Aaron B. O'Connell

Saving Private Lynch:
A Hyperreal Hero in an Age
of Postmodern Warfare

Moving stealthily through the night, Special Forces execute a bold raid to save a private. She was hiding in her bed just after midnight when the Special Ops team found her, in a room on the first floor of Saddam… Hospital in An Nasiriya. A soldier called her name… Jessica Lynch… we're United States soldiers and we're here to protect you and take you home… She looked up at him and replied: I'm an American soldier, too. The operation had launched less than an hour before. As helicopters carrying the Special Ops forces landed outside the hospital, Predator drones circled overhead, sending pictures back to intelligence officers, who briefed commanders in the supersecure Joint Operations Center… PFC Jessica Lynch had entered Iraq as an unheralded private, a 19-year-old clerk in a rear-echelon supply unit that had the misfortune to take a wrong turn in the desert. But she left it last week as the one enlisted soldier almost every American could recognize by sight—the first U.S. prisoner to be rescued from behind enemy lines since World War II.[1]

– Jerry Adler, "Jessicas Liberation"

The passage above, taken from the April 14, 2003 cover story of *Newsweek*, recounts the spectacular rescue of Army Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch from a hospital in Iraq after ten days of captivity. Next to Lynch's photo reads a headline in large print: "**Saving Private Lynch**," but in the bottom left hand corner of the cover, is a different label: a photo credit reading

PFC Jessica Lynch. Other media productions on the rescue—the news reports, television interviews and magazine articles—repeated the same move: using the caption **Saving Private Lynch** while correctly referring to her elsewhere as a PFC rather than a private. Though a small matter, this mislabeling of Lynch's rank provides a useful point of entry into a conversation about media representations during wartime, for the substitution of private for PFC was not an accident. Rather, it was intentionally performed to fill the Lynch story with the symbolic capital of Steven Spielberg's 1998 World War II film *Saving Private Ryan*.

This article addresses three themes present in the epigraph: the power of captivity narratives in American war stories; the ramifications of interpreting the war in Iraq through the lens of World War II; and the changes wrought by the U.S.'s postmodern military on war and American society. The argument contains three parts. Part one covers the rescue itself and provides some background on how it was portrayed in the media. Part two offers a textual analysis of the media representations of the rescue (which I refer to in shorthand as Saving Private Lynch), reading it as both a captivity narrative, and a retelling of *Saving Private Ryan*. Part three is a historical investigation of post-Vietnam civil-military relations in America, focused explicitly on how the military has learned to better represent itself to its domestic audience. Here, I chart the change over time in the military's strategies for managing its image, focusing specifically on the links between the military and the entertainment industries. Though not new, the relationship between the military and the producers of mass culture has changed dramatically since Vietnam and deserves a fresh look. In my conclusion, I examine both *Saving Private Ryan* and Jessica Lynch as sources of resistance to the hyperreality of the postmodern military.

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> *Special Forces execute a bold raid to save a private.*

When Jessica Lynch disappeared after her convoy was ambushed on March 23, 2003, the war in the Gulf was not going entirely to plan. Despite assurances of a speedy victory, there was little flower throwing, kissing or celebrating as the soldiers and Marines crossed the border from Kuwait. Retired generals began second guessing the Pentagon on national television almost immediately. With the war only three days old, there was a general state of discursive instability that comes with a media crisis. How should the public and the military—whom we might call the viewers and doers of war—contextualize

the conflict? Is it a continuation of the Gulf War? Is it liberation, like Paris, 1944? And the most important question: could it become another Vietnam, where good intentions and promises of a short war led to ten years of causalities and a national wound whose effects linger still. In the days that followed, television footage of American prisoners of war, civilian casualties, and high school photographs of Lynch began appearing in the nightly news summaries, making Americans increasingly skeptical of a quick victory. In the second week of the war, a poll conducted by ABC and *The Washington Post* registered a drop in optimism on the war with expectations of serious U.S. casualties soaring to 82%—twenty points higher than the previous highest figure.[2] Though domestic support for the president still held firm, the reasons for going to war no longer seemed so clear.

Then, on April 1st, a Special Forces team accompanied by a military cameraman rescued Lynch in a high-tech recovery operation. A still shot of soldiers loading Lynch safely into a helicopter replaced her high school photos in the evening news, and the nation warmed with patriotic and religious fervor. Poll numbers reversed immediately. Another version of the same *Washington Post* poll, taken two days after the rescue registered a thirteen point jump in those who though the war was going "very well"—numbers which, at the time, were "better than the even the best ratings for either the war on terrorism or the war in Afghanistan."[3] Overnight, the young PFC became the first—and still the most memorable—hero of the war. Even the Blackhawk helicopter, whose reputation had taken such a beating since Somalia, was returned to the good graces of the American public for carrying Lynch home. Time Magazine reported that "it was like *Black Hawk Down* except nothing went wrong."[4]

But things had gone wrong, if not in the performance of the rescue, then in the very fact of its occurrence. Special Forces rescue missions are more dangerous and intricate than video games would have us believe; therefore, they are usually reserved for downed pilots or hostages possessing classified information, not junior enlisted supply clerks. The battlefield calculus of risking ten to fifteen lives to save just one only makes sense when the hostage has access to information or materials that places other friendly forces at risk. Why put a squad of soldiers in danger just to save one PFC? Furthermore, Special Forces teams are task-organized with the minimal personnel and equipment to accomplish the mission; unnecessary personnel only increase the risk of casualties. Why then was a cameraman added to the mission? The team was already equipped with helmet cameras that transmit a grainy green image and yet, an extra life was risked to film the rescue in multicolor.

In the days that followed more problems and questions emerged. On April third, *The Washington Post*, citing an unnamed Pentagon official, ran a story entitled "She was Fighting to the Death," which claimed Lynch had suffered multiple gunshot and stab wounds while firing her weapon dry, statements that were later refuted by Lynch, her family and her doctors, but not by the military.[5] By her own admission, Lynch never fired a shot in the ambush, and was knocked unconscious by the car crash that killed her best friend and roommate, PFC Lori Piestewa. The army awarded Lynch the Purple Heart, the Prisoner of War Medal and the Bronze Star, the nation's fourth highest award for valor in ground combat. One prominent Vietnam veteran wrote that "the army needed a female hero to boost female recruiting and PR [public relations] efforts, so they went and invented one."[6]

Others, with more immediate knowledge of the rescue, would also accuse the military of theatrics. Dr. Anmar Uday, one of the doctors present at Saddam Hospital the day of the rescue recounts:

> …we were surprised. Why do this? There was no military, there were no soldiers in the hospital… it was like a Hollywood film. They cried, go, go, go, with guns and blanks and the sound of explosions. They made a show—an action movie like Sylvester Stallone or Jackie Chan, with jumping and shouting, breaking down doors.[7]

In the weeks following the rescue, Lynch became a national celebrity. Five of the seven largest media companies in America approached Lynch for the rights to her story, and a heated bidding war began. In the end, almost everyone got a piece of the action. General Electric's NBC got a television movie deal; Disney's ABC got an exclusive interview with Diane Sawyer; Bertelsmann's Knopf publishers got a book contract for *I am a Soldier Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*.[8] Viacom, which had offered Lynch a CBS News documentary on the rescue, a book deal from Simon & Schuster, an MTV Total Request Live show aired from her hometown, and a co-host slot on MTV2, got nothing.[9] Almost all the cultural productions on Lynch shared two things in common. They all portrayed Lynch as both a hero and a victim, and all but the book (which Lynch had heavy involvement in) misrepresented her rank, using the tagline Saving Private Lynch in order to tap the cultural power of a far more sophisticated piece of storytelling: *Saving Private Ryan*.

Whether or not the Lynch rescue was staged or just overplayed is both debatable and difficult to prove. But one thing is certain: there was constant

attention by the special operators who executed the mission and by the military and political planners above them to how the rescue would play on television. And this is a key point, because it is emblematic of two trends this article hopes to track: how military operations are becoming increasingly imaged, imagined, and performed for a domestic audience, and conversely, how media operations are becoming more and more militarized. These twin developments find their roots in the military's adaptation to the loss of Vietnam War, and have shaped both how American society gives consent to go to war and how the military manages that consent.

> *The first U.S. prisoner to be rescued from*
> *behind enemy lines since World War II.*

A textual reading of the media's representations of the Lynch rescue must begin with the acknowledgement that Private Lynch is not the same thing as PFC Lynch. In fact, there is no such thing as Private Lynch. It is a media event, a hyperreal fiction.[10] We must be clear to distinguish between the two: Jessie Lynch is a person, a young woman, still suffering from broken bones, partial paralysis, and an experience of trauma. Private Lynch, on the other hand, is a discourse: a constellation of statements, images, and shared assumptions, imbued with meaning by its relation to a fictional text. The effect of this pairing is twofold. First, it recasts the military as a family that rescues the children of the American citizenry, obscuring the fact that it is also the organization that demands their sacrifice. The story becomes one of family loyalty and domesticity, rather then one of politics and war-fighting efficiency. Second, the association with *Saving Private Ryan* marks the European theater of World War II as the rightful precedent of the War in Iraq instead of the far more appropriate, but troubling, legacy of Vietnam.

None of this is to say, however, that the media served as a simple functionary of the military's public relations efforts. While program directors and editors used the tagline Saving Private Lynch intentionally to connect the story with *Saving Private Ryan*, they did not do so as part of a coordinated military effort to paper over the problems of the war. Rather, they, like all producers of mass media, were seeking a story that would sell. In so doing, however, they performed the very service needed by the war's managers: a mobilization of support for the military and the government at the very moment that their predictions of an easy war seemed egregiously off the mark. What are more

interesting than the motives driving the producers, however, are the cultural maneuvers that creating a saleable or meaningful story entailed. In short, rather than asking *why* the story was told, we would do better to investigate *how* it was told. From where does the story derive its power? What myths or narratives are being invoked and what contracts installed between us, the viewers of war, and the soldiers and the state—the doers of war?

Saving Private Lynch is not simply a retelling of *Saving Private Ryan*, nor does it derive its effect solely through connections to World War II. The Lynch story reaches further back in the history of war stories in America, drawing on the generic tradition of the captivity narrative, which has commanded strong cultural capital since the seventeenth century. To understand the power of Saving Private Lynch we must approach the text with bifocals: reading it in relation to both the closer shared historical memory of World War II and in relation to the more distant and less obvious discursive pattern of captivity narratives. It is this specific pairing—of the recent memory of World War II combined with three centuries of racialized and gendered wartime stories about captivity—that made the Lynch story so significant for both the viewers and the doers of war.

Melani McAlister has argued that the Lynch "story resonates because it is the latest iteration of a classic American war fantasy: the captivity narrative."[11] From Mary Rowlandson's account of her capture by Wampanoag Indians in 1675 to the Iran hostage crisis of 1979, storytellers have recast wars in America as narratives of captivity and rescue. In a generic captivity narrative, "the captive (an ordinary, innocent individual, often a woman) embodies a people threatened from outside. The captive confronts dangers and upholds her faith; in so doing, she becomes a symbol, representing the nation's virtuous identity to itself." In its twentieth-century iterations, captivity narratives often painted the state as both the captive and the rescuer. From World War II to the first Gulf War, the U.S. told itself stories of "benevolent supremacy"—of conceiving America as a powerful parent that brings freedom to captive nations through the tough love of military intervention.[12] Saving Private Lynch repeated this tradition: "Americans were primed to expect a story of rescue—not just because our president told us that we would save Iraq and ourselves, but because for more than two centuries our culture has made the liberation of captives into a trope for American righteousness."[13]

In addition to its many precedents in our cultural memory, the captivity narrative also draws its power from deep-seated fears about gender and race in American culture. In most narratives, the captive is both hero and victim— tough and determined, yet feminine and oriented toward the domestic sphere

of home, family, and motherhood. Such a portrayal both valorizes traditional femininity and reinforces war as a fundamentally male activity undertaken to protect women. It recasts war as what Laura Wexler calls "tender violence:" a notion of violence that re-frames politics through the more familiar lens of domesticity.[14] Furthermore, captivity narratives enlist the racial baggage that is inextricably part of American culture; while exceptions do exist, captivity narratives are overwhelmingly stories of white women being saved from non-white men. Specialist Shoshanna Johnson, an African-American female soldier captured in the same ambush as Lynch, received almost no attention in the national media, nor did Hopi Indian PFC Lori Piestewa, Lynch's best friend and roommate. One reasons for the disparity in media coverage is that the Lynch story fit the racial pattern of the captivity narrative, while the Johnson and Piestewa stories did not.

But while drawing on the deep cultural legacy of captivity narratives, Saving Private Lynch also references another cultural memory, one that provides perhaps the most powerful benevolent vision of the U.S. military existing in American culture today: that of World War II. Let us now turn to *Saving Private Ryan* to demonstrate how the Lynch rescue draws legitimacy from the World War II story, and thus, reframes the war in Iraq as a story of rescue and family. Here is a quick reminder of the plot of the film. Following the invasion of Normandy, the Chief of Staff of the Army learns that three of the four Ryan brothers have been killed in combat all within the same week. He then orders the fourth son, Private James Ryan (Matt Damon) back home to Iowa. Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) and his squad of seven endure countless hardships and casualties searching for the young Private. In the process, they repeatedly ask the question that Americans never asked about the Lynch rescue. PFC Rivan states it most explicitly: "Can anyone explain the math of this to me? I mean, what's the sense of risking the eight of us to save one guy?… The rest of us got mothers [too]."[15] Captain Miller answers this question twice. Through his answers, we can chart the shift to tender violence as Miller searches for different explanations to motivate his men toward an end that seems wrongheaded and irrational. His first explanation places obedience to the state above family ties. The mission falls under "our duty as soldiers. We all have orders; we need to follow them. That supersedes everything, including your mothers."[16] But this answer fails to satisfy both Miller and his men, because, as the second in command reminds the captain after their first casualty, "this time the mission is a man."[17] The second time Rivan asks Miller for an explanation, the moral mathematics have gotten even more problematic. The squad has lost a second man trying to find Ryan, and Captain Miller has released a German prisoner of war against his

men's wishes. At this point, with the squad on the brink of mutiny, Miller offers a new justification, one that explains the mission not as an end in itself, but as a means to another, more appropriate end. Ryan "means nothing to me," says Miller, "but if going to Remel, and finding him so he can go home, if that earns me the right to get back to my wife, then that's my mission."[18] This is a reversal worth noting: where before, duty to the military trumped family obligation, now the mission is itself an act of family loyalty. Miller's second in command, states this explicitly in the line that gives the film its title:

> Someday we might look back on this and decide that *Saving Private Ryan* was the only decent thing we were able to pull out of the whole god-awful shitty mess… like you said, Captain, we do that and we all earn the right to go home.[19]

The re-interpretation of the mission as a duty to family would be repeated by the military and the media during the Lynch rescue. The public's many questions surrounding the war in Iraq—its legal status, the questionable evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and the practicality of liberating Iraq—faded in the pleasing glow of a story of a lost daughter returned to her parents. As Melani McAlister explains it: "if the war's first weeks didn't give us as many pictures of Iraqis welcoming their own rescue by American liberators as we expected, the image of a blonde American woman being saved may be the next best thing."[20] Through the story of Saving Private Lynch, the U.S. military became, just like in *Saving Private Ryan*, an organization whose primary role seems to be saving innocent lives, rather prosecuting war. And not only was the life they saved a pretty young women, as *Newsweek* reminded its audience, she was "the first U.S. prisoner to be rescued from behind enemy lines since World War II."[21]

What, then, are the broader political effects of the Lynch rescue? How does this insertion of familial affect change the way one thinks about the politics of war? Tender violence works by substituting private obligations for public ones—it tells us war is about loyalty to family rather than an obligation to the state.[22] This perception occurs both for the doers of war, the soldiers, who use a lens of domesticity to understand their violence and for the civilian viewers as well. Everyone is "culturally conscripted."[23] This re-framing of war is an act of discipline. It mandates what the public can and cannot question by enforcing a loyalty contract. Viewers are pressed to accept the war unconditionally, just as members of a family are supposed to love and support each other unconditionally. Opposition becomes a family betrayal on the scale of the entire nation. For most of the viewers and the doers of war, these narratives of family become

the emotional truth of the conflict: they trump the less affective stories one normally tells oneself about the civic duty to question the actions carried out in the name of the citizenry.

This, then, is the first thing Saving Private Lynch does: it softens and re-frames war by offering it to us with the emotional logic of family relations. When Lynch became the media darling of the war, the military was re-framed as benevolent rescuers, and any attempts to label them otherwise would be attacked as an act of family betrayal. But there's something else that happens in both *Saving Private Ryan* and Saving Private Lynch. Neither of the protagonists remains as a simple object of protection. They change into heroes. In *Saving Private Ryan*, once Captain Miller finds Ryan, the private refuses to be rescued, since it would mean leaving his fellow soldiers one man short in the final battle. When Miller reminds Ryan that his mother is awaiting his return, he replies: "tell her that when you found me I was here with the only brothers I have left, and that there was no way I was leaving them. I think she'll understand that."[24] With this line, Ryan stakes his claim to manhood: even if he is being rescued, he is going to fight first. And fight he does, though Captain Miller and most of the squad die in the battle, leaving Ryan to return home grateful, but emotionally scarred.

The same role-reversal would be foisted on Lynch by the military message-makers. In the days after her disappearance, she was portrayed as a passive victim in need of a hero; immediately after the rescue, she had become the hero herself, earning a medal for her "exemplary courage under fire."[25] This instability is partly due to the captivity narrative itself, which offers a role for the captive that can be both heroic and vulnerable at the same time. But here, we should not attribute too much to genre. Lynch did not become a hero because the captivity narrative deemed her one, but because she was intentionally and dishonestly lionized by the military public relations effort. Though her only act during the ambush was to get on her knees and pray, the Pentagon swore she had fought fiercely to avoid capture. Why? Here we can make some claims about intention and manipulation, and the obvious answer is that allowing Lynch to remain a victim indefinitely could have hampered the war effort. While her rescue gives the United States a morally unambiguous reason for fighting, Lynch's continued status as a victim of war thereafter, one with obvious wounds and trauma, threatened to become an indictment against the conflict. By turning Lynch into a hero, the military performed another act of preemption by conscripting Lynch into the role of spokesperson for the military, rather than victim of it.

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From the cultural substructure facilitating the Saving Private Lynch, we turn now to the military-media infrastructure that supported it. And to begin, we must return to one of our original questions: why would the military risk a squad of special operators for a junior enlisted supply clerk? What set of historical experiences led them to conclude that the reward of recovering Lynch was worth the risk of the rescue? In short, the rescue was performed because the military recognized that Lynch had a strategic value—a new kind of strategic value—that they could apply to the war effort. Lynch's rescue was a preemptive move taken to prevent a collapse of public support for the War in Iraq. Though no such collapse was imminent or even likely, military and political planners saw an opportunity to act in advance of the threat, much as they had with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Military leaders, like the public, were thinking about Vietnam, and taking to heart its central lesson: losing the public means losing the war. Unlike in previous wars, the strategic asset was not terrain, or equipment or even a person, but information: it was the story of the rescue and the images of it that were useful, not just the rescue itself. This new focus on information and image-management as a primary strategic asset in warfare is one of the key components of the United States new way of fighting wars which, following Chris Hables Grey, we might call postmodern warfare.[26]

The nineteenth-century author and journalist Ambrose Bierce once quipped that war is God's way of teaching Americans geography. But Vietnam was more a lesson in media studies. The United States lost the Vietnam War not on the ground or in the air, but on the airwaves—not on the front lines, but on the homefront.[27] The Tet offensive of 1968, a tactical failure for the North Vietnamese in all respects, became a strategic victory because it gave the lie to the U.S. government's repeated claims that the war was nearly won. Even with all the advantages of a modern war machine—a fully industrialized economy, scientifically organized to maximize the mass production of armaments and matériel, U.S. military planners could not operate effectively against the negative effects of a television war. In 1968, the management of information (which has always been a critical element in armed conflict) became a center of gravity: a hinge on which all else depends. As the U.S. military failed to adapt to this new fact, it lost the support of its own domestic population. This, in turn, helped to

demoralize the troops, limit the tactical and strategic options, and eventually, force the exit of the most technologically advanced army in the world.

During and after Vietnam, the military began to understand that in a sense, they needed protection from the citizenry they were charged with protecting. Negative coverage had become a threat in itself. Vietnam was the first time in U.S. history when in the eyes of the military, a public relations failure lost the war. The military's solution has been to prevent future losses by controlling public opinion much like they would a piece of terrain. After a few unsuccessful attempts to control the press using press pools and lockouts, in the last twenty years, the military has begun to do "media / information intervention"— conceiving of the civilian media not as a threat but as an asset, "a dominant operational and strategic weapon."[28] As one group of military strategists put it, since "television news may become a more powerful operational weapon than armored divisions," the military must not exclude it from operations, but incorporate it, applying the media toward the center of gravity that is public opinion.[29] As a result of this new strategy, the state is training military power on territories previously off limits, namely the military's own domestic population. This is the state of warfare in the twenty-first century: a world where information has replaced matériel and firepower as "the single most significant military factor…the crucial military resource."[30] This development involves a rather unsettling contradiction: the postmodern military, operating on behalf of the citizenry it is charged to protect has begun actively targeting that population in order to protect *itself* from them.

This goal of information management has led to significant changes in the way the military and the entertainment industries interact. None of this is to say that the use of the media to advance political goals—what might be loosely called propaganda—is new. But certain techniques of control, like embedded reporters, *are* new. There are three major changes, all appearing in the last twenty years or so, which deserve mention. First, there is a difference in quantity—in the sheer volume of entertainment products being supported by the military. This alone has helped create stronger and more streamlined institutional links between the military and the media. Second, the types of products receiving support from the military have expanded. Military advising and assistance have spread from the film industry to network and cable television and to the video game community. Finally, this expanded use of entertainment media fits hand-in-glove with the imaging and information-based weapons and reconnaissance systems that dominate war fighting today. This use of images both to fight and to justify the fighting has provoked a new set of social relations for the soldiers themselves, some of whose jobs consist of watching or manipulating screens

much like a movie or a video game. As a result of these changes, we are moving toward a new American way of war where the lines between the viewers and doers—between those who watch a war and those who fight it—are becoming impossibly blurred.

   As other scholars have shown, the links between the military and the film industry go back as far as the 1920s when *Wings* (the first film to win an Academy Award for Best Picture), was made with the full cooperation of the Army Air Corps.[31] But the occasional cooperation of previous years bears no resemblance to the situation today. In 1968, the only film receiving support was John Wayne's *The Green Berets*. Now, the Department of Defense supports over sixty films a year. We can mark a specific point in time when this changed: 1986, exactly the midpoint between Tet and 2004. In 1986, the military supported a film that is credited with single-handedly rehabilitating the U.S. military in the eyes of the domestic public and setting the Department of Defense and the film industry on a path of mutual exploitation: *Top Gun*.[32] Before *Top Gun*, the standard process for gaining approval for military support was to submit a finished script to the relevant branch of service, at which point it went through copious amounts of red tape, and sometimes emerged at the other end with support. But the producers of *Top Gun* did something different. Even before a script was written, Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson secured Pentagon approval by agreeing in advance to all changes the military desired in the script once it was completed. It helped, of course, that the Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, "was actively encouraging his public affairs officers to find a suitable project to support— one that would directly benefit the service."[33] As a result, director Tony Scott received unprecedented access to Navy facilities, to include fighter and rescue aircraft, bases, personnel, and an aircraft carrier. The day after the premier, lines formed outside navy recruiting offices and *Top Gun* went on to became the top grossing film of 1986.[34] The following year, the Department of Defense began re-writing their manual for supporting entertainment products, which had been last updated in 1964. Among other changes, the revised version greatly expands the range of productions eligible for support to include "theatrical and motion picture, television mini-series, network, cable, syndicated television, or direct video release productions."[35]

   Some of the films that have received support in recent years include *The Sum of All Fears*, *Air Force One*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Blackhawk Down* just to name a few, and they, like NBC's television drama *Saving Jessica Lynch* were edited by the military as a condition for Department of Defense participation. Again, the change here is not so much in the fact of military participation, but in the institutionalization of the process, and the

scale on which it is occurring. Second, the scope of support has changed. The military has gone from granting access for the occasional film to supporting television shows like CBS's *JAG* and Navy *NCIS*, pseudo-documentaries like ABC's *Profiles from the Front Line*, producing MTV specials, and even helping to develop video games like *SOCOM 2* and *America's Army: Operations*, which offer the viewer of war the chance to become an active participant. In 1997, the Marine Corps created *Marine Doom:* a modified version of the video game *Doom II*, which is a training tool for honing Marines target acquisition and target discrimination skills.[36] In 1999 the Department of Defenses experimentation with video games led to a $45 million contract at the University of Southern California for the Institute for Creative Technologies, a joint venture that brought together the academy, corporate world and military "to create a research center to develop advanced military simulations. The research center will enlist film studios and video game designers for the effort, with the promise that any technological advances can also be applied to make more compelling video games and theme park rides."[37]

These new improved linkages between the military and the media allowed both institutions to deploy the Lynch story toward different but complementary purposes. The military used its partnership with the media to ensure mass distribution of the story, and manipulated the facts to support the war effort. The different media outlets involved—news services, news magazines and entertainment television—sustained the story for profit, thereby aiding the military's propaganda effort. But the media's loose handling of facts is hardly the most important result of this 21st-century military-media nexus. More important is the effect on the viewers and doers of war, who now fight and experience war on a hyperreal battlefield. Warfare today is so conditioned by media fictions, that even the soldiers experiencing combat have trouble distinguishing between the two: *Blackhawk Down* author Mark Bowden's comments that in his interviews with veterans of the Mogadishu battle in Somalia: "they remarked again and again how much they felt like they were in a movie and had to remind themselves that this horror, the blood, the death was real."[38] The fictional representations of combat are authenticating the real experience in advance; soldiers find meaning through a performance of identity that links their actions in combat to a film or video game. The doers find meaning by becoming viewers, understanding their actions by contextualizing themselves as actors in a film they've seen before. As one Marine from Iraq put it: "I was just thinking one thing when we drove into that ambush. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City [a video game]… I felt like I was living it."[39]

What further complicated matters is that much of warfare today consists of humans killing other humans via a video screen. Soldiers are routinely trained

on simulators, and operate weapons and reconnaissance systems that are nearly indistinguishable from video games. Among the technologies being employed during the Lynch rescue was the Predator drone—an unmanned aerial vehicle, controlled by a satellite linked to a human operator in Virginia. One Predator operator, Staff Sergeant Veronica Ortiz, said of her performance in the war: "In a sense, it does feel strange, fighting the war from here, but as any operator will tell you, once we walk into the van, we're at war; we're in theater; we're all business."[40] So meaning and even reality in this new way of war are troublingly unstable: soldiers on the battlefield feel they are not in a war but in a movie, and those staring at screens in Virginia insist they are experiencing combat in the Central Command (CENTCOM) "theater." This is not surprising. For when a soldier learns of the military through Hollywood films, is recruited through video games, is trained through simulators and fights with a video screen, it is only natural that entertainment mediums become the dominant frame of reference. Americans are distancing themselves from the human dimensions of combat, at the very moment that we increase our military operations around the world. This is troubling, because as inhuman and barbaric as warfare is, it is all the more inhuman if one fails to recognize the real effects of military technologies on bodies, psyches, and souls. This new world of postmodern warfare—while effective and perhaps even entertaining for some—is frighteningly close to being post-human.

She looked up at him and replied: "I'm an American soldier, too."

𝔍 have argued that Saving Private Lynch was able to re-frame the war in Iraq for two reasons. First, it drew on long-standing cultural legacies that endowed it with power, and second, it was facilitated by the stronger military-media cooperation of the postmodern military. But if this is so, what can be done? Where is individual agency in a hyperreal world where cultural narratives direct behavior and the military shapes the narratives? Despite the pessimism of the preceding pages, there is still room for counter narratives. In fact, both *Saving Private Ryan* and Jessica Lynch herself offer us lessons on resisting the simplistic melodrama of Saving Private Lynch, and it is to these moments of resistance that we turn to now by way of a conclusion.

Though the Lynch rescue appropriated the most patriotic elements of *Saving Private Ryan*, it goes too far to call Spielberg's film a military melodrama. It is at times melodramatic, particularly the framing of the U.S. military as an

institution that rescues and returns sons to their mothers, rather than one that demands their sacrifice. But *Saving Private Ryan* focuses very little on the nobility of the mission; most of the three hours are filled with fear, confusion and the brutal costs of executing an irrational task that none of the soldiers understand. This contraposition—of thirty or so minutes of romantic idealism set against two hours of stomach-turning violence—seems to give the lie to the melodrama. The violence in Spielberg's film is anything but tender; it belongs more in the tradition of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* than with Mel Gibsons *We Were Soldiers* (2002). But of course, the numerous re-tellings of Saving Private Lynch don't rehearse the ambiguity in Spielberg's film. By invoking only the title, Saving Private Lynch remains little more than comfort food—a pleasant tale of rescue and family that reinforces the benevolent supremacy of the U.S. military by associating Lynch with World War II. We are meant to forget the inanity of risking eight soldiers to save one, but to remember the fidelity of a nation that, like a family itself, is willing to make irrational and emotional sacrifices to save one of its own.

However, twenty months after Saving Private Lynch, and six years after its release, *Saving Private Ryan* resurfaced in the national spotlight. In November 2004, the film sparked a short but vigorous national debate on patriotism and indecency in the media when ABC sought to run the film on Veterans Day without edits, as it had done in 2001 and 2002. At issue was the strong language and realistic depictions of combat, which one family group believed was "OK on the battlefield, but not OK on the public airwaves during prime-time broadcast hours."[41] A number of ABC affiliates planned to pull the broadcast, prompting Senator John McCain of Arizona not only to support the film, but to campaign for its airing and to introduce the broadcast. ABC released a statement, claiming the film's goal was to educate the public on "the devastating realities of war."[42] If *Saving Private Ryan* helped Saving Private Lynch turn attention away from the less palatable aspects of war in 2003, by 2004, it had become a vehicle for another purpose entirely: reminding America what war does to its children, and questioning how the media should represent it.

Jessica Lynch's own statements on her rescue are a testament to personal agency as well, for even though the military used her to justify the war, she did not go gently into that role. Here are some of the statements that she made publicly, and which ultimately served to discredit much of the military's bluster about the rescue. In regards to *The Washington Post* article that claimed she was fighting to the death she said: "It hurt that people would make up stories… I am not about to take credit for something I did or did not do." When asked why she thought the rescue was filmed, she replied: "It bothers me that they used me to

symbolize all this stuff… it's wrong. I don't know why they filmed it."[43] And perhaps most telling, on the death of Lori Piestewa, her best friend and mother of two children, she said: "We went and did our job and that was to go to the war, but I wish I hadn't done it—I wish it had never happened. I wish we hadn't been there, none of us… I don't care about the political stuff. But if it had never happened, Lori would be alive and all the rest of the soldiers would be alive. And none of this [referring to her wheelchair] would have happened."[44]

Lynch's book, *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*, though hardly a work of protest, also has episodes that intervene in the politics of the war. One of the last vignettes of Lynch, narrated by author Rick Bragg, is particularly moving:

> A few nights later, around midnight Jessi was lifted into her bed, with a photo album for company… there was not one sound in whole hollow except the singing of the insects and, from Jessi's room, sobs. She's lookin at pictures of Lori, and crying, Greg Lynch said, his eyes red. [Her mother] Dee stood across the kitchen, staring at the tops of her shoes.[45]

Since the book release, Lynch has remained in the public eye, participating in the Governor's state of the state address, doing motivational speaking, and promoting the Jessica Lynch Foundation, whose goal it is to educate the children of military veterans. One of the more interesting public appearances she made was for Carnival Cruise Lines in February 2004, where she served as the official "godmother" by christening their newest cruise ship, Carnival Miracle.[46] A war hero and a godmother—the dual gender roles of the captivity narrative linger still. But while working inside the roles that have been thrust upon her, Lynch has remained active, popular, and credible. For some, she has emerged a different kind of hero, one who stood up to the military's attempt at co-optation, and stood firmly by her truth of the war's tragedy.

Lynch's popularity demonstrates something important about how Americans tell war stories, namely, that the dominant narratives of war are still human ones, even if the tools are increasingly mechanical. One of the reasons war is so seductive for viewers and doers alike is because it reinforces communal bonds. It tells people that they are important enough to protect, providing a framework for acts of sacrifice that strengthen the networks of imagined community and fictive kinship.[47] Above all, as I have tried to show here, war has meaning in American culture because it taps the emotional power of discourses of home and family. As such, films like *Saving Private Ryan* and speakers like Lynch have the most power to shape the conversation about war when they work within the logic of tender

violence while simultaneously highlighting its inconsistencies and contradictions. By demanding that the public consider the military as part of the family of the nation, such speakers raise the stakes involved in trading lives for political goals. Particularly if those who speak have the "martial first-class citizenship" of veterans, their claims of family betrayal will find willing listeners.[48]

The fact that Lynch is considered credible today—and the spin of Saving Private Lynch is not—is perhaps the best evidence that the military's control over the human terrain of public opinion is not a *fait accompli*. Citizens are not impotent to resist the expanding cultural power of the postmodern military. Though political and military leaders were successful in temporarily appropriating her, she fought back. Lynch's statements push against the effort to turn her into an emblem of the war; she resists a political use of her image, and counters the efforts to domesticate combat. She reminds us of the human consequences of armed conflict. Her sadness knifes its way through all the spectacle of patriotism and militarism. War, she reminds us, is not a noble fight for family, but a thing that breaks bodies and robbed Lori Piestewa's children of their mother. To say this—while simultaneously staking her claim to speak with authority in a military culture dominated by paternalism—deserves acknowledgment for what it is: *bravery*.

Notes

1. Jerry Adler, "Jessicas Liberation," *Newsweek* 14 April 2003, 42.

2. Gary Langer, "Support for War with Iraq Hold Fast, even as Expectations of Casualties Soar," ABC News.com; available from http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html; Internet; accessed 20 February 2005.

3. Gary Langer, "Surge in Optimism Greets Battlefield Gains," ABC News.com, posted 3 April 2003; available from http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

4. Judy Morse, et al. "Saving Private Jessica," *Time*, 14 April 2003, 67.

5. Susan Schmidt and Vernon Loeb, "She Was Fighting to the Death: Details Emerging of W. Va. Soldiers Capture and Rescue," *The Washington Post*, 3 April, 2003; sec A, p. 1.

6. Colonel David Hackworth, "Using Jessica Lynch," WorldNetDaily.com; available from http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=34272; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

7. Jack Kampfner, "The Truth about Jessica" segment on *War Spin*, television program, BBC2, 15 May, 2003. Transcript available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,956127,00.html; accessed 24 February 2005.

8. Rick Bragg, *I am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003). The fifth company that approached Lynch, News Corp., was also refused a contract, but their subsidiary, Harper Collins, published Mohammed Odeh Al-Rehaief's account of the rescue without Lynch's cooperation. See Mohammed Odeh Al-Rehaief with Jeff Coplon, *Because Each Life is Precious: Why an Iraqi Man Risked Everything for Private Jessica Lynch* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

9. John Gorman, "No Credibility, No Problem, Viacom Wants to Sell you Everything," *Cleveland Free Times*, 9 July, 2003; Internet; available at http://www.freetimes.com/modules.php? op=modload &name=News&file=article&sid=102&newlang=eng; accessed 24 February 2005.

10. Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality challenges the basic assumption that cultural representations have meaning because they refer back to experiences in real life—that the productions of artists, writers and the culture industries are maps drawn from the territory of the real. Rather, Baudrillard argues the opposite: the map precedes the territory—it is not that cultural productions have meaning because the refer back to real life, but rather real-live events have meaning precisely because they correspond to film, television, and other forms of media. The actual experience becomes just another reproduction of the pre-existing fictional representation—a simulacrum or copy without an original. For a fine application of Baudrillard's concept to television and American mass culture, see Lynne Joyrich, "All that Television Allows: TV Melodrama, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture," *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* 16 (January 1988), 129-151, esp. 137-9.

11. Melani McAlister, "Saving Private Lynch," *The New York Times*, 6 April 2003, sec. 4, p. 13.

12. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, 1945-2000, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 43-83.

13. Melani McAlister, "Saving Private Lynch" *The New York Times*, April 6, 2003, sec. 4, p. 13.

14. Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 52-53.

15. Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan*, (Los Angeles: Amblin Entertainment, 1998), DVD Ch. 6, 43 minutes, 20 seconds (hereafter: 6, 43.20).

16. Ibid., 6, 43.40.

17. Ibid., 9, 1.08.01.

18. Ibid., 13, 1.42.04.

19. Ibid., 14, 1.52.58

20. McAlister, New York Times, sec. 4 p. 13.

21. Adler, 42.

22. Robert A. Westbrook, "I want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation," *American Quarterly* (December 1990), 591.

23. Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 17-18.

24. *Saving Private Ryan*, 14, 1.15.22.

25. Lynch's Bronze Star citation is reprinted in Colonel David Hackworth, "Using Jessica Lynch," WorldNetDaily.com; available from http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp? ARTICLE_ ID=34272; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

26. The primacy of information as a strategic weapon is just one of the components of postmodern warfare. See Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 36-40.

27. David C. King and Zachary Karabell, *The Generation of Trust: How the U.S. Military has Regained the Publics Confidence Since Vietnam* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2003), p. 20-21.

28. William S. Lind, et al. "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1989, 22-26.

29. Ibid., 24.

30. Gray, 22, 38.

31. *Wings*, a Lucian Hubbard Production (1927) was also the only silent film ever to win best picture. For a good history of military cooperation with the film industry see Lawrence Suid, *Sailing on the Silver Screen: Hollywood and the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), and Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

32. Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer, *Top Gun* (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1986). Admiral John Shanahan, "The Military and the Movies," *America's Defense Monitor*, 27 January 1997. Transcript available at www.cdi.org/adm/Transcripts/1020/; Internet; accessed on 24 February 2005.

33. Suid, 229.

34. King and Karabell, 7.

35. Department of Defense Instruction 5410.16, DoD Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Motion Picture, Television and Video Productions, p. 13.

36. Robert Rydell, Doom Goes to War, *Wired*, April 1997 available at www.wired.com/wired/5.04/; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

37. Andrew Pollack, "Trying to Improve Training, Army Turns to Hollywood," *The New York Times* 18 August, 1999., sec A., p. 17.

38. Mark Bowden, *Blackhawk Down: A Story of Modern Warfare* (New York: Signet, 2001), 422.

39. *Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War* by Evan Wright, (New York: G.P Putnam, 2004), 5.

40. "Network Centric Warfare" on *Innovation*, (New York: Thirteen), originally aired 3 March, 2003, 9pm EDT.

41. Ann Oldenburg, "Some Stations Shelved Private Ryan Amid FCC Fears," *USA Today*, 11 November 2004; sec. News, p. 24.

42. Ibid.

43. Jessica Lynch: "I'm No Hero," ABC's *Primetime*, originally aired 6 November 2003. Transcript available at http://abcnews.go.com/sections/Primetime/US/Jessica_Lynch_031106-1.html; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

44. Bragg, 199.

45. Bragg, 200.

46. "New Carnival Miracle to Operate Diverse Inaugural Schedule in 2004" in *Cruise News*, available at http://www.cruise411.com/cruise_buzz/feature_article.asp?article_ID=411; Internet; accessed 24 February 2005.

47. On imagined community, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). On fictive kinship, see Jay Winter, "Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War" in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 54-56.

48. Ilene Rose Feinman, *Citizenship Rights: Feminist Soldiers and Feminist Antimilitarists* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 55.

AARON B. O'CONNELL is a graduate student in American history at Yale University, working with John Lewis Gaddis, Jean-Christophe Agnew and Jay Winter. His dissertation explores the cultural politics of the United States Marine Corps in the early Cold War.