 240 (35 of which were from friendly fire and eleven from unexploded allied munitions) testify to the one-sided nature of the conflict. To quote Baudrillard, "It is as though the Iraqis were electrocuted, lobotomized, running towards the television journalists in order to surrender or immobilized beside their tanks, not even demoralized: de-cerebralised, stupefied rather than defeated—can this be called a war?"[8] An imbalance of military means meant that this was not a conflict in which the survival of both sides was at stake, but an exercise in domination rather than an act of war. Richard Keeble expressed it more bluntly in *Secret State, Silent Press: New Miltarism, the Gulf and the Modern Image of Warfare*, "There was no Gulf war of 1991. In the way in which

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[8] Baudrillard, 67-68.

the term is generally used and understood, what took place in the Persian Gulf in January-February 1991 was not a war at all. It was nothing less than a series of massacres."[9]

I have found that explaining the Gulf War as a lopsided operation is crucial to understanding the cultural meaning pictorial media gave to the air war. It was the lopsided nature of the air campaign that pictorial print media not only described but celebrated. Prior to the launching of the Gulf War, President Bush insisted that sufficient force was being deployed to guarantee a swift and decisive victory that had been denied during the Vietnam War. I contend that print media produced a visual narrative of the war that confirmed the political discourse. It was a narrative that portrayed the air war as self-aggrandizing posturing of American strength and dominance. This narrative stated that the Gulf War avoided the status of becoming an open-ended conflict because America was using advance technology and deploying large quantities of military resources. The themes of U.S. military prowess and dominance persist in the narrative construction of how American pilots fought the air war. Print media depicted the Gulf War as an individualistic endeavor. Photographs of combat pilots neglected the imagery of unit cohesiveness and instead promoted the imagery of a lone warrior. The result was that the combat pilot was depicted as a unique individual who was capable of defeating forces that outnumbered him. Although the combat pilot was a violent individual, he fought according to his own special laws. In essence, the combat pilot was a white knight or a cowboy saving a community from a wrongdoer. He was a defender of the weak against a heinous intruder whose assault was unprovoked, and he used advanced technology to destroy military targets with pinpoint accuracy and to avoid collateral damage. The U.S. military was powerful

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[9] Richard Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press: New Miltarism, the Gulf and the Modern Image of Warfare* (Luton: University of Luton, 1997), 5.

because it possessed an independent and morally righteous class of warriors.  The Iraqi military,

on the other hand, was weak because it lacked individual discretion and sadistically attacked

civilians for a purpose.

# CHAPTER 1

## "By God, We've Kicked the Vietnam Syndrome": The Air War as a Renewal of American Confidence

On 30 April 1975, Saigon fell to the Vietnamese Communists. Americans witnessed televised pictures from Saigon showing chaotic scenes of loyal South Vietnamese and the last Americans evacuating by helicopter from the roof of the U.S. Embassy. Thousands of people were seen clamoring at the Embassy gates, begging to be taken away as the sound of gunfire approached. Televised images also showed South Vietnamese Air Force helicopters being dumped off the deck of an U.S. aircraft carrier. These scenes signified the end of U.S. involvement and the defeat of U.S. objectives in the region. President Gerald Ford recalled that 30 April 1975 was "one of the saddest days in my life" and journalist Evan Thomas labeled the day a "low moment in the American century."[1]

The Vietnam War claimed over 58,000 American lives, left some 300,000 Americans wounded, and cost the American government $155 billion. The lives lost and the dollars spent did not spare the United States from being defeated totally for the first time in its history. The Vietnam War represented a national trauma for the United States, a psychological shock that seemingly affected all facets of American culture for decades. From the 1970s to the early years of the twenty-first century, American leaders conducted their foreign and military policy within the framework of their own unhappy memories of the Vietnam War, and ordinary Americans often perceived those policies through their own memories of Vietnam. Memories of America's

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[1] Quoted from George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002 [1979]), 337.

experience in Vietnam provided the basis for much of the discourse of America's involvement in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. President George H.W. Bush stressed that the Gulf War was consciously being constructed to avoid a conflict similar to Vietnam. The main focus here is on how pictorial print media produced a visual narrative that validated Bush's promise that the war in the Gulf would not mirror America's Vietnam experience and how the visual narrative temporarily restored public confidence in post-Vietnam governmental institutions.

America's experience in Vietnam had profound effects on American public confidence. Opinion polls taken in 1974 showed that Americans believed they were facing problems worse than they could remember at any other time in their lives. A *Time* magazine poll showed that 71 percent of Americans believed that "things are going badly in the country." Another 68 percent thought that "the country is in deep and serious trouble today." Faith in governmental institutions had significantly declined between 1968 and 1973. In 1974, 88 percent of Americans mistrusted "the people in power in the country." A majority felt "that the great national institutions command an excess of power, which they abuse for selfish ends." Vietnam, combined with the resignation and pardon of Richard Nixon that followed the Watergate revelations, had, as many commentators, public officials, and ordinary Americans declared, inflicted deep wounds in the American psyche. As one commentator observed, "These psychological wounds may have been vague and largely intangible but they did manifest themselves in nagging doubts about the meaning and future direction of America."[2]

Memories of anger and bitterness regarding America's Vietnam experience reverberated for decades. In *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of Vietnam War,* Robert Schulzinger examines

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[2] Trevor B. McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: US Policy since 1974* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 37.

how the American Vietnam experience was remembered and the effects those memories had on current events. Schulzinger found that "Nearly everyone agreed on the obvious point that the war in Vietnam had gone badly for the United States, but beyond that, however, differences of opinion proliferated. Americans divided over the proper lessons of the Vietnam War in disagreements that roughly followed the contours of the debate that had raged during the war."[3] Some advocates of American participation in the war came to believe that the United States needed to pursue an active, assertive international policy to erase the sense of failure in Vietnam. For them, postwar U.S. foreign policy needed the threat or use of force. Opponents of the war in Vietnam learned precisely the opposite lesson from Vietnam. These advocates sought to limit the use of American military power. For them, the Communist victory revealed an arrogant overextension of American military force.

After 1975, the public changed their opinions on the Vietnam War through a combination of learning more about the war and reflection on current events. Some, for example, became more supportive of U.S. military action than they had been during the Vietnam War. Others who had supported America's role in Vietnam became highly skeptical of the use of American military force after 1975. "Whatever their views had been during the Vietnam era," concluded Schulzinger, "many Americans expressed their concerns about contemporary foreign policies through language, images and memories of the mistakes and disappointments of Vietnam." When postwar foreign policy seemed to go wrong, a common reaction was for Americans to encourage their leaders to change course based upon what they believed to be the lessons obtained from the Vietnam experience. When postwar foreign policies seemed to go

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[3] Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 183.

successfully, Americans commonly explained how current accomplishments contrasted with the mistakes of Vietnam.[4]

Schulzinger's research indicates that Americans came to believe that there were limits to American power. While the nature and extent of these limits became a major source of debate and dominated discussions over foreign policy in each post-Vietnam administration, public officials, military strategists, journalists, scholars, and ordinary Americans had no definitive answer to the question of what the lessons of the Vietnam War were for American society. The Vietnam syndrome became a widely used term to describe the collective lessons and legacies of the war. In its political-military sense, the Vietnam syndrome amounted to a set of criteria that should be met before the United States commits troops to combat. The criteria associated with the Vietnam syndrome, explained scholar Trevor McCrisken, stated that "the U.S. should not employ force in an international conflict unless: just cause can be demonstrated, the objectives are compelling and attainable, and sufficient force is employed to assure a swift victory with a minimum of casualties."[5] While there has been continuous debate over how these conditions should be applied, they have played a central role in U.S. foreign policy in the post-Vietnam era.

Prior to the outbreak of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush stressed a particular theme: the comparison of the Gulf crisis to the Vietnam War. The comparison was generally reassuring. At a late November 1990 news conference, President Bush assured the country, "If there must be war, I promise there will not be any murky endings."[6] The president restated his promise during his 16 January 1991 televised speech announcing the launching of

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[4] Ibid., xix.

[5] McCrisken, 38.

[6] "Excerpts from President's News Conference on Crisis in the Gulf," *New York Times* (1 December 1990), A6.

Desert Storm: "I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight.  Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back."[7]  According to journalist Bob Woodward, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney "had come to realize what an impact the Vietnam War had had on Bush.  The president had internalized the lessons—send enough force to do the job and don't tie the hands of the commanders."[8]

Bush's prewar statements essentially guaranteed the U.S. public that the Gulf War would not be another Vietnam.  There would be material and ideological differences between the wars.  Bush assured the public that the Gulf War would conform to a narrative already written against the legacy of the Vietnam War.  The Vietnam syndrome, haunting the present with its open and unresolved features, functioned as a force in the creation of the Gulf War narrative in such a way that the new narrative restored order or a renewal of U.S. power, control, and identity.  As one commentator noted,

> Before the outbreak of hostilities, media commentaries theorized that war in the Persian Gulf might become a "prolonged war of attrition, similar to Vietnam" and might mean "blood, gore, pain, retribution and hate for years to come."  In order to resist the rhetoric, the political promises and the subsequent narrative of the Persian Gulf War, therefore, had to emphasize containment and closure.[9]

In short, the implicit message was that the Vietnam War had resisted closure and that the Gulf War was consciously being constructed to avoid that pitfall.

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[7] George H.W. Bush, "Operation Desert Storm Launched," *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A14.

[8] Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 306-307.

[9] Michelle Kendrick, "Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome: CNN's and CBS's Video Narrative of the Persian Gulf War" in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War,* ed. Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 66.

Television coverage of the Gulf War provided an abundance of imagery that fulfilled Bush's promise that the war would not mirror America's Vietnam experience. Strongly established with news bureaus and broadcast outlets located in the Middle East and connected to the United States via satellite feed, the news network CNN was well prepared to provide twenty-four hour coverage of the war. For the first forty-two hours of the war, ABC, CBC, and NBC replaced their regular programming with continuous live coverage of the war, mostly without commercial breaks. One of the most discussed aspects of the war was the use of precision-guided munitions or smart weapons, and the televised footage of those munitions hitting targets with surgical accuracy. The *Washington Post* referred to the footage as "the Nintendo effect: those tapes of exploding buildings that made bombing seem like a video game."[10] According to *Post* editors, "the Nintendo effect…create[d] a kind of illusion of perfection and ease and safety in the conduct of combat."[11] The bombing footage communicated a positive image of war. The U.S. military was using advanced technology to destroy its targets with pinpoint accuracy, avoiding collateral damage and only taking out nasty military targets. "The Nintendo effect" produced a sense of power and an aura of magic for the U.S. military that restored the public's faith in its armed forces. To quote *Life* magazine,

> All at once the military seemed to look as if it knew what it was doing all along….Not only did the gizmos work [smart weapons] they were also revolutionizing warfare. In past wars an overwhelming percentage of everything fired missed its targets. Now that same amount would strike its target. Would this turn out to be the neatest little war ever?[12]

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[10] Michael Kinsley, "No Mathew Brady for Iraq," *Washington Post* (28 February 1991).

[11] "The Nintendo Issue," *Washington Post* (23 January 1991), A16.

[12] Roger Rosenblatt, "Gone to Soldiers Everyone," *Life* (14 February 1991), 32.

Televised war was becoming a source of entertainment. Anna Quindlen of the *New York Times* described the television coverage as "America's back fence," a modern meeting place "where [Americans] were all connected, all having the same sensation at the same time."[13] Caryl Rivers expressed it more bluntly in a *New York Times* op-ed piece: "[T]oday, the production values of television—the great graphics, the instant videotape, the ability to let the viewer practically sit on the nose of a jet fighter as it destroys it target—have given us Instant War as Instant Amusement."[14] Interwoven with the images of munitions slamming into buildings there were images of adrenaline-pumped pilots who took off in glamorous warplanes into either the setting or rising sun. In essence, the coverage was a cross between Nintendo and *Top Gun*, the 1986 blockbuster hit celebrating the air-to-air training of fighter pilots at the Navy Fighter Weapons School. Rivers admitted that while her family flipped between *Top Gun* and the war coverage, she could not tell which was which: "They both had martial music, splendid graphics, and high-tech shots of planes soaring into the sky. It was only when Tom Cruise came on the screen that I knew which was the movie. Even then, he didn't look much different from the pilots whose faces I saw on CNN."[15]

The techniques of entertainment television and news coverage had converged to a point where they were undistinguishable. As described by Rivers, the television coverage produced an upbeat side of war, a splendid show that fetishized technology and the Tom Cruise look-alike who commanded the technology. Editors of the *New York Times* referred to the coverage as "Iraq, the movie," non-stop action that viewers could cheer at while eating popcorn in their

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[13] Anna Quindlen, "The Back Fence," *New York Times* (20 January 1991), E19.

[14] Carly Rivers, "It's Tough to Tell a Hawk from 'Lonesome Dove,'" *New York Times* (10 February 1991), H29.

[15] Ibid.

living rooms.[16]  In fact, a University of Oklahoma student commented that he was "gonna pop

some popcorn and watch the war" as the first bombs struck Baghdad and Rivers claimed that she

cheered and snacked on Doritos while watching the war unfold from her couch.[17]

Computer graphics contributed to the movie-like appearance of the war.  John

MacArthur, publisher of *Harper's Magazine*, has suggested that Pentagon censorship forced TV

news graphic departments to tell most of the story.  Philip Megg, a professor of graphic design at

Virginia Commonwealth University, explained to MacArthur that

> [Censorship] put tremendous pressure on graphics to convey information and support
> news reports….Maps, battlefield models, and informational graphics on weapons systems
> helped anchors and experts explain the war.  Technical terms and weapons systems
> mentions in the constant briefings had to be explained to viewers with graphics.

Television audiences had come to expect graphics as a means to reporting the news, and in

response, continued Meggs, "[s]ome editorial writers asked if dazzling graphics and upbeat

soundtracks had given war the ambiance of football playoffs and African adventure movies."[18]

The Gulf War was the first full-fledged war told through computer-created imagery.  Indeed,

Vietnam film of actual fighting would look crude alongside Desert Storm graphics that showed

warplanes and soldiers moving across the TV screen, presumably targeting enemy forces.  To

quote Ralph Famiglietta, director of news graphics for NBC Network News and a Vietnam

veteran, "[I]t was a little too *Top Gun*-y….I was concerned about my children and the way it

made war look fun."[19]

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[16] "Iraq, the Movie," *New York Times* (20 January 1991), E19.

[17] Quoted from "Overheard," *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), 11; Carly Rivers, "It's Tough to Tell a Hawk from 'Lonesome Dove,'" *New York Times* (10 February 1991), H29.

[18] Quoted from MacArthur, 80.

[19] Ibid., 81.

In theory, newspapers and magazines faced a tremendous technical disadvantage in their war coverage competition with televised news. With the advent of instant satellite coverage and CNN's round-the-clock news reporting, print journalists found it difficult to show what television had not already covered. Moreover, as John MacArthur has suggested, in a censored war there was a shortage of video footage. Newspaper and magazine photo editors were similarly constrained by the shortage of photographs. Faced with a visual gap, print media photo editors relied on graphic design to convey the war. In this respect graphics in print were more advanced than their computer counterpart simply because print graphics had been around longer. "The result," suggested MacArthur, "was that while television had an inherent advantage in images, the press was not very far behind TV in using graphics."[20]

Across the country, newspaper and magazine readers were confronted with a daily supply of illustrated displays of Coalition military power. Some of the largest illustrations were battlefield diagrams. Here, the term battlefield diagram refers to the illustrated interpretations, from the crude, abstract sketches to the highly stylized artistic renditions, of air-to-ground tactics. Diagrams featured drawn U.S. bombers approaching a target and releasing precision-guided bombs.[21] Arrows that designated motion traced the would-be path of the bomb directly to the target, implying that the bomb strikes with pinpoint accuracy. These battlefield diagrams gave the appearance of being Nintendo-like video game stills—a print media version of the warplane cockpit videotape of precision-guided munitions hitting their targets. Similar to the cockpit video footage, these illustrations produced the image of precise bombing and coded the destruction as positive. The illustrations demonstrated that U.S. bombs always destroyed their

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[20] MacArthur, 87.

[21] See, for example, *New York Times* (19 January 1991), A9; *New York Times* (26 February 1991), C8; *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A22; *Washington Post* (22 February 1991), A31; *Time* (4 February 1991), 23.

targets with pinpoint accuracy, avoiding collateral damage and only taking out military targets. Other battlefield diagrams displayed A-10 Thunderbolt IIs, AV-8 Harriers, and B-52 Stratofortresses releasing conventional or free-fall, non-guided ordnance.[22]  Although less sophisticated and therefore less accurate than precision-guided munitions, diagrams portrayed the use of conventional ordnance as positive.  The diagrams illustrated that the unguided ordnance was only used against dug-in Iraqi Republican Guard positions that were far from population centers.  War was something that one could admire and cheer about.

Most of the illustrations were aircraft identification drawings, line drawings, or silhouette drawings that commonly appeared in military aircraft recognition guides.[23]  Whether a line or silhouette drawing, these graphics identified the type of aircraft that the outline depicted and usually featured short technical information summaries that provided dimensions, armament, and performance characteristics for each aircraft.  Editors commonly grouped the graphics together to form aircraft recognition layouts.  With such titles as "Waging the Air War," "Key Weapons in the U.S. Arsenal," "Key Weapons in the First Wave," "Striking Behind Iraqi Fortifications," and "Leading the Attack," the graphic layouts contained little information about the progress of the war.  Rather, the graphics amount to nothing more than visual confirmations of the superior Coalition forces.  The same can be said about the aircraft cutaway diagrams.  Like line drawings, aircraft cutaway diagrams usually featured technical information summaries but included

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[22] See, for example, *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), 29; *Newsweek* (4 February 1991), 42; *Newsweek* (11 February 1991), 22, 26, and 28; *Newsweek* (18 February 1991), 30 and 47; *Newsweek* (25 February 1991), 27 and 28; *New York Times* (26 February 1991), A15; *Time* (25 February 1991), 34; *Washington Post* (16 February 1991), A13; *Washington Post* (23 February 1991), A15.

[23] See, for example, *Newsweek* (11 February 1991), 32; *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A15 and A17; *New York Times* (18 January 1991), A27; *New York Times* (22 January 1991), A9; *New York Times* (11 February 1991), A17; *New York Times* (10 February 1991), A16; *New York Times* (15 February 1991), A12; *Washington Post* (17 January 1991), A26; *Washington Post* (18 January 1991), A26; *Washington Post* (25 January 1991), A28; *Washington Post* (28 January 1991), A14.

identifications and descriptions of a dense array of key technical aspects, specifically weapons systems, to a particular aircraft.[24] The diagrams generally conveyed a message of confidence in the ability of U.S. military technology to confront and defeat the Iraqi army.

The most spectacular of the aircraft identification illustrations appeared in *Time* magazine. In the 25 February 1991 edition of *Time*, editors included a pullout weapons poster. Printed on glossy, heavy stock paper, the colored poster depicted Coalition and Iraqi military weapons (aircraft, armor and artillery, and air and ground ordnance) facing off against one another with their names and country of origin identified. Based on the overwhelming number of light blue Coalition images, Desert Storm definitively ended with a defeated Iraqi military. Appearing in the 17 January 1991 edition of the *New York Times* a chart titled "The Balance of Power in the Air: Who Has What" listed the number of aircraft by name and origin of country that the Coalition and Iraq possessed in the Gulf region. Based on the quantity of aircraft on both sides, "the balance of power" definitively favored the Coalition.[25] The message is self-evident. The United States had gone to war with enough resources to complete its military objectives, thereby avoiding the Vietnam pitfall of an open-ended conflict.

There seemed to be something childlike in the abstract graphic displays of military power. War was reduced to egotistic and self-aggrandizing posturing of strength and dominance. The preponderance and superiority of U.S. weaponry combined with the near nonappearance of the Iraqis resulted in a Coalition victory, if not slaughter, but the spectacle, observed Janet Maslin of the *New York Times*, had created a belief "in the ability of sheer vanity and arrogance

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[24] See, for example, *New York Times* (22 January 1991), A9; *New York Times* (1 February 1991), A8; *Washington Post* (23 January 1991), A26; *Washington Post* (20 February 1991), A8; *Newsweek* (18 February 1991), 47.

[25] "The Balance of Power in the Air: Who has What," *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A15.

to conquer all."[26]  Before the ground war had been launched, *New Republic* editor Charles

Krauthammer prophesied what victory over Iraq would mean in his essay "How the War Can

Change America," which appeared in *Time* magazine.  "If the war in the gulf ends the way it

began—with a dazzling display of American technological superiority, individual grit and, most

unexpectedly for Saddam, national resolve—we will no longer speak of post-Vietnam America.

A new, post-gulf America will emerge, its self-image, sense of history, even its political

discourse transformed."  For Krauthammer, a defeated Iraq would mean a return to America's

golden age, a resurrection of "the legacy of the last good war, World War II, a legacy lost in the

jungles of Vietnam."[27]

After the ground war ended quickly and decisively, the celebratory rhetoric that

permeated the political world spoke of exorcising Vietnam from the American consciousness.

"It's almost like the whole burden of Vietnam has been lifted off everyone's shoulders,"

remarked Clayton Yeuter, chairman of the Republican National Committee.  "Americans have

pride again."[28]  Or as President Bush declared, "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome

once and for all."[29]  Leslie Gelb of the *New York Times* stated the mythical logic between the

wars in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf more directly.  A new blood sacrifice had seemingly

redeemed another: "U.S. servicemen and women who fought and died in the Persian Gulf earned

back honor for those who served and fell in Vietnam.  Don't ask me exactly how.  There is no

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[26] Janet Maslin, "Why Movies are only Movies and a Real War is War," *New York Times* (23 January 1991), C11.

[27] Charles Krauthammer, "How the War Can Change America," *Time* (28 January 1991), 100.

[28] Quoted from, James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 294.

[29] Quoted from EJ Dionne, Jr., "Kicking the 'Vietnam Syndrome,'" *Washington Post* (4 March 1991), A1.

real link of honor between the two wars.  Nor should there be.  Yet there is."[30]  While some Americans favored the resurgence of national pride, others such as George J. Church of *Time* magazine found it troublesome.  Too much pride, contended Church, could lead to a national tragedy:  "Among Americans, the war has finally laid to rest all the ghost of Vietnam.  Self-doubt, deep divisions, suspicions of national decline—the very words suddenly seem quaint.  The problem now may be to contain the surge of pride and unity before it bursts the bounds of reason and passes into jingoism, even hubris."[31]

Statistical research conducted by John Mueller suggests that commentators like *Time* magazine's George Church overestimated the degree and the resiliency of national pride that swept through the country after the Gulf War.  Mueller's research found that the Coalition victory made Americans proud about themselves.  Opinion polls taken between spring 1990 and spring 1991 displayed significant increases in the public's confidence in the military and in the executive branch.  Opinion polls taken after the Gulf War showed a jump of some 30 percentage points in the degree in which Americans registered satisfaction with the way things were going in the country or felt the country was now generally going in the right direction.  While American confidence grew substantially after the war, it is interesting to note that Americans were less confident than they had been during the 1980 Iran hostage crisis, an event which they said had significantly lowered their confidence.  The post-Gulf War jump in public satisfaction with the way things were going in the country dropped quickly, and by the fall of 1991 it had dropped to the same level as in July 1990, before the crisis in the Gulf had begun.  Mueller attributed the decline to the state of the economy.  After the war, the public seemed to turn their

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[30] Leslie H. Gelb, "Best and Brightest," *New York Times* (26 May 1991), E11.

[31] George J. Church, "The 100 Hours," *Time* (11 March 1991), 24.

attention to the economy, and they did not like what they saw.  Initially people believed that the war had made them better off financially than they had been a year earlier.  Within six weeks of the end of the war, confidence in the economy declined until it was at or near the low levels that had been registered in October 1990.[32]

Public opinion seems to further suggest that the American experience in the Gulf failed to kick the Vietnam syndrome.  A CBS News-*New York Times* poll conducted in March 1991 found that 60 percent of the American public believed it should "stay out of other countries' affairs." In a *Time*-CNN survey, more than 3 to 1 of Americans polled responded that the U.S. should not "fight violations of international law and aggression wherever they occur."  Most telling was a *Newsweek* survey conducted two days after the Coalition victory that asked, "Does success in the Persian Gulf War make you feel the U.S. should be more willing to use military force in the future to help solve international problems?"  Only 32 percent said yes, while 60 percent answered no.[33]  The Vietnam syndrome placed limits on the strength, resolve, and capabilities on American action in world affairs so that the nation does not commit itself to another Vietnam. The purpose of the syndrome was to avoid situations in which the United States could suffer another military defeat.  The results from the post-Gulf War polls suggest that Americans still believed the central tenets of the Vietnam syndrome.  Confronted with a foreign policy crisis, Americans would only authorize the use of force if just cause would be demonstrated, the objectives were clear and compelling and victory could be achieved swiftly and with minimal casualties.

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[32] John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 93-95.

[33] McCrisken, 152.

The defeat of U.S. objectives in Vietnam indicated that there were limits to American power. While the extent of these limits became a major source of debate, each post-Vietnam administration justified the application of military force in terms consistent with the apparent lessons learned in Vietnam. The application of force in accordance with the apparent lessons learned in Vietnam, stated public officials, would enable the U.S. to avoid another military defeat. According to President George H. W. Bush, the legacy of the war in Vietnam taught that the United States needed to send enough military force to avoid the Vietnam pitfall of an open-ended conflict. For the first major post-Vietnam war, the president insisted that sufficient force was being deployed to guarantee a swift and decisive victory. Print media, like television news, produced a narrative of the war in the Gulf that translated the political discourse into imagery. The narrative displayed an upbeat side of war. It was an entertaining and enthusiastic showing of the preponderance and superiority of U.S. weaponry. War was reduced to self-aggrandizing posturing of strength and dominance. It was a narrative that confirmed President Bush's message that America had gone to war with enough resources to secure a swift and decisive U.S. victory. Simply by having advanced technology and deploying large quantities of military resources to the battlefield, the Gulf War avoided the status of becoming the kind of open-ended conflict that had haunted contemporary America since the American defeat in Vietnam.

The narrative also led some political pundits to believe that America's experience in the Gulf would exorcise Vietnam from the American consciousness. The Vietnam War shattered some of the basic assumptions Americans held about the honesty and competence of their leaders, especially the wisdom of their leader's actions in foreign policy. The positive display of U.S. military prowess and dominance in the Gulf War helped to resurrect public confidence in governmental institutions that had declined during the post-Vietnam era. While the quick and

decisive victory dissolved some of the public's doubts about the leadership qualities of their political and military leaders, the war's long-term impact on public perceptions and attitudes was quite limited. That is, ordinary Americans continued to perceive U.S. foreign policy through the prism of their unhappy memories of Vietnam.

The display of U.S. military prowess and dominance was not restricted to the imagery of advanced technology and superior numbers of American forces on the battlefield. The remaining chapters show how the visual narrative articulated an American class of warriors that was unique and therefore superior to their Iraqi adversary.

# CHAPTER 2

## "Pure Pilot Initiative": The Combat Pilot as a Lone Warrior

War is a collective enterprise. Early warriors learned to fight shoulder-to-shoulder with their shields overlapping the other and spears projecting from the shield wall. Practice and discipline enabled members of a phalanx with six or more rows of men standing behind the other to move quickly forward while maintaining unity. The momentum gained deflected a charge of mounted warriors and frightened off attackers. To achieve this advantage required members of the phalanx to transform from individual warriors to a well-drilled unit. No matter how heroic or skilled, the individual warrior lost to a well-ordered military organization. While warfare has changed since the days of the phalanx, the fact that war is a collective enterprise has not. With the advent of twentieth century mechanized warfare, commanders have utilized tactics to successfully deploy and maneuver an array of specialized combat arms (i.e., infantry, tanks, ground attack aircraft) on the battlefield. Not only victory but also survival depended on combat arms cooperation.[1]

This chapter will demonstrate that air warfare conducted by American air forces during the Gulf War was a collective enterprise. Despite imagery that is consistent with warriors participating in communal warfare, the narrative produced by print media more frequently expressed the air war as an individualistic endeavor. The result is that print media portrayed the American combat pilot as lone warrior, and because American pilots were lone warriors the United States was able to defeat Iraq.

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[1] See, for example, Jonathan M. House, *Combined Arms: Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

A collective body of military professionals assisted American aviators in planning a Gulf War air strike. These professionals provided information that determined the type of tactics aviators utilized during a particular combat sortie. Weather was one factor that aviators considered in planning an air strike. Poor weather adversely affected target acquisition and navigation. On the other hand, some weather conditions did not hinder bombing but enhanced enemy defenses. Overcast skies, for instance, established a known maximum altitude and made visual acquisition easier for enemy forces. Meteorologists continually updated weather conditions, and aviators planned sorties according to the forecasted weather but developed alternative flight plans if actual weather differed from anticipated weather conditions.[2]

Intelligence analysts also determined the types of tactics an aviator used during an air strike. The Iraqis deployed three basic types of air defense weaponry: antiaircraft artillery (AAA), surface-to-air missiles (SAM), and aircraft. Each system used a variety of tracking methods: radar, infrared optics, or a combination of the two. Intelligence analysts identified the type and location of the Iraqi air defenses. In the flight plans, aviators made sure to fly around, over, or under the known threat envelopes. To limit Iraqi forces from anticipating tactics, aviators tried to confuse the enemy by constantly flying different penetration formations, navigational routes, attack axes, delivery parameters, and multi-ship tactics. Moreover, intelligence analysts provided aviators with pre- and post-attack bomb damage assessments. The bomb damage assessments determined the number of sorties required to inflict the desired level of destruction and the target's vulnerability to certain tactics and ordnance.[3]

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[2] *Gulf War Air Power Survey,* vol. 4, *Weapons, Tactics, and Training* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993), 153-156.

[3] Ibid., 154-155 and 158-159.

Some 23,500 Air Force munitions personnel ultimately supported the Gulf War activity. Munitions is a collective term that includes precision-guided and unguided bombs, air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles, and special operations munitions. Munitions personnel were responsible for identifying, procuring, storing, and fitting aircraft with over thirty kinds of munitions used by the Air Force in Operation Desert Storm. A total of 17,000 maintenance personnel accounted for approximately thirty-eight percent of the Air Force population deployed to the Gulf. These personnel were responsible for keeping aircraft airworthy. Extensive air and sea lines of communications provided vital support. The strategic airlift alone moved more than 500,000 people and 540,000 tons of cargo by the time hostilities ended.[4]

During the Gulf War, American airmen used massive air attacks involving more than one type of aircraft and lasting a short period. This action, which overwhelmed enemy defenses and reduced aircrew exposure to those defenses, provided the safest way to hit a large target. A mission scheduled on 17 January 1991, for instance, consisted of four F-4G Wild Weasels, two EF-111 Ravens, eight F-111F Aardvarks, four GR-1 Tornados, and four F-15C Eagles. This kind of strike package with its twenty-two aircraft required forty aircrew members. EF-111s jammed enemy radars while F-4Gs launched HARM missiles to destroy dangerous surface-to-air missile sites. The four GR-1s attacked Al Jarrah airfield runways while four F-111Fs attacked the airfield's facilities. The other F-111Fs attacked a radio relay station. F-15Cs flew as escorts, protecting the attackers from enemy fighters. If Iraqi aircraft rose, an E-3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) monitoring the battle zone vectored the F-15Cs to the threat. Moreover, E-3 controllers helped coordinate the two air refueling operations needed by

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[4] *Gulf War Air Power Survey,* vol. 3, *Logistics and Support* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993), 221-222, 309, and 357-358.

the aircraft of the strike package.  The sheer number of aircraft involved in air refueling operations from other strike packages created the danger of mid-air collisions in a very congested airspace.  With the authority to move tankers and direct aircraft refueling operations, E-3 controllers made air fueling safer and more efficient.[5]

The success of the 17 January air strike depended upon aviators fighting as a cohesive unit.  A designated mission commander became responsible for developing and holding the attack plan together.  The mission commander often delegated planning tasks to subordinate leaders who developed their own routing and target attacks.  Since the aircraft of the strike package took off from different bases, used different tanker tracks for mid-air refueling, and flew separate routes to the same target, coordinating with other package members became crucial.  The mission commander reviewed his subordinates' plans to ensure that aircraft of the strike package did not cause conflicts in space, time, or altitude.  F-15C pilots needed precise coordinates with specific times to defend the strike package from possible hostile aircraft.  A delay in F-4G attacks and EF-111 jamming increased the risk of dangerous hostile fire directed towards F-111Fs and GR-1s making low-level attacks.  The massive and concentrated bombing runs required aircrews of F-111s and GR-1s to adhere to strict bombing intervals to avoid mid-air collisions and bombing fragmentation.  Fuel was a basic mission necessity, and the mission commander needed to ensure that air-fueling rendezvous points delivered the required fuel to the aircraft.  If the mission commander incorrectly scheduled a refueling or if flight plans caused delays in delivering fuel, key factors to the mission's success such as aircraft range, loiter time over the target, and recovery contingencies became negatively affected.[6]

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[5] *Gulf War Air Power Survey,* vol. 4, 97, 163, and 167-169.

[6] Ibid., 163-164.

A simple visual of a group of soldiers wearing the same clothing and marching in step create an image of unit cohesiveness.  Some 6,000 years ago on a cave wall in Spain, an artist painted a procession of warriors similarly dressed, marching equally spaced, and holding similar weaponry.  The procession of five follows a figure wearing a larger headdress that likely signified leadership.  The early cave wall painting transcends the cultural differences that emerged in more fully developed civilizations.  A mural in ancient Largash shows marching infantrymen with identical apparel, facial expressions, and shaven heads and holding spears perfectly in line with one another.  In Assyrian reliefs, images depict identically attired bearded soldiers with the same facial expressions marching and fighting.  Around 1,400 B.C.E artisans in the Hittite capital of Begazcoy carved a similar procession of warriors on a stone wall. The warriors are identically dressed and march together in lockstep, almost arm-in-arm.  The visual unity is self-evident.  The individual dissolves into a fighting unit of one.[7]

Imagery of cohesion among 1991 Persian Gulf War pilots does appear.  A Gulf War photograph titled "Home Safe," for instance, depicts a modern interpretation of the visual of unit cohesiveness found in the 6,000-year-old Spanish cave painting.[8]  "Home Safe" shows A-6 Intruder crews returning to their home base in the United States.  Ghost gray A-6s with open canopies sitting diagonally wingtip-to-wingtip serve as the background to some twenty-eight airmen casually walking in close proximity to one another.  All the airmen wear black shoes and olive green fight suits with identical squadron patches displayed on the right side of their chests. The men wear bright yellow turtlenecks under their flight suits and navy blue baseball caps with VA-75 written in yellow stitching cover all the airmen's heads.  The men even carry similar

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[7] David D. Perlmutter, *Visions of War: Picturing Warfare from the Stone Age to the Cyber Age* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin), 96.

[8] C.D.B. Byan, ed., *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1991), 63.

family reunion gifts: a heart shaped balloon attached to a plastic dowel and a red rose. Most of the men are shaven of all facial hair; the rest fashion identically trimmed and shaped moustaches. Some wear identical sunglasses: a pair of heavily tinted flatten eye drop shaped lenses held in gold frames. Unlike the Spanish cave painting and the ancient Lagash mural, the airmen do not exhibit the same racial characteristics. The majority of the men are Caucasian but one African-American walks with the group. His race is the only visual cue separating him from the rest of the airmen. The African-American wears the same olive flight suit, the same bright yellow turtleneck, the same navy blue squadron baseball cap, the same type of sunglasses, the same black shoes, and carries the same type of gifts. He is not positioned differently from the rest. He walks side by side with his fellow airmen.

The inclusion of an African-American in a group consisting mostly of Caucasians makes the A-6 squadron a multi-cultural unit. Since World War II, multicultural units have been a common American image construction of combat. Political leaders during World War II stated that fascism posed a risk to American identity, and that democratic virtues, specifically equality, would win the war. American combat films of the era, for instance, celebrated teamwork within fighting units consisting of a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds. The units imitated what film historian John Belton called "the melting-pot ideal of American culture." Films like *Air Force* (1943), *Bataan* (1943) and *A Walk in the Sun* (1945) followed a simple formula. A tough career sergeant took charge of a suburban rich kid, an inner-city poor kid, a lower-middle class Midwesterner, a Jew, a Hispanic, an Italian-American, and a Texan to transform into a precision fighting force. Often, the individuals in the unit had to overcome racial divisions and the desire for personal autonomy in order to achieve the collective goals of the group. Essentially, the unit achieved cross-ethnic unity, the dissolving of racial divisions that exist among peoples to fulfill a

great cause, to prevail over the forces of evil. The formula continued well after the end of the 1940s.[9]

Unit cohesiveness again appears in a portrait of electronic countermeasure aircraft employed in the Gulf War. In this image, four different electronic countermeasure aircraft form a diamond on the flight line.[10] The large size of the aircraft formation required the photographer to take the photo from a great height. Facing forward, an EC-130 Hercules sits in the middle, upper portion of the image. An F-16C Fighting Falcon, also facing forward, sits several feet in front of the EC-130. From left to right an F-4G Wild Weasel and an EF-111 Raven diagonally sit with their noses pointed between the EC-130 and F-16C. The wide-angle lens of the camera cast the airmen in the image in the same focus. All the airmen wear identical flight suits. All the airmen pose in a similar stance: legs slightly parted, head forward and angled slightly upward, and arms crossed in front of the chest. The airmen stand next to their respective aircraft. The visual is self-evident. These separate but conjoined units work together to jam enemy radar and fire HARM missiles for the collective goal of destroying radar transmitters.

Unit cohesiveness was not a universal representation of the air war. On 20 February 1991, for instance, a photograph of AH-64 Apache crewmember Captain Michael Thome of the 101st Airborne Division appeared in the *Washington Post*.[11] Thome stands in front of his two-seat attack helicopter while securing his survival vest to his body. Behind Thome a man leans into the rear cockpit of the helicopter. It is unclear if the man is the second AH-64 airmen. The *Post* failed to identify the man in the photo caption that mentions Thome's name. *Newsweek*

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[9] John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 166 and 178. See also Perlmutter, 110-113.

[10] *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War*, 63.

[11] *Washington Post* (20 February 1991), A7.

photo editors decapitated the unidentified man by centering the image across two opposite pages.[12] Thome, then, is the focus of the image. The low angle of the camera lens heightens Thome's authority and prowess. The photographic close-up exposes all Thome's individual features with clarity and depth. The photograph depicts Thome as a lone warrior.

The lone warrior is prevalent in images depicting air crew members of two-seat jet aircraft. For example, the *Washington Post's* 17 January 1991 front-page image is of an F-4G Wild Weasel crew. The photo caption reads, "The pilot of an F-4 fighter-bomber is welcomed back to base by a ground crewman following US air strikes against Iraq."[13] The pilot sits in the cockpit and shakes hands with a ground crewmember. From the photographer's shallow upward angle the metal frame of the pilot's opened canopy conceals the Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO) standing in the rear cockpit of the F-4G. The EWO's head is barely visible. During the coalition air raids against Iraq, the F-4G was ideally suited for the suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) or the detection and firing on enemy surface-to-air missile sites. The pilot flew the F-4G while the EWO monitored threats. Survival of the crew depended on how well the pilot and EWO worked as a team. However, the *Post's* image does not convey pilot and EWO teamwork. As with Thome's portrait, the imagery draws the viewer's eye to an individualized warrior. The EWO is obscured. The pilot is clearly visible and the subordinate's greeting recognizes the pilot's authority.

Other aircrew images completely dismiss second airmen to two-seat jet aircraft. The Navy's F-14 Tomcat carried a crew of two. The pilot sat in the front cockpit and the Radar Intercept Officer (RIO) who controlled the radar and weapons systems sat behind the pilot.

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[12] *Newsweek* (Spring/Summer 1991), 50-51.

[13] *Washington Post* (17 January 1991), A1. See also *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), 13.

Immediately after the Gulf War, photographers employed by Knight-Ridder newspapers published a collection of their photographs taken during the war. The collection includes an image depicting the side view of four F-14s sitting closing together on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Kennedy*.[14] Two airmen board two different F-14s. The men are likely RIOs because they proceed to climb into rear F-14 cockpits. The pilots of the F-14s are absent from the image. In a *Washington Post* photo, as well, single air crewmembers board two-seat aircraft. Published on 18 January 1991, photo editors published an image of a Marine bombardier/ navigator boarding his A-6 Intruder, a two-seat attack bomber.[15] The left side of the attack bomber is cropped from the photo, completely removing the pilot's portion of the cockpit. Several weeks later, the *Post* published another image of an airman boarding an A-6.[16] In this A-6 crew image, the bombardier/navigator is absent. Although editors of a postwar commemorative *Victory in the Gulf* photo journal remind readers that an F-15E Strike Eagle "pilot and weapons operator must coordinate their actions for a successful mission," the caption refers to an image showing a single Strike Eagle crew member sitting in the cockpit.[17] Similarly, a two-seat F-15 with only the pilot occupying the cockpit returns to base in an image from a postwar pictorial book.[18] Although the aircraft is absent, a *New York Times* photo caption identified the man in a photo as a crew member from an F-111 Aardvark, a two-seat attack

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[14] Randy Miller, ed., *Eye of the Storm: Images of the Persian Gulf War by Knight-Ridder Photographers* (Miami: Knight-Ridder, Inc., 1991), 29. See also *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A19.

[15] *Washington Post* (18 January 1991), F1.

[16] *Washington Post* (7 February 1991), A22.

[17] *Victory in the Gulf* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, LTD., 1991), 64.

[18] *Desert Storm: Weapons of War*, 24.

bomber.[19]  The crew member kneels on a linoleum floor and checks the gear in his flight bag.

The photographer stands above the airman, keeping his camera level.  The photographer's

position exposes a long, narrow locker room.  On either side of the F-111 crew member, shelves

overflowing with flight gear line the walls.  Although the airman is surrounded by the gear of

other F-111 crew members, he is alone in the locker room.  The visual suggests that the airman

prepares for a solo journey.

The image of a warrior embarking on a solo journey appears in photographs highlighting

combat aircraft.  For example, an F-14 Tomcat catapults off a carrier deck at dusk.[20]

Photographer Todd Buchanan's wide-angle lens leaves the Tomcat overwhelmed by a limitless

ocean horizon.  The Tomcat flies alone into a harsh environment becoming more dangerous as

daylight fades.  Although seven A-7 Corsair IIs line the flight deck, the aircraft with wings

folded remain static.  Flight deckhands who provided reliable service on the carrier are left

behind.  They can only gather on the flight deck to watch the F-14 disappear beyond the horizon.

In another image of the Tomcat, the naval aircraft streaks over the desert with wings sweptback

for maximum speeds.[21]  Taken from above the aircraft, the photograph shows a vast and barren

environment below the single F-14.  From the *New York Times*, an F-16 Fighting Falcon takes

off from an air base in Qatar that is surrounded by a desert landscape.[22]  Similarly, a desert

horizon serves as the background in an image of a Kuwaiti A-4 Skyhawk taking off from an

airfield in Saudi Arabia.[23]  In the 21 January 1991 edition of the *Washington Post*, an F-117

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[19] *New York Times* (23 January 1991), A10.

[20] *Eye of the Storm: Images of the Persian Gulf War by Knight-Ridder Photographers*, 82-83.

[21] *Desert Storm: The Weapons of War*, 48.

[22] *New York Times* (19 January 1991), L37.

Night Hawk, commonly referred to as the stealth fighter, rolls down a runway.[24] The angular aircraft is silhouetted against the openness of the Middle Eastern desert. In another image of the stealth aircraft, the F-117 sits on a runway.[25] The F-117 is overwhelmed by the setting of desert mountains. The visual is self-evident. The aviator flies into combat alone.

The background in which photographers place the single aircraft is related to the imagery of the lone warrior. Ocean and desert horizons appear as open or limitless landscapes. The limitlessness expresses complete freedom of movement. The appearance of complete freedom of movement consummates the fantasy of the individual warrior. Without freedom to move about as he pleases, the warrior lacks complete individualism. At the same time, ocean and desert landscapes are harsh, unmapped territories. Since the warrior is alone, he must trust his instincts, reflexes, and luck to triumph in a hostile world. To survive in an inhospitable environment requires the skills of a rare individual. In the article "The Flight Stuff: What Makes a Pilot," Martha Sherrill of the *Washington Post* asked, "Have you wondered why some people can pack themselves into a cockpit the size of a piano crate, cruise above Baghdad at night, drop bombs and dodge flak, while others can't take the shuttle to La Guardia without experiencing paralyzing anxiety?" The answer was simple: strong egos translated into low anxiety. Moreover, combat pilots exhibited what psychologist Samuel Karson called "The Errol Flynn Factor," the relishing of challenges, risks, and danger. Pilots talked about the fear of combat flying but they could not wait until the next mission. All humans are "a little neurotic," concluded Karson who

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[23] *Victory in the Gulf*, 65.

[24] *Washington Post* (21 January 1991), A28.

[25] *Desert Storm: Weapons of War*, 14.

specialized in personality assessments and stress, but the strong ego coupled with "The Errol Flynn Factor" remained a natural human trait that most people did not exhibit.[26]

Unsurprisingly, images show the pre-eminence of the individual combat pilot. Imagery that reveres an individual commonly places the subject within a formless mass giving gestures and glances of subordination. An image on a wall from the palace of Nineveh, for example, shows the king of Elam arriving home to greeting soldiers. The king stands above the soldiers who wear identical clothing and stand in lines giving a salute of servitude.[27] Several millennia later, the *New York Times* published a photograph of an F-16 Fighting Falcon confronted with a group of cheering ground crewmembers.[28] The pilot in his single-seat aircraft sits above a group of men identically dressed and cheering the pilot as he leaves the Saudi Arabian base on a bombing mission. Another *New York Times* image depicts an AV-8 Harrier pilot giving a thumbs-up signal to deck crews on the flight deck of an amphibious assault ship.[29] Editors titled the photograph "A Thumbs Up Before Taking Off." Again, the pilot sits above a group of identically dressed men. The men huddle around the U.S. Marine aircraft with their heads angled upward toward the pilot who gives a thumbs-up signal to signify that he no longer needs their services. Finally, a pilot and two ground crew members examine a map under the nose of an AV-8.[30] In the image, the pilot is undistinguishable from the two ground crew members. All three men kneel over the map. Thus, the pilot is not in a position of reverence. However, the *New York Times'* caption reads, "A Marine pilot and *his* ground crew looking at a map near a

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[26] Martha Sherrill, "The Flight Stuff: What Makes a Pilot," *Washington Post* (31 January 1991), C1.

[27] Perlmutter, 73.

[28] *New York Times* (19 February 1991), A5. See also *New York Times* (18 January 1991), A9 for a similar image.

[29] *New York Times* (24 February 1991), A17.

[30] *New York Times* (20 January 1991), A1. See also *Washington Post* (20 January 1991), A28.

Harrier jet yesterday in Saudi Arabia" (emphasis added). The inclusion of the possessive pronoun "his" in the caption indicates pilot ownership over the ground crew members. The text interprets the Marine AV-8 pilot image as subordinates working for a superior individual.

Nowhere in aerial warfare is the pre-eminence of the individual combat pilot more manifest than in the image of the fighter pilot. Fighter pilots flew aircraft designed to seek and destroy enemy aircraft in the air. Looking again at the photographs of aircrews from two-seat aircraft, another shared visual beyond the absence of a second air crewmember emerges. Most of the two-seat aircraft in the aircrew photographs performed a ground attack role but all gave the impression of being fighter aircraft. The F-4G Wild Weasel was a converted F-4E Phantom II, the famous Vietnam era fighter. The Wild Weasel maintained the performance characteristics of the Vietnam fighter, but armed with radar-hunting missiles. Although used as a tactical strike aircraft, the F-111 Aardvark's slender fuselage and variable-geometry wings looked characteristically like the F-14 Tomcat, the Navy's multi-role fighter. Five years before the Gulf War, the movie *Top Gun* made the F-14 famous. As an advanced tactical bomber, the two-seat F-15E Strike Eagle developed from the single-seat F-15 Eagle air superiority fighter. The Strike Eagle still resembled the Eagle, especially the cockpit topped with a large bubble canopy that provided exceptional panoramic visibility, which is critical to survival in air-to-air combat. The A-6 Intruder's raised canopy, sweptback wing design, pair of half-moon shaped engine intakes located at the wing roots, and tadpole shaped fuselage are the features that gave the low-level, attack bomber the retro look of a 1950s naval fighter. A photo caption in a post-Gulf War pictorial book, for instance, mistakenly labeled the A-6 as a "fighter plane."[31] Even Captain Thome's AH-64 Apache attack helicopter could pose as a fighter. The AH-64's slender and

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[31] *Desert Storm: The Weapons of War,* 33.

tapered fuselage, the menacing angled cockpit windshield, the stub wings, the visible chin gun, and the two square engine cowlings behind the pilot fit the description of a futuristic fighter aircraft possibly found in a science fiction novel. Actually, the manufacturer of the Apache, McDonnell Douglas Helicopter Company, integrated General Dynamics Stinger air-to-air missiles with the helicopter in 1987. Mounted in pairs on the tips of each stub wing, the AH-64 could carry up to four Stingers.[32]

In fact, aircrews flying aircraft that did not look like fighters did not appear with their aircraft. For instance, a popular aircraft in print media was the C-5 Galaxy, an extremely large fixed-wing transporter. Eighty-five C-5s carried forty-two percent of the cargo used in Desert Shield/Desert Storm. In one of the images, troops of the 82nd Airborne Division emerge from the C-5's cavernous interior capable of holding almost any item in the United States military inventory from M-1A1 Abrams main battle tanks to AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, plus seventy-three passengers.[33] From the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, U.S. troops unload Patriot missile batteries sent to defend Saudi Arabia from Iraqi Scud attacks from the dark cavern of the transporter.[34] Other images show the offloading of supplies carried in large cargo ship containers.[35] A Knight-Ridder photograph shows a ground crew member walking the length of the main freight compartment of the C-5.[36] The C-5's freight compartment dwarfs the man. Simply sitting, the C-5 silhouetted against a desert sunset spoke of America's aerospace triumph

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[32] Mark Lambert, ed., *Jane's all the World's Aircraft, 1990-91* (Surrey, UK: Jane's Information Group Limited, Sentinel House, 1990), 463.

[33] *Victory in the Gulf* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, LTD., 1991), 24-25.

[34] *New York Times* (20 January 1991), A16; *Washington Post* (20 January 1991), A30.

[35] *Newsweek* (Spring/Summer 1991), 90; *Desert Storm: The Weapons of War*, 85.

[36] *Eye of the Storm: Images of the Persian Gulf War by Knight-Ridder Photographers*, 46.

of using physics to lift over 300 tons and successfully flying that weight across an ocean.[37]  But where were the air crews?  A pilot and copilot with a flight engineer and navigator flew the monstrous transporter.  The C-5 photographs emphasize the carrying capacity of the cargo plane, not the men who flew it.  Similarly, there are no images of aircrews boarding a C-130 Hercules, a four-engine transport.  There are no images of a pilot giving a thumbs-up signal out of a cockpit window of an E-3 Sentry AWACS, a converted airliner flying as a radar station that commanded and controlled the air battle.  There are no images of crews posing in front of their B-52 Stratofortress, a Cold War-era strategic bomber.

There is a photograph of an airman from a KC-135 Stratotanker, an aerial tanker.  The *Gulf War Air Power Survey* considered air refueling critical to the success of Desert Storm. Without air refueling systems, the Coalition could not support complex tactical operations. During the opening hours of Desert Storm, for instance, seven B-52s launched from Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana.  Lasting over thirty-five hours, the B-52 mission culminated in the launching of thirty-five air-launched cruise missiles.  The mission required the B-52s to be air refueled five times, and a mix of thirty-eight KC-135 Stratotanker and nineteen KC-10 Extender tanker sorties provided the needed fuel to the Cold War-era bombers.  In all, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Saudi Arabia flew twelve different varieties of tanker aircraft to support the Coalition air effort.  United States Air Force tankers alone flew over 34,000 sorties, performed over 85,000 refuelings, and offloaded over 1.2 billion pounds of fuel.[38]

In light of the critical role aerial tankers played in providing the necessary fuel for pilots to accomplish their missions during the Gulf War, it is unsurprising that Edward Cody of the

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[37] *Newsweek* (Spring/Summer 1991), 25-26.

[38] *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 4, 311-312 and 318.

*Washington Post* praised tanker air crews for their efforts in a 5 February 1991 article. Cody remarked, "Routine aerial refueling on an unprecedented scale has helped U.S. and allied air forces mount more than 44,000 sorties in the 19 days since their massive bombing campaign began against targets in Iraq and occupied Kuwait." Aerial tanker crews provided the fuel to the aircraft conducting a "relentless bombing campaign" that held the potential of "dislocating and demoralizing" Iraqi forces to the point of surrender. At best, aerial tanker crews ensured that Coalition aircraft received support to weaken Iraqi forces "enough to hold down U.S. and allied casualties in any ground assault on Kuwait." Calling it more than vital to the air war, Cody viewed aerial refueling as a demonstration of pilot skill. The reporter referred to tanker operations as an "endless series of aerial refueling ballets that have made the Persian Gulf conflict a war like no other wars." Tanker air crews continually locked the fuel-deliver boom dangling from the tanker tail assembly into a refueling probe or hole in order to pump gallons of jet fuel into an aircraft. Offloading fuel required the tanker pilot to maintain speed and altitude to avert a midair collision and to ease the refueling process. A pilot needing an aerial "pit stop" carefully trimmed speed and altitude to remain steady for the boom operator to maneuver the boom nozzle into the aircraft's refueling apparatus. Aerial refueling operations displayed the human skills of coordination, precision, and discipline.[39]

A photograph of a KC-135 tanker airman that the caption identifies as pilot Captain David Meinhart accompanied Cody's article. However, the image does not reflect the admiration for the tanker airman that Cody expresses in his article. First, the clarity of the image of Meinhart is too poor to show esteem for a tanker pilot. Poor clarity refers to the obstruction of Meinhart's features and his status as a pilot. The photographer's angle captures a side view of

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[39] Edward Cody, "Full-Service Fill-Ups at Gas Tank in the Sky," *Washington Post* (5 February 1991), A10.

Meinhart that almost becomes the pilot's backside.  Standing to inspect an engine on the KC-135

he flies, it is easy to confuse Meinhart for a ground crewmember.  Second, the position and

sizing of the photograph suggest little regard for the tanker pilot.  *Post* editors vertically cropped

the photograph of Meinhart and placed the small, slender image at the bottom left corner of an

article that extends the entire length of the newspaper.  Editors placed a larger image, a

photographic close-up of the cockpit of a refueling F-16 Fighting Falcon, above the article's title

that draws the attention of the viewer.  Taken from inside a KC-135 from the boom operator's

window, the downward angle captures the entire length of an F-16's bubble canopy occupied by

a pilot giving a salute.  The imagery in the photograph fits the fighter pilot image: a single pilot

enclosed in a bubble canopy.  Cody furthered the imagery of a fighter pilot by emphasizing in the

article that although the refueling F-16 carried cluster bombs to use against Iraqi ground forces,

AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles "tipped the ends of both wings."[40]  The photographic

layout to an article praising the accomplishments of tanker aircrews places more emphasis on the

airman who fits the appearance of a fighter pilot.

During the Gulf War, Coalition fighter pilots flew combat air patrols (CAP) to deny

enemy access to friendly airspace, or to patrol the airspace over a target to allow an attacking

force to strike without fear of enemy fighters.  The Coalition employed various types of CAPs

during the Gulf War.  One type of CAP established multiple defensive patrol stations along the

northern border of Saudi Arabia to protect the kingdom and Coalition forces.  These patrol

stations extended over the northern Persian Gulf to protect Coalition ships and the Arab Gulf

states.  F-15C pilot Captain Ayedh al Shamrani of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) was flying

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[40] Ibid.

such a patrol on 24 January 1991 when he engaged and destroyed two Iraqi Air Force (IrAF) Mirage F-1s attempting to fire Exocet anti-ship missiles at Coalition naval vessels.[41]

Shamrani's air-to-air engagements received great attention in the United States. A photo of Shamrani surrounded by military officials and talking to reporters circulated on the front page of the 25 January 1991 edition of the *New York Times*. Behind Shamrani, an F-15 sat in a hangar, legitimizing the claim that Shamrani was a fighter pilot. In the article accompanying the photograph, *Times'* reporter R.W. Apple, Jr. celebrated Shamrani's personal accomplishment. Apple referred to Shamrani as the pilot who flew against "some of the best planes in the Iraqi Air Force" and destroyed not one but two of those planes. The reporter quoted Shamrani who said, "I just rolled in behind them and shot them down. It was easy." The Saudi's demeanor, described Apple, was like that of the Red Baron, the famous German World War I fighter pilot and ace. The Red Baron demeanor alluded to a romanticized notion of a man in complete control of a dangerous situation and relishing the risks.[42] Essentially, the Red Barron demeanor was synonymous with Samuel Karson's psychological term "The Errol Flynn Factor" that the *Washington Post* referred to several days after Apple's article appeared in the *Times*. The persona of the fighter pilot was that of an individual dependent on personal prowess and courage to defend himself against another man in a modern day hand-to-hand battle occurring thousands of feet in the air. The strongest and the most skillful combatant survived.

The *Washington Post* circulated a photographic close-up of the Shamrani holding two fingers up. Throughout the history of aerial warfare, pilots commonly held up fingers to communicate the number of enemy aircraft they downed during a sortie. In Shamrani's case,

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[41] *Gulf Air War Survey*, vol. 4, 201.

[42] R.W. Apple, Jr., "Allies, Aided by Weather, Intensify Bombing of Iraq; Hussein Restates Defiance," *New York Times* (25 January 1991), A1.

two fingers represented the two Iraqi F-1s he shot down, but the photograph represented more than victory over two airborne foes. The two fingers symbolized the saving of lives of Coalition sailors. Molly Moore of the *Washington Post* wrote that the destructive capability of the Exocet missile ranged from "seriously damaging large ships" to "devastating smaller ones." Moore then recounted the May 1987 incident involving an Iraqi Mirage firing an Exocet at a U.S. guided missile frigate that killed thirty-seven sailors. Below Moore's article, the *Post* circulated a schematic drawing of the Exocet that included a historical account of the devastating usage of the missile in past conflicts. Adding to the May 1987 incident, there was the Iran-Iraq war when forty ships were struck with Exocets and the Argentina air force and navy used the missile to sink two British ships during the Falklands War.[43] The *Washington Post's* coverage of Shamrani's aerial engagements implied that the Saudi's individual achievement averted another military disaster caused by Exocet missiles. At a minimum, Shamrani's double kill was, as *Time* magazine stated, "a symbolic success for the Saudi Arabia's military image" and keeping a coalition of diverse nations together.[44]

While reports published during the war commended Sharmrani's skills as a fighter pilot, postwar reports presented an unflattering image of the Saudi pilot and the RSAF in general. Reports alleged that although a United States Air Force AWACS provided the Saudi pilot with good vectors, Shamrani struggled to complete the intercept. Running short of time before the Iraqi F-1s came within minutes of striking distance of the Coalition naval vessels, an AWACS controller needed to talk Shamrani into position behind the Iraqi fighters. The Saudi pilot eventually fired two AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, both of which struck their intended

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[43] Molly Moore, "War Waged at Closer Quarters," *Washington Post* (25 January 1991), A1.

[44] James Walsh, "A War Machine that Works—So Far," *Time* (4 February 1991), 36.

targets. Purportedly, the overall level of professionalism amongst RSAF F-15C pilots was mediocre. Throughout the war, the Coalition restricted RSAF F-15C pilots to flying what were termed Goalie CAPs that placed Saudi Eagle pilots some distance behind the Iraq/Saudi border. The Goalie CAP effectively put Saudi F-15 pilots in a position where they could not interfere with the efforts of the rest of the Coalition. Circumstantial evidence such as the close proximity of U.S. Navy F-14 Tomcats that reportedly were in an equally good position and more capable to engage the Mirages supported the theory that the Saudi's kills were politically directed to provide positive press coverage for the Arab nation and Coalition.[45]

For American F-15C pilots the unknown whereabouts of Shamrani's wingman during the air-to-air engagements validated reports alleging RSAF mediocrity. Generally, U.S. F-15Cs operated in flights of four aircraft during a CAP. The group of four Eagles usually broke into two pairs over the airspace they were sent to protect. Each pair took a position on the opposite side of an elliptical flight pattern ranging from ten to fifteen miles long. Sometimes Eagle pilots flew a figure eight pattern. The splitting into pairs ensured that some of the F-15Cs headed towards a possible enemy airborne threat at all times, and the tactic allowed for continuous radar coverage of the airspace, since the F-15C's radar worked in a forward arc. Moreover, the basic combat unit employed a pair of tactical fighters to maintain personal security against enemy defenses and provide the best offensive capability. The wingman's main duty was to provide support for the leader. Thus, teamwork between at least two aviators was required to achieve a successful CAP.[46]

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[45] Steve Davies, *F-15C Eagle Units in Combat* (Oxford, Osprey Publishing Limited, 2005), 17-18.

[46] *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, vol. 4, 106-107 and 148; Jim Winchester, ed., *American Military Aircraft: A Century of Innovation* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 2005), 315.

U.S. F-15C pilots downed thirty-one Iraqi aircraft without losing a single Eagle.  Steve

Davis, an aviation journalist with strong ties to the F-15 community, commented that the success

rate of Eagle pilots was because a wingman "support[ed] the shooter with such

competence…that [the shooter] could concentrate on his own shot."[47]  Yet images commonly

depict U.S. F-15C pilots as lone warriors.  Editors of *Victory in the Gulf*, a pictorial paperback

book using print media photos to commemorate the end of the Gulf War, published a series of

photos of F-15C pilots.[48]  The first image of the series shows an Eagle pilot suiting up for a

mission in a locker room.  He is alone in a room where helmets, oxygen masks, and other flight

gear dangle from a wall rack so densely packed that the wall is concealed.  The next image

shows an Eagle pilot climbing into his fighter.  A cockpit photo of an Eagle pilot flying is the

third image in the series.  Although the pilot receives fuel from an aerial tanker, the clear blue

sky is devoid of other Eagles.  The last image shows a solo Eagle dropping a load of bombs.

From preparing for a mission to flying the mission, the series of photos suggest that the F-15C

pilot performs his duty in solitude.  Similarly, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* depict

F-15C pilots performing solo missions.  Both national newspapers published an image depicting

an F-15C returning to a Saudi base after taking part in the first air strikes against Iraq.[49]  The

photographic close-up of the fighter shows a single pilot giving the gestures signaling a

successful sortie: a tooth-filled grin and a thumbs-up signal.  In the *Times,* there are images of

single F-15Cs preparing to take off into a desert night sky.[50]  In the *Post,* there are images of

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[47] Davies, 75.

[48] *Victory in the Gulf*, 64.

[49] *Washington Post* (17 January 1991), A23; *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A15.

[50] *New York Times* (20 January 1991), section 4:1.

single F-15Cs surrounded by an empty desert landscape taking off.[51]  The fighter pilot flies

alone.

The 28 January 1991 cover of *Newsweek* featured an extreme close-up of an American

fighter pilot at the controls of an F/A-18 Hornet and giving a thumbs-up signal.[52]  The cover read

"AMERICA AT WAR" in black, bold face capitalized lettering.  No weekly grocer could have

missed the proclamation, especially the "AT WAR."  Any larger, the font size would have

obscured the image.  The pilot's thumbs-up gave the impression of holding up the bulking

lettering.  Placed on the weekly news magazine's first issue since Coalition forces began

dropping bombs on Baghdad on 16 January 1991, *Newsweek* editors seemed to suggest that the

image symbolized the way in which the United States was fighting the Gulf War.  The image is a

common portrayal of the combat pilot: alone and in control of the situation.  The visual is self-

evident.  Individual prowess describes America's way of war.  George Will of the *Washington*

*Post* implied this when he wrote, "When American pilots are assigned a target, they plan their

mission….Many U.S. sorties in Desert Storm involve pure pilot initiative: They head for the

Kuwait theater, then go hunting for tanks."  According to Will, the democratic system of

government encouraged pilots to act on their own.  The result produced a winning strategy.

America's undemocratic adversaries suffered from a "systemic sickness" that did not promote

pilot initiative: "Their skills have been stunted by a system in which individual discretion and

initiative were discouraged by keeping pilots on a short leash to ground control."[53]  General

Charles Horner, the Joint Forces Air Component Commander during Desert Shield/Desert

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[51] *Washington Post* (17 January 1991), A23; *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A22; *Washington Post* (18 January 1991), A25.

[52] *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), cover.

[53] George F. Fill, "Workhorse with Wings," *Washington Post* (22 February 1991), A23.

Storm, concurred: "The problem for Iraq was they were a landcentric military and a dictatorship….As a dictatorship they rely on close control and regimentation of the individual, not a good thing when you are fighting pilots who are trained to act on their own initiative."[54] America's lone air warriors won the war.

The depiction of the American combat pilot as a lone warrior was common during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Warfare conducted by American air forces during the Gulf War was a collective enterprise. However, photographs of combat pilots found in pictorial print media rarely displayed the imagery of unit cohesiveness and instead promoted the imagery of a lone warrior. The result is that print media depicted the Gulf War as an individualistic endeavor. The pre-eminence of the individual combat pilot manifested most clearly in the image of the fighter pilot. In fact, pictorial print media completely neglected airmen who flew aircraft that did not look like fighters. American celebration of the fighter pilot and therefore the lone warrior perhaps emerges most spectacularly from the attention Captain Ayedh al Shamrani's two aerial victories received from print media. Shamrani's persona was that of an individual dependent on personal prowess and courage to defend himself against another man in a modern day hand-to-hand battle occurring thousands of feet in the air. The strongest and the most skillful combatant survived. The presence of individual initiative in American combat pilots made the U.S. military powerful, and because Iraqis lacked individual initiative the U.S. was able to dominate the battlefield. How the combat pilot fights is the subject of the next chapter.

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[54] *Desert Shield/Desert Storm: The 10th Anniversary of the Gulf War,* (Tampa: Faircount, 2000), 204.

# CHAPTER 3

## "Gary Cooper Come to the Persian Gulf War": The Combat Pilot as a Morally Righteous Warrior

Iraqi troops and tanks stormed the border of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. The invasion force faced little resistance, and Western intelligence reports indicated that Saddam Hussein might plan to attack Saudi Arabia. The United States sent elements of the 82nd Airborne Division to Saudi Arabia on 7 August to hinder any attempt by Iraq to extend its control over another county. President Bush continually denounced Iraq's "brutal, naked aggression" against a weaker neighbor.[1] Saddam Hussein instantly became a villain, a madman comparable to Adolf Hitler, the totalitarian leader of Nazis Germany during World War II.

The analysis in this chapter will first show how President Bush framed the Gulf crisis as a battle between good and evil. The comparison if Saddam to Hitler emphasized a moral justification for American intervention. It was American intervention that could reverse Iraq's immoral behavior. The main focus here is on how the image of the American combat pilot reflected the perception that American action was morally righteous. By delivering counter violence to restore law and order, the combat pilot was to champion the weak and the defenseless against a heinous intruder whose assault was unprovoked. In essence, the combat pilot engaged in morally righteous warfare.

The Saddam-as-Hitler comparison emerged as a dominate theme in imagery of crisis and war. *New Republic* editors doctored a 3 September 1990 cover photograph of Saddam Hussein to make his moustache more reminiscent of the Hitler prototype. A study conducted by the

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[1] Quoted from Gary R. Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 167.

Gannett Foundation found 1,179 examples in print media and television where Saddam was conflated with Hitler.[2]  There were certain similarities that encouraged the comparison.  First, the Iraqi armored assault on Kuwait looked like the 1939 invasion of Poland by Nazi Panzer divisions.  In his first speech to the nation after the invasion of Kuwait, the president implied that identification: "Iraq's tanks stormed in blitzkrieg fashion through Kuwait in a few short hours."[3]  Second, Saddam's anti-Zionism was comparable to Hitler's anti-Semitism.  In rhetorical outbursts, Saddam claimed that the Arab world faced a "Zionist-American" plot and threatened Israel with devastating chemical attacks.[4]  To Western observers, Saddam's anti-Israeli tirades resembled Hitler's mesmerizing harangues against European Jews, bringing to mind the heinous crimes such rhetoric had inspired.  As R.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times* wrote in April 1990, Saddam Hussein "wants to wipe out the Jews of Israel and rule the Middle East.  He has made this clear as *Mein Kampf*."[5]

Finally, Saddam's Ba'athist and Hitler's National Socialist regimes committed atrocities. Western media reported all the Iraqi leader's alleged and actual crimes.  Actions and events that had gone unreported when Saddam was a U.S. ally, such as the March 1988 massacres of 4,000 Kurdish civilians, became a major focal point in Western media.  In October 1990, the U.S. House Human Rights Caucus heard eyewitness testimony from an unidentified Kuwaiti girl.  The teenager stated that she had witnessed Iraqi soldiers remove fifteen babies from hospital incubators and left them to die on the hospital floor.  The girl did not reveal her identity,

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[2] Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 63.

[3] Quoted from James McBride, *War, Battering, and Other Sports: The Gulf Between American Men and Women* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Inc., 1995), 47.

[4] Hess, 157-158.

[5] Quoted from MacArthur, 71.

supposedly to protect family and friends from Iraqi reprisals.  In a 6 January 1992 op-ed piece in

the *New York Times*, however, the publisher of *Harper's Magazine*, John MacArthur, revealed

that the unidentified congressional witness was the daughter of Saud al-Sabah, Kuwait's

ambassador to the United States.  Hill and Knowlton, the public relations firm contracted by the

ousted Kuwaiti government, organized the congressional hearings and coached the witness from

the ruling al-Sabah family.  To date, the baby-killing story remains unauthenticated.[6]

Nevertheless, the baby incubator story worked well in the framework of Western

imagination to confirm Saddam as Hitler.  In popular Western imagination, Hitler embodied the

incarnation of evil.  By definition, the Nazi leader symbolized a political leader standing apart

from civilized standards with a personality rooted in the irrational, the perverted, and the deviant.

In the words of one commentator, "The significance of the baby incubator story in the larger

propaganda campaign against Saddam Hussein and the war option cannot be underestimated.

Without it, the comparison of Hussein with Hitler loses it luster; to make the case effectively one

had to prove Hussein's utter depravity."[7]

The killing of infants produced a primal image of evil.  The removal of Kuwaiti babies

from incubators by Iraqi soldiers became the most notable atrocity story used in official and

popular discourse.  President Bush referred to the baby-killing story six times in one month and

eight times in forty-four days.  Vice President Dan Quayle and General Norman Schwarzkopf,

Commander in Chief of Central Command (which was responsible for the Middle East) during

Desert Shield/Storm, frequently mentioned the story.  Six U.S. Senators cited the incubator story

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[6] MacArthur, 58-61 and 76.

[7] Ibid., 68.

in speeches supporting the 12 January 1991 resolution authorizing military action against Iraq that passed by a five-vote margin.[8]

Jean Sasson's propagandistic *The Rape of Kuwait* that flooded American bookstores in the fall of 1990 encouraged the image of Iraqi soldiers killing infants in official and popular discourse. Of the 1.2 million copies printed of Sasson's book chronicling the alleged atrocities committed by Iraqis in Kuwait, some two hundred thousand were sent by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Washington to American troops in Operation Desert Shield. In television commentaries, news articles, and political speeches, "the rape of Kuwait" became a common expression to describe the crisis. In *War, Battering, and Other Sports*, James McBride points out that the expression "the rape of Kuwait" identified the Iraqi army as an instrument of rape, and the Iraqi military became an extension of Saddam's own personality. President Bush used the phrases "Saddam's nuclear bomb potential," "Saddam's artillery and tanks," "his chemical weapons," and "Saddam's vast military arsenal" that depicted Iraqi military capability as the personification of Saddam himself. The president emphasized that "the United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people. Our quarrel is with Iraq's dictator and with his aggression." Saddam, described Bush, was the man who had "systematically raped, pillaged and plundered a tiny nation." The president reiterated his remarks almost word for word in his State of the Union message: "Saddam Hussein's unprovoked invasion, his ruthless systematic rape of a peaceful neighbor, violated everything the community of nations holds dear."[9]

The depiction of Saddam Hussein as a rapist conveyed an image of Kuwait suffering from the terror of a sexual assault. Manipulating gender stereotypes, the president's war rhetoric

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[8] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War,* 67.

[9] McBride, 41-42.

depicted Saddam as an intruder preying on the weak and the defenseless female.  The Iraqi

leader's actions defied civilized behavior.  The purpose of the United States was to stand up for

American principles synonymous with civilized behavior, that is, support for international law,

opposition to aggression, and the right of peoples to self-determination.  The United States would

fight for "a new world order, a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the

conduct of nations," declared the president.[10]  As one commentator observed,

> Bush seems to have emphasized the moral justification for American intervention not as a
> manipulative tool to ensure public support but because he believed deeply that the Iraqi
> action was immoral and must be reversed.  But by insisting that this was not a matter of
> shades of gray, or of trying to see the other side's point of view, Bush ensured that his
> administration would view all Iraqi action as absolutely evil and all American actions as
> absolutely good.[11]

According to Bush, to stop Saddam's madness required the use of counter violence.

From postwar readings of the events of the late 1930s, the policy of appeasement signified a

relapse into fear and cowardice that bolstered Hitler in conducting some of the most uncivilized

actions known to humanity.  In the last decade of the twentieth century, the West faced a new

Hitler, and the hawkish stance against the Iraqi leader, claimed the president, "resisted the trap of

appeasement, cynicism, and isolation that gives temptation to tyrants."[12]  If not confronted,

Saddam's madness threatened to destroy the well-ordered life of Western civilization.

On the evening of 16 January 1991, President Bush authorized the launching of

Operation Desert Storm to compel Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.  From the beginning of the

aerial bombing campaign in mid-January 1991 to the culmination of the one hundred hour

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[10] George H.W. Bush, "Operation Desert Storm Launched," *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A14.

[11] McCrisken, 144.

[12] George H.W. Bush, "State of the Union Message," *New York Times* (30 January 1991), A12.

ground war on 28 February 1991, the war lasted six weeks.[13] Echoing allied propaganda of a battle between good and evil, the combat pilot reflected an image of a warrior delivering counter violence to restore law and order. The combat pilot was to champion the weak and the defenseless against a heinous intruder whose assault was unprovoked.

Physically the image of the combat pilot gives the appearance of extreme strength. In the 4 March 1991 edition of *Newsweek*, for instance, two pilots shake hands. The image is a photographic close-up showing the upper half of the pilots' bodies. An F-16 Fighting Falcon sits in the background. According to the caption, the "American F-16 pilots exchange congratulations after a mission over Kuwait."[14] The pilots wear gear required to fly the highly maneuverable, multi-role fighter. Over an olive green flight suit, the pilots wear a G-suit (also referred to as an anti-G suit). The one-piece jumpsuit helps protect the pilots from feeling discomfort and losing consciousness from the pressure of G-forces. G-forces are the forces of gravity that bear down on the pilot and his plane during high-accelerated flight. A pilot coming out of a dive, for example, can experience nine Gs pushing against him. G-forces prevent the pilot's blood from properly circulating throughout his body. Since a person can lose consciousness after experiencing two Gs, pilots flying highly maneuverable aircraft must wear an anti-G suit. Bags within the suit fill with air to put pressure on the pilot's abdomen and legs in order to keep blood from accumulating in those places and starving the pilot's brain of oxygen. A survival vest, packed with equipment needed for survival after ejecting from a disabled F-16, covers the pilots' chest. Although the lower halves of their bodies are not shown,

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[13] See, for example, James A. Winnefeld, Preston Niblack, and Dana J. Johnson, *A League of Airmen: U.S. Air Power in the Gulf War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994), 55-87 for an account explaining how the U.S. military planned the air campaign.

[14] *Newsweek* (4 March 1991), 32.

it is likely that the pilots' leg pouches are filled with waterproof maps and flight plans, and thick leather boots cover their feet.

The wearing flight gear enlarges the size of the thighs and calves and broadens the chest and shoulder areas. The result is an image of overt masculinity or the distortion of male features that distinguish him from the female. The image depicts the combat pilot as a man with superb muscle tone that signifies youth, vigor, and above all power. When President George W. Bush took a ride in an S-3 Viking to address returning troops from the 2003 Iraq War on the carrier U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*, for instance, Lisa Shiffren pronounced in a *Wall Street Journal* article that the president wearing flight gear looked "virile, sexy, and powerful."[15]

Indeed, photographers commonly depict airmen in flight gear. In an image from a postwar pictorial book, Captain Jim Glasgow—who is dressed in flight gear—boards his A-10 Thunderbolt II.[16] The 20 February 1991 edition of the *Washington Post* shows Captain Michael Thome securing his survival vest to his body.[17] The low angle of the camera lens amplifies Thome's prowess. In the 21 January 1991 edition of *Newsweek*, four naval aviators aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* wear fitted helmets that provide noise and head protection.[18] Wearing a helmet enlarges the size of the apparent skull that makes the pilots' heads proportionate with the rest of their distorted physique. In an image featured in *Time*, a

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[15] Quoted from Linda R. Robertson, *The Dream of Civilized Warfare: World War I Flying Aces and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 432.

[16] *Desert Storm: The Weapons of War*, 38. See *Victory in the Gulf*, 64 for the similar image.

[17] *Washington Post* (20 February 1991), A7.

[18] *Newsweek* (21 January 1991), 30. See *Eye of the Storm: Images of the Persian Gulf War by Knight-Ridder photographers,* 29; *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), cover; *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A15; *New York Times* (24 February 1991), A17; *Time* (28 January 1991); 19; *Washington Post* (17 January 1991), A23; *Washington Post* (18 January 1991), A25; *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A25; *Washington Post* (7 February 1991), A22 for similar images.

British Royal Air Force pilot in the cockpit of a GR-1 Tornado also wears a helmet.[19] The pilot wears the heavily tinted visor that shields his eyes from sunrays in the down position and has an oxygen mask attached to his helmet. The dark visor and oxygen mask replace the normal male face with an ominous facial expression devoid of human like features. The menacing facial look, coupled with a body visual bursting of super human strength, gives the impression that the combat pilot has the capability of doing great harm. As Edward Cody of the *Washington Post* described, combat pilots are "Darth Vader figures behind flight helmets, tinted visors and oxygen masks."[20]

Images commonly display aircraft ordnance, implying that combat pilots actually perform violent attacks. In a hangar in Qatar, for instance, an image in a postwar pictorial book shows three ground crew members cradling an AIM-9 Sidewinder missile to load onto an F-16 Fighting Falcon's wingtip launcher fixing.[21] Equipped with an electronic detector called a photovoltaic, the Sidewinder tracks the hot metal of a jet or piston engine exhaust ports to destroy an airborne target. In a photo taken by Knight-Ridder photographer Todd Buchanan, a deckhand aboard the USS *John F. Kennedy* checks an AGM-88 High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM) on an F/A-18 Hornet pylon.[22] Designed to travel at speeds greater than Mach 3, the HARM detects, guides to, and destroys radar emitters. At an air base in Saudi Arabia, ground crew from the South Carolina Air National Guard loads an AGM-65 Maverick missile

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[19] *Time* (4 February 1991), 36. See *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War*, 66-67; *Victory in the Gulf*, 64 for a similar images.

[20] Edward Cody, "Full-Service Fill-Ups at Gas Tank in the Sky," *Washington Post* (5 February 1991), A10.

[21] *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War*, 65. See *Desert Storm: Weapons of War*, 31; *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A23

[22] *Eye of the Storm: Images of the Persian Gulf War by Knight-Ridder Photographers*, 86.

onto a wing of an F-16 Fighting Falcon.[23]  Airmen primarily use the Maverick, a 500-pound, rocket-propelled air-to-surface missile, against tanks and other armored vehicles.

The *Washington Post* circulated a photograph of ground crews preparing to load shells into an A-10 Thunderbolt II's GAU-8/A Avenger 30 mm seven-barrel Gatling-type cannon on the front page.[24]  The image shows a ground crew member straining to push a chart holding belts of 30 mm shells while a second ground crew member helps to position the chart close to the A-10's cannon that protrudes from the aircraft's nose.  In a pictorial book, a photographic close-up displays a frontal view of the Avenger cannon that fires at a rate of 3,900 rounds per minute and is the centerpiece of the ground attack aircraft's armament.[25]  The same postwar pictorial book shows an A-10 flying and firing its cannon.[26]  Gray gun smoke engulfs the ground attack aircraft that is possibly firing depleted uranium shells.  Delivered through a penny-sized area, a single depleted uranium shell yields enough energy to lift thirty-tons one foot and sends a stream of flames into a tank.  Six rounds usually debilitate a tank.

From the 7 February 1991 edition of the *Washington Post*, a Marine, under the wing of an A-6 Intruder, checks cluster bombs holding hundreds of bomblets that, when dropped, fall away in an elongated, doughnut pattern.[27]  Each bomblet detonates upon contact with the target or the ground, shredding everything in the bomblets' path with razor sharp shrapnel.[28]  In the 4

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[23] *New York* (9 February 1991), A2.

[24] *Washington Post* (12 February 1991), A1.  See also *Newsweek* (Spring/Summer 1991), 78. See *Time* (18 February 1991), 20-21; *Washington Post* (6 February 1991), A1 for similar images.

[25] *Victory in the Gulf,* 66.

[26] Ibid.

[27] *Washington Post* (7 February 1991), A23.

February 1991 edition of *Time*, ground crewmembers load cluster bombs onto a Kuwaiti A-4 Skyhawk that has "Free Kuwait" painted on the fuselage. The A-4 dominates the image, and the low, photographic angle radiates aircraft potency. The visual suggests that to drive Iraq from its country, Kuwaitis must use extreme violence. As the photograph caption, a quote from a Kuwait minister, puts it, "Driving Saddam from our country is only good if we also make sure he can never come back."[29]

Another image of an A-6 shows a frontal view of a pylon holding three cluster bombs.[30] The additional destructive power of three general-purpose bombs hangs from the other wing pylon. Once detonated, the thin cast walls of the general-purpose bomb burst into fragments, sending a deadly spray of shrapnel throughout the target area. The concussion caused by a bomb explosion can suck the air out of a person's lungs and shatter a person's eardrums. The basic family of general-purpose bombs used by the U.S. military was known as the Mark (MK) 80 series and was the type of bomb most frequently used during the Gulf War.[31] From the *New York Times*, five flight deckhands aboard the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* load a general-purpose bomb under the wing of an A-6.[32] With the help of a hoist, depicted in a *Washington Post* photograph, Senior Airman Conley Blankenship guides a general-purpose bomb onto a vehicle

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[28] See Tom Clancy, *Fighter Wing: A Guided Tour of an Air Force Combat Wing* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004 [1994]), 177-182 for a historical account of the development of cluster bombs. See *Gulf War Air Power Survey,* vol. 4, 72-74 for a detailed description of the type of cluster bombs used by the US military during the Gulf War.

[29] *Time* (4 February 1991), 39.

[30] *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A18; *Time* (28 January 1991), 18.

[31] See Clancy, *Fighter Wing*, 172-175 for a historical account of the development MK-80 series of bombs. See *Gulf War Air Power Survey,* vol. 4, 69-71 for a detailed description of the MK-80 series of bombs used by the U.S. military during the Gulf War.

[32] *New York Times* (10 February 1991), A19. See also *Eye of the Storm: Images of the Persian Gulf War by Knight-Ridder Photographers*, 84.

to transport the ordinance to F-15E Strike Eagles.[33]  Also appearing in the *Washington Post*, two ground crew members use a hoist to stack general-purpose bombs at an air base in Saudi Arabia.[34]  Aircrews will use the cylindrical-shaped bombs with conical fins against a variety of targets that include artillery, trucks, bunkers, Scuds, surface-to-air missiles sites, antiaircraft sites, and early warning radars.

From a postwar pictorial book, a row of general-purpose bombs rest on a long, wooden truck platform positioned next to a B-52 Stratofortresses, a long-range, heavy bomber that can carry approximately eighty-one general-purpose bombs.[35]  Two ground crew members who stand on the ground ready the general-purpose bombs that sit at shoulder height for loading into the Stratofortresses' bomb bay that can hold up to 60,000 pounds of ordnance.  The photographer, standing in the open cab of the vehicle, directs the camera lens above the truck platform to capture the entire row of bombs.  From the photographer's angle, the single row of bombs overwhelms the two ground crew members.  The men appear small in an image dominated by thousands of pounds of bombs.  The visual expresses the large bomb load that rendered the B-52 most effective in psychological operations against Republican Guard positions dug in along the Iraq-Kuwait border.  Approximately 20 to 40 percent of the Iraqi deserters mentioned B-52 sorties in their explanation for surrendering.  One Iraqi prisoner explained that he had surrendered because of the B-52, but the interrogator noted that the bomber never attacked his position.  The prisoner answered, "That is true, but I saw one [a position] that had been attacked [by a B-52]."[36]

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[33] *Washington Post* (15 February 1991), A31.

[34] *Washington Post* (25 January 1991), A28.

[35] *Victory in the Gulf*, 67.  See *York Times* (16 February 1991), A9 for a similar image.

In a photograph credited to photographer F. Lee Corkran, a U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot dressed in the attire that makes him look bigger and more powerful than he actually is uses white chalk to scribe "Hussein Stain 2000 lb. Cleaner" on a MK-84 bomb that he will deliver over Iraq.[37]  The bomb signifies that the pilot lives in a violent world and, coupled with his appearance of physical strength, shows that the pilot is prepared for violent confrontation. Signing the bomb with his own personal message suggests that the pilot believes in and willingly uses violence.  There is no suggestion that the pilot flies into combat reluctantly.  In fact, the pilot smiles as he signs the bomb as if relishing in the thought of striking Iraqi forces.  Trained as a warrior, the pilot could not fulfill himself if he did not confront his enemy.  The pilot's violence, however, is self-restrained.  The moment of violence comes according to the pilot's own special laws.  Referring to the 2,000-pound general-purpose bomb as a "Hussein stain cleaner" implies that the pilot uses the bomb against a strictly defined target.  Characterized as a cleaner, the bomb acts as a sanitizing agent against Saddam Hussein's forces of oppression.  By using violence, the pilot's purpose is to cleanse Kuwait of the wrongdoer who stands apart from civilized standards.  Thus, the pilot imposes himself with the appearance of moral clarity, since he does not seek confrontation but uses aggression to retaliate against an apparent injury.

The portrayal of the combat pilot in F. Lee Corkran's image alluded to the persona of the hero found in the Western genre that began in the earliest days of American cinema.  Typically, the Western followed the exploits of the Western hero, the cowboy who sided with and fought for justice.  He was a polite man of honor, assured in manner, and morally correct.  The gun slung visibly around his waist showed preparedness for violent confrontation but he restricted his

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[36] Quoted from Kenneth P. Werrell, *Chasing the Silver Bullet: U.S. Air Force Weapons Development from Vietnam to Desert Storm* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 253.

[37] *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War*, 65.

violence to the boundaries of defense of self and community.  The Western hero's moral code

rationalized and defended his violent behavior while providing a morality that enabled him to

engage in actions against villainy that may be unlawful, but embodied a more meaningful

justice.[38]

War correspondent Philip Shenon of the *New York Times* identified the combat pilot as a

modern interpretation of the Western hero when he described Marine AH-1 Cobra pilot Michael

Steele as "the quintessential American airman with his brown leather bomber jacket, zippered

olive green fight suit and confident jut-jawed grin—Gary Cooper come to the Persian Gulf."[39]  In

one of his most memorable performances, Gary Cooper played Will Kane, the Western hero in

the critically acclaimed *High Noon* (1952).  The role earned Cooper an Oscar for best actor.

*High Noon* begins with Kane about to marry and then retire as marshal of Hadleyville.  Kane's

wife, Amy (Grace Kelly), is a Quaker and it is because of her religious faith of non-violence that

he promises to give up his gun and badge to become a shopkeeper in another town.  As the

newlyweds are about to leave, they learn that Frank Miller is out of prison and will return to

Hadleyville on the noon train.  Miller had ruled Hadleyville with cruelty until Kane became

marshal.  Now Miller is returning with his gang to take revenge on those who had a hand in

imprisoning him.  The townspeople plead with Kane and his new wife to leave, assuring Kane

that they can take care of themselves until the new marshal arrives.  Kane agrees and starts his

journey out of town, but, despite his wife's objections and her threat of leaving him if he decides

to fight, Kane decides to return to confront Miller and his gang.[40]

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[38] David Lusted, *The Western* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 45-46 and 150-151;

[39] Philip Shenon, "Copter pilot, after battle, no longer sees quick war," *New York Times* (3 February 1991), A15.

[40] Ralph Lamar Turner and Robert J. Higgs, *The Cowboy Way: The Western Leader in Film, 1945-1995* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 207-208.

A social element went into Kane's decision to confront Miller. Kane's work had transformed Hadleyville into a prosperous town where women and children safely walk the streets. Miller's return will undo his work. Kane cannot permit society to revert to Miller's savagery. As a lawman, he exists to protect justice and order. The deputy is too inexperienced to deal with Miller. The new marshal has not arrived. Kane is the only man with enough knowledge, skill, and power to defeat the outlaw. In this respect, the combat pilot is like Kane: a defender of civilization who uses violence to destroy the wrongdoer in order to save civil society. Unlike the combat pilot, as we shall see, Kane's moral code holds that a responsibility to act comes when one possesses the power to act whether or not the action is legal or acceptable to the public. Kane dismisses his wife's religiously based teachings of non-violence. This rejection causes Amy to leave her husband. Kane dismisses the wishes of the town. At the town meeting where Kane tries to enlist the help of his fellow citizens, the residents declare that they no longer want Kane to fight their battles. Kane prepares to face Miller and his gang alone. No one has authorized his use of violence. No one has given him official entitlement to the badge that he has reassumed after returning that morning. Kane is a vigilante: a private individual assuming the power of the law without submitting himself to a higher authority.[41]

The portrayal of the combat pilot in another image credited to photographer F. Lee Corkran suggests that he is the antithesis of a vigilante, that is, the combat pilot summits himself to a higher authority before using violence to uphold justice and order. Titled "Base Qatar," Corkran's photograph is an aerial portrait of aircraft from each nation gathered in Qatar as part of the military force used against Iraq.[42] A French F-1 Mirage, an American F-16 Fighting Falcon,

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[41] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*, (New York: Ahenum, 1992), 392-393.

[42] *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War*, 68-69.

a Canadian CF-18 Hornet, a Qatari Alpha 2 Jet, and a Qatari F- 1 Mirage fly in formation off the coast of Qatar.  It is an image of five different combat aircraft, four different flying techniques, and three different languages.  The visual is that of diverse nations forming a coalition and using force against a common enemy.  As President Bush said during his speech launching Operation Desert Storm, "Tonight, 28 nations—countries from five continents, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Arab League—have forces in the Gulf area standing shoulder to shoulder against Saddam Hussein."[43]

The five aircraft in Corkran's photo fly in accordance with United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 678.  The UN formed in 1945 as an international organization of nations to promote peace, security, and cooperation, and resolutions passed by the organization gave international legitimacy to policies.  "In standing together to confront [the Gulf] crisis," wrote the president of Turkey in an opinion piece that appeared in the *Washington Post*, "the international community has proved its determination not to permit aggression.  What we have witnessed since Aug. 2 is remarkable: the United Nations and its Security Council exercising their peace-keeping function in the name of the international community to enforce international law."[44]  Passed in late November, Resolution 678 allowed Iraq "one final opportunity, as a pause of goodwill" to withdrawal from Kuwait.  If Iraq did not withdrawal by 15 January 1991, UN member states were authorized "to use all necessary means" to "restore international peace and security in the area."[45]  When Iraq failed to withdrawal from Kuwait by the January deadline,

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[43] George H.W. Bush, "Operation Desert Storm Launched," *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A14.

[44] Turgut Ozal, "An Unavoidable War," *Washington Post* (22 January 1991), A13.

[45] Quoted from Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1993), 234.

Coalition aircrews, authorized by the UN, assumed a legal right to use violence to restore peace and justice to an area succumbed to the savage regime of Saddam.

The American F-16 in Corkran's photograph flies with additional authority that went beyond UN Resolution 678. In early November, President Bush announced his decision to double the size of the original August military deployment to Saudi Arabia. Bush's announcement triggered an intense reaction from Congress. Some congressional leaders were alarmed at what many judged to be the president's illegal push for war. Since the Vietnam War, Congress remained firm in asserting its power to declare war. In 1973, Congress passed the War Powers Resolution, which placed procedures between Congress and the president when committing U.S. forces to hostilities. The intent of the resolution was to limit a president's power to wage an undeclared war. The Senate Majority Leader gave President Bush an ultimatum when he publicly stated, "The president must come to Congress and ask for a declaration. If he does not get it, then there is no legal authority for the United States to go to war."[46] To dismiss charges of abusing presidential powers, Bush asked Congress to authorize the implementation of UN Resolution 678, which Congress did on 12 January 1991. The U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate passed a joint resolution "declar[ing] their support for international action to reverse Iraq's aggression" and "authoriz[ing] the use of the United States Armed Forces pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 678."[47]

President Bush's adherence to the constitutional process allowed Congress to convene, debate, and authorize the commitment of U.S. forces to hostilities, making the use of violence against Iraq a legal action. An early January opinion poll showed that sixty percent of

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[46] Quoted from Hess, 179.

[47] U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, "Authorization for use of Military Force" (January 12, 1991).

Americans believed that Bush needed congressional authorization before taking military action against Iraq. Bush also sought Congress' endorsement of UN Resolution 678 to enhance the prospect of popular support of U.S. policy. A failure to go to Congress risked alienating the public. The joint congressional resolution of 12 January 1991 met the public's demand that the president not act solely on his own initiative regarding the use of force in the Persian Gulf.[48] As the president stated, "military action [against Iraq was] taken in accord with United Nations resolutions and with the consent of the United States Congress."[49]

In the end, the decision for war was made in Baghdad, not in Washington or at UN headquarters in New York. The crisis began when the Iraqi dictator invaded and brutalized a neighbor. Military action taken to liberate Kuwait, assured President Bush, accrued after "the 28 countries with forces in the gulf area…exhausted all reasonable efforts to reach a peaceful resolution." Saddam failed to succumb to the economic pressures of a five-month embargo implemented and enforced by the UN. The president contended that sanctions gave Saddam time to prepare for war and damaged economies worldwide.[50] In addition, Saddam ignored various diplomatic initiatives. Jordan's King Hussein unsuccessfully tried to use his country's partnership with Iraq to press Saddam into negotiations. Iraq refused UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar's proposal of a UN established peacekeeping force to monitor Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, which was to be followed by negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait. French President Mitterand insisted on unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait and in return for

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[48] Hess, 189.

[49] George H.W. Bush, "Operation Desert Storm Launched," *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A14.

[50] Ibid.

Iraqi cooperation promised negotiations on all regional issues, but Saddam did not respond.[51] U.S. Secretary of State James Baker met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in Geneva to give Iraq one last opportunity to avoid war but Baker was, in Bush's words, "totally rebuffed."[52]

The president's portrayal of the events prior to the launching of Desert Storm, clarifies the combat pilot's moral code. It holds that the possession of power to retaliate an apparent injury entails a responsibility to act when the action is legal. The pilot has submitted himself to the authority of an international organization of nations, a domestic legislative branch, and to the will of the American people. The adherence to instructions from authoritative legislative entities allows the pilot to defend and rationalize his violent behavior when crisis fails to be peacefully resolved. At each step of the escalating diplomatic, economic, and military pressures that the UN put in place the sanctioning of violence was the last option to Saddam's defiance. The result is that the pilot commits himself to what President Bush called a "just," "moral," and "right" cause.[53]

How does the pilot fight a "just," "moral," and "right" cause? We know he is on the side of justice and order and he fights for these things when authorized by a higher authority. These principles do not determine exactly how he fights; they merely offer him an opportunity to enter combat. The pilot's violent behavior is self-contained and limited to begin with, since he only uses violence to right a wrong. The weaponry hanging from aircraft pylons constitutes a visible show of the pilot's moral code, suggesting a continual possibility of controlled violence. With the appearance of unshakable control, the pilot's strength lay in the ability to deliver violence accurately against villainy. Without the skill of precision, the pilot's actions are valueless. As a

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[51] Hess, 176.

[52] George H.W. Bush, "Operation Desert Storm Launched," *New York Times* (17 January 1991), A14.

[53] Ibid.

man of virtue and conviction, his violence cannot harm the innocent or else he becomes a murderer.

Shown in the 19 January 1991 edition of the *Washington Post*, a grainy still frame from aircraft video footage displays the rooftop of a Baghdad communication center.[54] Crosshairs-fix on the center of the unglamorous square building mark the entry point of a bomb soon to be dropped. Another grainy image taken from a video camera aboard a warplane reveals a line of Iraqi mobile Scuds.[55] Again, crosshairs center on a target. Other still frames originate from video footage taken from a camera mounted in the front of air-to-ground ordnance.[56] In these images, crosshairs zero in on a structure serving a military purpose that is seconds away from being struck, providing photographic evidence that the projectile fired by the pilot accurately heads toward its intended target. Finally, there are photographic layouts that usually consist of three still frames of videotape taken by a camera aboard a warplane.[57] Showing a bombing run through a series of images, these photographic layouts offer a definitive manifestation of the type of destruction caused by the combat pilot. The series of images commonly begins with crosshairs centered on a bunker or a Scud storage hangar. The following image shows a missile or a bomb slamming into the target. A dense cloud of smoke and debris engulfs the target in the final image. In the words of *Life* magazine editor James R. Gaines, missiles "darted like

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[54] *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A17. See *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), 23 for a similar image.

[55] *Washington Post* (31 January 1991), A21.

[56] See, for example, *New York Times* (28 January 1991), A9; *Washington Post* (28 January 1991), A14; *In the Eye of Desert Storm: Photographers of the Gulf War*, 72; *Victory in the Gulf*, 57.

[57] See, for example, *Newsweek* (Spring/Summer 1991), 70-71; *New York Times* (19 January 1991), A22; *Washington Post* (22 January 1991), A16; *Washington Post* (19 January 1991), A22; *Desert Storm: The War in the Persian Gulf*, 176.

swallows through the door of a big bunker and blew it inside out."[58]  The visual is self-evident. The pilot always hits his intended target.

Still frames displaying the destruction of Iraqi military targets showed the dropping of a specific type of ordnance: precision-guided munitions.  Guided by infrared, electro-optic, or laser systems, precision-guided munitions increase the likelihood of hitting the target, reducing the level of civilian casualties and the number of bombs needed to do the required level of damage. After the war, the United States Air Force admitted that only 6,520 out of 88,500 tons of bombs dropped by U.S. planes on Iraq and occupied Kuwait were precision-guided munitions, a mere seven percent of the total bomb tonnage.   The Air Force claimed that precision-guided munitions were ninety percent accurate, but other estimates suggest that only sixty percent of the weaponry hit their intended targets.  The bulk of the tonnage consisted of conventional bombs or unguided general-purpose bombs.  In March 1991, a senior Pentagon official told Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post* that the unguided bombs missed their targets at least seventy percent of the time. [59]  Shortly after Gellman's article appeared in the *Post*, Air Force Chief of Staff General Merrill McPeak publicly announced that the U.S. made targeting mistakes during the air campaign, indicating that U.S. pilots stuck civilian targets.  "There is no doubt that we made some mistakes of what we bombed.  I know of several," admitted the general.  "I have photographic evidence of several where the pilots just acquired the wrong target."[60]

As the only images of bombing sorties that print media circulated, the videotape footage capturing accurate air attacks misrepresented a highly imprecise air war.  Iraqi military targets

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[58] James R. Gaines, "A Note from the Editor," *Life* (14 February 1991).

[59] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War,* 163.

[60] Quoted from Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War,* 309.

were missed.  Civilian targets were destroyed.  Nevertheless, the published bomb footage worked well in portraying the combat pilot as a warrior who is completely in control of his violent behavior.  Taken as a whole, the still video frames suggest that the combat pilot is a figure of repose, a warrior who calmly and carefully takes aim before striking his enemy.  The inclusion of crosshairs comparable to that in an optical sight found on a sniper's rifle on the images gives the impression that the combat pilot unleashes his violence with sharpshooter accuracy.  The still video frames seem to demonstrate that U.S. bombs always hit their targets without causing collateral damage.  There are no dead bodies in these images.  There are no images of the burned and wounded.  There is only a nasty military target getting closer and closer and then everything ending with an explosion, which is bloodless.   These images projected an illusion that only machines and not people are involved in air warfare.  The visual is that of a clean, precise, and surgical air war.  As media critic Douglas Kellner noted, airmen seemingly always performed a "surgical operation that was removing methodically the instruments of Iraqi war."[61]

In the early hours of 13 February, a bombing sortie that received a great deal of media coverage challenged the appearance of a clean air war.  During the twelve-hour period from the evening of 12 February to the early morning of 13 February, reporters in Baghdad described the bombardment of the Iraqi capital as the most intense since the war began.  At approximately 4:30 A.M. Iraqi time on 13 February, two 2,000-pound precision-guided bombs from U.S. F-117 aircraft apparently struck an air raid shelter in the residential Amiriya quarter of western Baghdad containing civilians, mainly women and children.  The first bomb struck the air vent of the facility, weakening the structure, and the second ripped through the roof and exploded inside. The explosion converted the six-foot thick concrete walls and half-foot thick steel doors into a

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[61] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War,* 160.

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crematorium.  According to various Iraqi reports, the air strike killed between 200 and 300

civilians, the highest reported death toll from a single allied attack during the air war.[62]

Just after 5:00 A.M. EST on 13 February, CNN's Peter Arnett broke the story first.

Transmitting a live voice report from the Iraqi capital, Arnett asserted, "We have the makings of

a major tragedy here in Baghdad today.  We have been taken to the Amiriya district of west

Baghdad and there were two direct hits on a civilian bomb shelter."  Arnett recounted the

removal of forty bodies "charred almost beyond recognition" from the installation that he had

witnessed several hours earlier.  "There were women, there were children in this group," assured

Arnett.  When an anchor in Atlanta asked if the bombing was just another example of collateral

damage, Arnett replied, "From what we could see there was no immediate military target within

miles of this place."  The Amiriya installation was situated in "a middle class civilian area,"

sharing the same block with a mosque, a school, and a supermarket.  Further, the 100 foot long,

100 foot wide concrete building was "marked as a shelter with street signs leading to it saying it

was a shelter."[63]  In response to whether the Iraqis were censoring his story, Arnett replied that

correspondents for the first time were not subjected to any censorship nor were Iraqi authorities

with him as he gave the report.  Arnett was free to report exactly what he saw.  For the first time

during the air war, an uncensored Western report provided strong evidence that the United States

directly attacked and destroyed a civilian target.

Throughout the day, Arnett transmitted several other reports, which included pictures.  In

the United States and Britain, media outlets like CNN chose to censor the images.  The decision

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[62] *Needless Deaths in the Gulf War: Civilian Casualties during the Air Campaign and Violations of the Laws of War* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 128-129.

[63] Quoted from Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 189.

revolved around questions of taste and decency. The pictures and video footage of the corpses were so graphic that they required editing if audiences were not to be offended or alienated. This meant that a considerable amount of self-censorship occurred in the same way that television editors would treat pictures of a highway or rail crash. In the words of BBC's Michael Buerk, "Many of the pictures coming from Baghdad of burned civilian bodies are considered too dreadful to show you."[64] As a result, American and British media outlets never broadcast the true horror. The graphic nature of the images in Arnett's report televised just after 6:00 A.M. EST, for instance, only went as far as to show rows of bodies covered in patterned blankets. Two hours later, another report filed by Arnett showed rows of charred bodies in a long shot. According to Philip Taylor's *War and the Media: Propaganda and the Persuasion in the Gulf War*, this was "the first and only time audiences could get a glimpse on this station [CNN] of the real carnage caused to human life."[65]

Although the pictures had been self-censored, the sanitized images were still shocking. The images of the Amiriya installation revealed a different type of air war than what media had shown before. The regular release of warplane and ordnance video footage depicted clinical bombing accuracy. The image created the impression of a clean air war that was successfully striking military targets with a high degree of precision and avoiding civilian casualties. But here, for the first time since the start of the war, the media circulated pictures revealing the impact the Coalition air campaign had on the citizens of Baghdad, and the images the Amiriya installation stood in stark contrast to the bombing footage showing a clean war restricted to the destruction of Iraqi instruments of war. The austere buildings seen framed in the pilot's sighting

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[64] Quoted from Taylor, 191.

[65] Taylor, 188 and 191-193.

scope and disappearing in flashes of light were no longer devoid of human life. In the aftermath

of a laser-guided bomb explosion, images showed rescue workers wearing cloth facemasks to

filter out the stench of charred and rotting flesh while sifting through ruble to find victims.[66]

There were images of rows of bodies covered with blankets.[67] There were images of Iraqis

trying to identify charred bodies as dead family members.[68] There were images of outraged

Iraqis and Iraqis mourning the dead.[69] These images exposed a more chilling and grisly reality

of war than previously seen, made more disturbing by the fact that the dead were civilians. As

Peter Applebome in a *New York Times* article titled "Carnage in Baghdad Erases Image of an

Antiseptic War" speculated, "The smoking ruins of the Baghdad building where allied bombing

apparently killed hundreds of civilians this morning may have profoundly changed the American

picture of what had been viewed as an antiseptic war of precise, surgical attacks and minimal

loss of life."[70]

The media's mid-February representation of the air war did not convey an image of

morally pure combat. According to Peter Arnett and other reporters present at the Amiriya

installation, these were the facts: At around 4:30 A.M. Iraqi time on 13 February, two allied

precision-guided bombs struck an installation in the Amiriya district in Baghdad. The air strike

resulted in significant casualties, mainly women and children. Photographic and film evidence

had indicated a sign marked shelter, rescue workers pulling corpses from the wreckage so badly

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[66] See, for example, *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A17: *New York Times* (15 February 1991), A13.

[67] See, for example, *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A1; *Newsweek* (25 February 1991), 15.

[68] See, for example, *Washington Post* (14 February 1991), A28.

[69] See, for example, *Washington Post* (14 February 1991), A1; *Washington Post* (14 February 1991), A33; *New York Times* (15 February 1991), A1; *Newsweek* (25 February 1991), 20 and 38.

[70] Peter Applebome, "Carnage in Bagdad Erases Image of an Antiseptic War," *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A19.

burned that it was impossible to determine the gender of some of the remains, and distraught observers. None of this could be denied. They were the facts of the situation, and the facts revealed that U.S. airmen had killed civilians. The smoldering ruins in Baghdad laden with the charred remains of hundreds of civilians showed that the pilot essentially committed an act of violence that he was called upon to put an end to. But as we shall see, it was the interpretation placed upon the facts of the situation that preserved the combat pilot's appearance of moral integrity.

The U.S. government insisted immediately and categorically that the Amiriya installation was "a command and control center that fed instructions directly to the Iraqi war machine, painted and camouflaged to avoid detection, and well documented as a military target." The presence of civilians, claimed White House press spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, did not indicate that the building was an air raid shelter, but that Saddam was using Iraqi civilians as a military target by putting them in danger. Fitzwater reminded the nation that Saddam "time and again" had "shown a willingness to sacrifice civilian lives and property that further his war aims." Saddam placed command centers on top of schools and public buildings. Saddam placed tanks and artillery near private homes. Saddam placed aircraft next to treasured archeological sites. Saddam fired Scud missiles at innocent Israelis and Saudi civilians. The Amiriya bunker was just another example of Saddam killing civilians intentionally and for a purpose. It was a tragic reminder that one of Saddam's major objectives was to show that the Untied States was attacking civilians in a sadistic attempt to turn world opinion against the Coalition.[71] The operations director for the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred, arguing that one could not rule out "a cold-

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[71] Transcript of What House spokesman Martin Fitzwater's statement on bombing of building in Iraq, *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A18.

blooded decision on the part of Saddam Hussein to put civilians without our knowledge into a facility and have them bombed. He had to know we knew this was a military target."[72] The general asserted that if the Coalition had known that there were civilians there, the target would not have been attacked.

The administration was not passing the destruction of the Amiriya installation off as a case of mistaken bombing. Rather, it was claiming that the building was a military bunker used to transmit operational instructions to Iraqi forces in the Kuwaiti theater. The essential point was that U.S. airmen attacked with pinpoint accuracy an active military target. Indeed, the administration placed complete culpability for the loss of innocent lives onto the Iraqi regime. It was American airmen who released the bombs that destroyed the bunker but it was Saddam who, by inhumanly blurring the lines between military and civilians targets, killed the civilians. If U.S. military officers knew about Saddam's diabolical plan to pack a military target with hundreds of civilians, the bunker would not have been attacked. The administration's interpretation of the facts resonated well with the public. According to a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll, an overwhelming majority of Americans believed that the Amiriya facility was a legitimate military target and that Saddam Hussein/Iraq was most responsible for the deaths at the bombing site. [73] By rapidly developing a plausible story that blamed the deaths of hundreds of noncombatants on an enemy leader already reduced to inhuman status, the Bush administration was able to exonerate the combat pilot from any wrongdoing.

The *Washington Post*-ABC News poll also showed that public support did not decrease because of the Amiriya bombing. The Amiriya incident demonstrated that horrendous civilian

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[72] "Excerpts from Pentagon Remarks on Iraqi Concrete Building's Destruction," *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A18.

[73] Richard Morin, "Majority in Poll Blame Iraq for Civilian Deaths," *Washington Post* (16 February 1991), A19.

damage did not dramatically increase public opposition to the war. In fact, the Amiriya incident appeared to have no effect on public support for the war. Compared to a *Post*-ABC survey completed before the bombing, support for the war continued to hold at 78 percent. The results suggest that a majority of Americans accepted that the loss of civilian lives inevitably happens during war without this affecting their overall view of the war. The survey found that 60 percent said that the United States should continue bombing military targets "even if Iraqi civilians might be killed," indicating that a majority of Americans expected the air war to result in civilian casualties. In the words of one American, "This is war, and innocent civilians are going to be killed in war."[74] Further, 67 percent said that the United States was "making enough of an effort" to avoid bombing civilian targets. As a California man said, "I believe that the American people have an appreciation for human life, and we're trying to fight this war with as little loss of life as possible."[75]

The results from the *Washington Post*-ABC News poll suggest that a majority of Americans possessed a fatalistic attitude toward war and its affect on civilians. There was no way around the inevitable fact that in wars the combat pilot was gong to injure and kill noncombatants. "When Americans voted for war," commented George Will in a *Washington Post* editorial, "they embarked on a course of action that had to include civilian casualties."[76] What maintained the combat pilot's moral status was the public's belief that the airman did absolutely everything he possible could do to minimize collateral damage. As Charles Krauthammer stated in the *Post*, "So long as we scrupulously attack what we reasonably believe

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[74] Quoted from Peter Applebome, "Carnage in Baghdad Erases Image of an Antiseptic War," *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A19.

[75] Ibid.

[76] George F. Will, "The Morality of Long-Range Killing," *Washington Post* (17 February 1991), C7.

to be military targets, the bombing of Baghdad is a cause for sorrow, not guilt."[77]  Or as the

operation director for the Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted, "We could have tens of thousands of

[Iraqi civilians] hurt.  We could have run this operation the way the Iraqis ran their operation

against the Iranians.  We could have fired missiles up there that are terribly inaccurate right into

the middle of their cities.  We've done none of that."[78]

Indeed, it is difficult to suggest that civilian casualties harmed the combat pilot's

appearance of moral integrity.  Middle East Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch,

concluded, "[W]e are reasonably confident that the total number of civilians killed directly by

allied attacks did not exceed several thousand, with an upper limit of perhaps between 2,500 and

3,000 Iraqi dead."[79]  During the war, most of the deaths went unreported, and Middle East Watch

accused the Coalition for being silent about civilian casualties: "U.S. military spokesman refused

to concede that *any* of the allies' combat sorties were flawed" (original emphasis).[80]  The

withholding of incidents of collateral damage helped to project the image of a clean air war that

was crucial to the combat pilot's moral status.  It is reasonable to assume that the American

public viewed the Amiriya bombing as something out of the norm; a one-time tragedy that, when

compared to the reportedly vast number of successful combat sorties conducted by the Coalition,

could be overlooked.  Within days of the Amiriya incident Charles Krauthammer implied this

when he wrote in the *Washington Post*, "By any measure, casualties thus far have been

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[77] Charles Krauthammer, "Bombing Baghdad," *Washington Post* (14 February 1991), A23.

[78] "Excerpts from Pentagon Remarks on Iraqi Concrete Building's Destruction," *New York Times* (14 February 1991), A18.

[79] *Needless Deaths in the Gulf War*, 19.

[80] Ibid., 14.

proportional to [the objective of liberating Kuwait]. They have indeed been far less than one would have expected of a war against so vast a military machine as Iraq's."[81]

There is the possibility that, if reported, 3,000 Iraqi dead would not have threatened the combat pilot's moral status. Firstly, the public may have viewed 3,000 dead as remarkably low considering that Coalition forces waged a high-intensive bombing campaign, especially when comparing the Iraqi deaths to death tolls of past air wars. George Will implied this when he wrote in a *Post* editorial that the United States was not "deliver[ing] huge tonnages of free-falling bombs from great heights" as it had done during World War II. The use of precision-guided munitions was "America's attempt to edge back from the 20th century's moral abyss" of using indiscriminate force.[82] Of course, this assumes that the public would still believe that pilots were using large amounts of munitions that minimized collateral damage for the 3,000 deaths to be acceptable. Secondly, as the Amiriya incident demonstrates, the public would likely have blamed Saddam for the civilian deaths. An already demonized enemy leader reduced to inhuman status meant that noncombatants could be killed without recrimination. "This is war," explained Sue Bondzeleske in a letter to the editor, "and it's inevitable that innocent people are going to be hurt. But that's Saddam Hussein's choice."[83]

A common portrayal of the combat pilot during the 1991 Persian Gulf War was that of a morally righteous warrior. President Bush framed the Gulf crisis as a battle between good and evil that emphasized a moral justification for American intervention. It was perceived that American intervention could reverse Iraq's immoral behavior. The image of the American combat pilot reflected the perception that American action was moral. The combat pilot lived in

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[81] Charles Krauthammer, "Bombing Baghdad," *Washington Post* (14 February 1991), A23.

[82] George F. Will, "The Morality of Long-Range Killing," *Washington Post* (17 February 1991), C7.

[83] Sue Bondzeleske, Letter to the editor, *Washington Post* (18 February 1991), A24.

a world of violence and believed in violence. When the pilot committed an act of violence, however, the action was one of self-restraint; the moment of violence came according to the pilot's special laws. He defended the weak against a heinous intruder whose assault was unprovoked by delivering counter violence meant to restore law and order, but acted only when the action was considered legal. He engaged in clean warfare, that is, the combat pilot used advanced technology to destroy nasty military targets with pinpoint accuracy and to avoid collateral damage. Conducting warfare within the boundaries of his special laws rationalized and defended his violent behavior while providing a morality that enabled him to engage in violence to protect the innocent from villainy. Really, it was not violence that characterized the image of the combat pilot. Rather, it was a certain image of a man that expressed itself most clearly in violence.

## Conclusion

Pictorial print media cannot avoid interpreting the "actuality" of an event. Editorial choices, censorship, unexamined assumptions, and other influences shape how events are presented in print outlets such as news magazines. In fact, pictorial print media articulate the prevailing social and political perspectives of a culture through the power of a visual narrative. At the same time, images need words. Photo captions and articles are interrelated with the visual. Words reinforce the visual by creating meaning that gives the visual imagery cultural power. Thus, pictorial print media express cultural ideological reproductions of "actuality," realizations of an objective truth.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of material produced by pictorial print media during the Gulf War. It is clear that the American experience in Vietnam haunted contemporary America with its open and unresolved features. Memories of the US defeat in Vietnam affected the way in which some generations of Americans viewed contemporary war, politics, foreign affairs, and culture. The 1991 Persian Gulf War was one such event. America's experience in Vietnam provided the basis for much of the discourse of America's involvement in the first major post-Vietnam conflict. President Bush stressed that the Gulf War was consciously being constructed to avoid a conflict similar to Vietnam. For President Bush, the lesson of Vietnam was to send enough force to definitively win a military conflict. He regularly assured the public that the United States was going to war with enough resources for a swift and decisive victory, thereby avoiding the Vietnam pitfall of an open-ended conflict.

Pictorial print media produced a narrative that validated Bush's construction of the war in the Gulf. At it simplest, the narrative emphasized the quantity and the superiority of U.S. forces. Simple charts documenting the disparity between the size of allied and Iraqi forces predicted that

the war would definitively end in a Coalition victory. Weaponry and video game-like graphics were enthusiastic displays of U.S. military prowess and dominance. These graphics fetishized technology and were visual confirmations of the superiority of U.S. forces. The result was that these graphics conveyed a message of confidence in the ability of U.S. military technology to confront and defeat the Iraqi army.

Beyond the display of U.S. military prowess and dominance through the imagery of superior numbers and the wizardry of U.S. weaponry there was America's style of warfare. Photographs of combat pilots neglected the imagery of unit cohesiveness and instead promoted the imagery of individual prowess. The combat pilot was a lone warrior, a unique individual who was dependent on personal prowess and capable of defeating forces that outnumbered him. To be more precise, the lone warrior was a fighter pilot. Aircrews flying aircraft that did not look like fighters did not appear with their aircraft. The narrative gave the impression that the United States fought the air war with only fighter pilots. Possessing a class of lone warriors gave the impression that Americans had a tremendous advantage over Iraq, since the Iraqis supposedly lacked individual initiative. This apparent Iraqi lack of individual initiative was because dictatorships suppressed individualism. Democracies, on the other hand, encouraged pilots to act on their own. This comparison between the Iraqi and American governments gave some Americans a reason to feel militarily and nationalistically superior.

To Bush, the crisis in the Gulf was a case of good verses evil. It was American intervention that could reverse Iraq's immoral behavior. The image of the American combat pilot reflected the perception that American action was morally righteous. The combat pilot lived in a world of violence and believed in violence. When the combat pilot committed an act of violence, however, the moment came according to the pilot's special laws. He defended the

weak against a heinous intruder whose assault was unprovoked, but the pilot acted only against the intruder when the action was legal. Moreover, he engaged in clean warfare. That is, the combat pilot used advanced technology to destroy nasty military targets with pinpoint accuracy and to avoid collateral damage that kept warfare morally righteous. The ability to deliver violence with pinpoint accuracy and his purpose to protect the weak rationalized and defended his violent behavior.

Some criticized the depiction of American's experience in the Gulf because it made war look clean, precise, and surgical. War was reduced to something like a movie that one could enjoy, admire, and cheer about. They criticized what they believed was an immoral display of war and violence, self-aggrandizing and egocentric posturing of strength and dominance. Others welcomed the depiction of war because it possessed the potential of exorcising Vietnam from the American consciousness. The display of American technological superiority, individualism, and morally righteous warfare appeared to renew American confidence that had suffered greatly after the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. While American confidence did grow as a result of the Gulf War, the war's impact was limited. The post-Gulf surge in American confidence quickly dropped to pre-war levels. Moreover, Americans continued to view foreign affairs through the prism of their memories of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. Confronted with a foreign policy crisis, Americans only authorize the use of force if just cause would be demonstrated, the objectives were clear and compelling and victory could be achieved swiftly and with minimal casualties.

The fact that pictorial print media produced a narrative of the war in the Gulf that translated the political discourse into imagery begs the question of whether the Bush administration manipulated the media in order to win public approval for policy. From the beginning of the crisis in the Gulf, the administration intended to tightly mange media coverage

in a way the supported political goals. Since many in the administration remained convinced that journalists lost the Vietnam War, the high level of Gulf War censorship was meant to avoid a similar defeat.

While memories of Vietnam likely explain the implementation of the high level of censorship, it does not explain the press' willingness to provide the American public with only the military view of the war. According to cultural critic Douglas Kellner, the media repeated the administration's rhetoric because "there were strong corporate forces connected to the 'Big Three' TV networks which would benefit from a war in the Middle East." The result was that "the networks were boosting military technology, a military solution to the crisis, and U.S. intervention to promote corporate interests, they were acting in the interests of the corporate elite who controlled the networks." Kellner noted that NBC, ABC, and CBS had connections to US defense industries and oil companies. For example, NBC, a television network owned by General Electric (GE), derived $9 billion of its $54.5 billion in revenues from military contracts. "In other words," explained Kellner, "when correspondents and paid consultants on NBC television praised the performance of U.S. weapons, they were extolling equipment made by GE, the corporation that pays their salary."[1]

To suggest that this is the only reason for the visual narrative to match the political discourse is to ignore other evidence. In "Roots of War, The Long Road to Intervention," Hamid Mowlana suggested that the media did not wittingly work with the Bush administration to win public approval for policy. He explained that "U.S. and European mainstream media, especially the elite press and the major media outlets, have consistently supported their country's foreign policy decisions—at least in the initial stages when the defeat of a particular foreign policy was

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[1] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War,* 59-60.

not yet on the horizon—without seriously challenging their basic assumptions." In this interpretation the "coverage of the Persian Gulf War was only a chapter in that long history of the illusory concept of 'objectivity' whereby the media perceived themselves as somehow operating outside international society, eschewing all responsibilities for what took place within it."[2] The media's supreme loyalty, therefore, has always been to patriotism and national interest. Or as Noam Chomsky put it, "When the guns are firing, even if in only one direction, the media close ranks and become a cheering section for the home team. Overwhelmingly, that is what happened in the Gulf conflict."[3]

Observations made by those who covered the war in the Gulf seemingly support Mowlana's and Chomsky's conclusions. In an interview conducted by *Harper's Magazine* publisher John MacArthur, Dan Rather of CBS commented

> that you would be wise to consider the possibility that this [the Gulf War news coverage] fits into a general trend of American journalism over the last five to ten years that you can see in the coverage of political campaigns, in the coverage of domestic issues such as race and the economy….It is: just get in the middle and move with the mass; don't cause trouble; don't ask any tough questions; don't take the risk.[4]
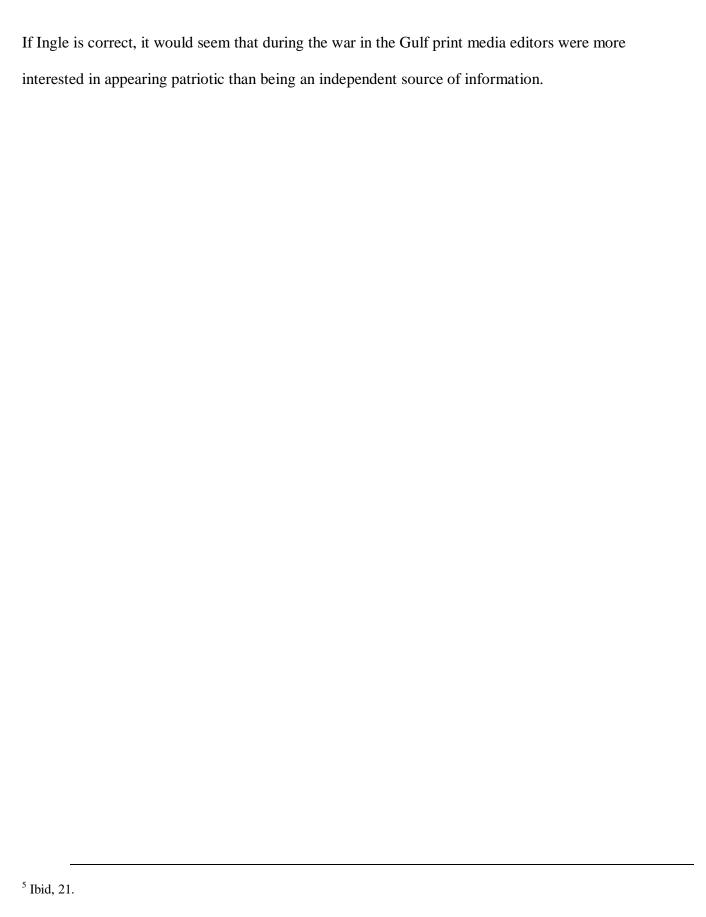
In a postwar forum at Stanford University, Robert Ingle, executive editor of the Knight-Ridder chain's *San Jose Mercury News*, put it more bluntly. Ingle noted that

> newspapers all over the country, including the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and all the others, are terribly concerned about losing touch with their readers and losing the support of their readers….Your have to keep in mind that this was a terribly popular war by all of the polls I've seen….I think the conflict between needing to stay relevant and in touch with readers, and independent of those readers, is a terribly difficult one.[5]

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[2] Hamid Mowlana, "Roots of War: The Long Road of Intervention" in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—A Global Perspective,* ed. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 31.

[3] Noam Chomsky, "The Media and the War: What War?" in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—A Global Perspective,* ed. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 54.

[4] Quoted from MacArthur, 213.

If Ingle is correct, it would seem that during the war in the Gulf print media editors were more interested in appearing patriotic than being an independent source of information.

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[5] Ibid, 21.

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