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Psychologically Troubled Combat Veterans in Early Postwar American Drama

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A Thesis in the Field of English for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts

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Abstract

     In the late 1940s, the award-winning playwrights Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Sidney Kingsley each included a combat veteran as a main character in their first postwar play. Each play presents a combat veteran who displays a different psychological problem that hinders his readjustment to civilian life. In Miller's *All My Sons*, Army veteran Chris Keller alienates himself from civilians who did not experience the brotherhood and shared sacrifice of men in combat. In Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Army veteran Stanley Kowalski, dominates others with the violent behavior that helped him survive combat. In Kingsley's *Detective Story*, Navy Veteran Arthur Kindred resents those who avoided wartime service while he suffered through combat.

     This thesis contends that contextualizing these plays in relation to the cultural moment when they were written, provides present-day viewers a crucial path toward a deeper understanding of each play. If present-day viewers consider early postwar anxieties regarding combat veterans, they can see another facet to the dramatic characters Chris, Stanley, and Arthur. When a present-day viewer fully recognizes these main characters as psychologically troubled combat veterans, they can see themes within the plays which they might otherwise currently overlook.

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Chapter I

Introduction

During the Second World War, Americans worried how the violence of war affected combat veterans. All military personnel who came under enemy attack either while fighting on the ground, on board a ship, or in an airplane classified as combat veterans. Although combat veterans included men from all of the military branches, they represented only a small subgroup of all war veterans. Multiple historians estimate 6% of American Second World War veterans experienced combat.[1]

Even though combat veterans represented a low percentage of the millions of American war veterans, they attracted a great deal of popular media coverage. Beginning in 1944 and continuing well into the early postwar period, an abundance of media attention shed light on potential long-term negative psychological effects of combat. The media conditioned Americans on what to expect from combat veterans. The message warned about battle-hardened men who would exhibit antisocial behavior and, in the worst cases, might become dangerous and commit violent criminal acts. The hype surrounding combat veterans and their potential psychological problems generated anxiety among the general public.

Writers for Broadway and Hollywood used the anxiety regarding combat veterans as a means to connect audiences with larger themes within their dramas. During the early postwar period, combat veterans appeared as main characters in multiple highly

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[1] See the second chapter for a detailed analysis of combat veterans as a subgroup of all American Second World War veterans.

successful plays and movies. The well-known concerns regarding combat veterans gave early postwar audiences a reason to reflect on main characters with combat experience. A character's past combat experience helped create a more nuanced character who a postwar audience knew, at an underlying level, beyond the basic relationships presented in a drama. Playwrights and screenwriters capitalized on the easily recognizable psychological problems of combat veterans to play into conversations already taking place throughout early postwar American society.

In the late 1940s, the award-winning playwrights Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Sidney Kingsley each included a combat veteran as a main character in their first postwar play. Each play presents a combat veteran who displays a different psychological problem that hinders his readjustment to civilian life. In Miller's *All My Sons*, Army veteran Chris Keller alienates himself from civilians who did not experience the brotherhood and shared sacrifice of men in combat. In Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Army veteran Stanley Kowalski, dominates others with the violent behavior that helped him survive combat. In Kingsley's *Detective Story*, Navy Veteran Arthur Kindred resents those who avoided wartime service while he suffered through combat.

In addition to featuring a psychologically troubled combat veteran in a critical role, each drama achieved a high level of commercial success on both stage and screen. On Broadway, each play surpassed three hundred performances and had an initial theater run that lasted eleven months or longer. In Hollywood, the motion picture industry adapted each of these plays into a major box office hit. All three films featured some of the leading movie stars of the time period (see Appendix A).

Despite their similar high profile, release times, and visible portrayal of

psychologically troubled combat veterans, no existing scholarship connects the three plays by examining their portrayal of troubled combat veterans. When one considers the anxiety surrounding the reintegration of combat veterans into peacetime society, the gap in scholarship that examines a connection between these three plays seems even more surprising. This thesis fills that gap.

Seven decades after these plays debuted on Broadway, one might argue the characters Chris, Stanley, and Arthur appear only superficially connected by their Second World War combat experience. However, these plays are products of a time period when the aftermath of the war still hovered over many aspects of American life. Rather than consider the text of these plays in isolation, this thesis connects these characters in the context of the postwar cultural moment of the original Broadway productions. This thesis critically analyzes the plays through a lens that considers the cultural milieu of the 1940s as it pertained to combat veterans who recently returned home from overseas battlefields.

My analysis answers four questions. Why did dramatic characters with combat experience connect powerfully with theater audiences in the early postwar period? How does the combat experience of a main character interact with larger themes in each play? How do the combat veterans in each play compare to each other? How might understanding the cultural moment of the late 1940s help present-day viewers appreciate these plays in a new way?

These questions prompted me to not only analyze the text of each play but to also study the aftermath of the Second World War on American society. Social historians who study the postwar veteran experience argue the reintegration difficulties of Second World War combat veterans remain largely ignored by mainstream historians. Consequently,

these difficulties have little recognition among the general public today (Childers 4-5, Gambone 11, Huebner 279-281). Thus, locating these plays within the wider cultural context of early postwar American life reveal a dimension of these plays not usually considered by present-day viewers.

Unlike theater audiences in the late 1940s, present-day viewers do not have a top of mind knowledge of the psychological struggles of returned Second World War combat veterans. When present-day viewers approach *All My Sons*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Detective Story*, they do so without full appreciation for the cultural moment when these plays first appeared on Broadway. If one understands how and why each play portrayed combat veterans, one gains a new valuable awareness through which to engage the theme of each play.

This thesis contends that contextualizing these plays in relation to the cultural moment when they were written, provides present-day viewers a crucial path toward a deeper understanding of each play. If present-day viewers consider early postwar anxieties regarding combat veterans, they can see another facet to the dramatic characters Chris, Stanley, and Arthur. When a present-day viewer fully recognizes these main characters as psychologically troubled combat veterans, they can see themes within the plays which they might otherwise currently overlook.

Because my analysis considers Broadway plays within their historical and cultural contexts, the methodology of this thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. Through a synthesis of historical study and literary criticism, I provide a springboard to reconsider these early postwar dramas. Specifically, my research combines an analysis of primary historical sources from the 1940s and a textual analysis

of each play.

My interdisciplinary approach expands the existing body of research on the portrayal of combat veterans in American drama. Despite the prominence of combat veterans in early postwar entertainment, no scholar previously completed an in-depth study of the connection between popular culture and the portrayal of combat veterans on Broadway. On the periphery of my topic, four previous survey studies consider the portrayal of Second World War veterans on stage or screen – one study considers plays, and three studies consider films.

Michael Counts analyzed fifty-five American plays with a central focus on the homecoming of a war veteran. The plays, all written and produced during the twentieth century, address returned war veterans from the Civil War through the Vietnam War. The study concludes themes centered on veteran readjustment are often two-sided with both society and veterans needing time to accept the return of men home from war (193-201). Counts excludes plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Detective Story* in which a troubled combat veteran fits into a larger theme of the play.

James Deutsch analyzed five decades of American films with main characters who are returned Second World War veterans. As a survey study that considered hundreds of films, Deutsch does not analyze the individual films or characters. The study offers a generalized conclusion that Hollywood portrayed troubled war veterans through a predictable feel-good formula. According to this marketable formula, a troubled war veteran needs the help of a romantic interest in order to make a successful transition to civilian life (iii, 161-162). Deutsch's conclusion does not discuss why some films such as *All My Sons* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* forego this feel-good formula.

William Fagelson examines films from the 1940s that are representative of the Hollywood portrayal of returned war veterans. Fagelson's survey discusses over one hundred films, and he includes an in-depth analysis of six films that he considers representative of the returned veteran genre. The study concludes major Hollywood film studios helped create societal pressure for war veterans to conform with the national reconversion from wartime production to a peacetime economy. Fagelson argues reconversion pressured young war veterans to completely abandon their wartime identities and idealism in order to make the full conversion to mature adult. During the postwar period, becoming an adult man meant assuming the role of family man and breadwinner (viii, 3, 214-216). Due to Fagelson's restricted focus on films only from the 1940s, his study does not discuss the dramas analyzed in this thesis.

Timothy Shuker-Hines studies postwar popular culture through a survey of fictional characters who are Second World War veterans. The study includes films, novels, pulp fiction magazines, and radio soap operas. Shuker-Hines concludes hyper masculinity displayed by fictional war veterans represents a concerted effort by the entertainment industry to appeal to the postwar debate surrounding gender norms. Shuker-Hines asserts war veterans initially resisted societal pressure to conform and embrace domesticity as a component of postwar economic prosperity (45-46). Surprisingly, with its emphasis on hyper masculinity this study does not mention *All My Sons* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

My thesis differs from the previous mentioned survey studies in two ways. I analyze the sociocultural reasons why writers tapped into the anxieties regarding combat veterans, and I provide an in-depth analysis of each main character with combat

experience. The body of my thesis analyzes why and how, in their first postwar play, three Pulitzer prize winning playwrights each included a psychologically troubled combat veteran as a main character. The following preview of the body of this thesis explains how I intend to weave together both historical analysis and literary analysis.

The second chapter considers how our current popular culture inaccurately depicts the readjustment experience of Second World War combat veterans. Today, popular culture depicts these men as stoic and heroic icons of American history. According to this narrative, the vast majority of combat veterans made a relatively easy transition from combatant to civilian. In direct contrast to this revisionist view of history, this thesis examines primary historical sources from the 1940s to reveal a contrary story.

The second chapter discusses the reality of returned Second World War combat veterans. A large percentage of these men, similar to combat veterans of all wars, returned home traumatized by the extreme violence of the battlefield. Early postwar American society did not have a misconception that combat veterans would return home mentally unscathed by their experiences in battle.

During the 1940s, the print media and the entertainment industry did not shy away from the truth about psychological problems experienced by combat veterans. Popular culture provided a cautionary message against hopeful expectations that men who spent months overseas killing would blend effortlessly back into society. Instead, newspapers, magazines, books, movies, and plays addressed the anticipated peacetime readjustment problems of combat veterans. The second chapter looks at a wide assortment of these types of primary sources to identify what expectations American society had about combat veterans.

The analysis of primary sources from the 1940s illuminates the truth about the aftershock of the Second World War among combat veterans. Today, psychiatrists would classify the aftershock from the violence experienced during combat as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Unfortunately, in the late 1940s, psychiatrists had yet to identify PTSD as a mental health problem common among combat veterans. While psychiatrists now estimate that 15% of combat veterans suffer from PTSD, in the late 1940s, the vast majority of combat veterans returned home undiagnosed with a postwar psychological problem (National Center for PTSD).

Although PTSD went largely untreated, the second chapter discusses why awareness by the general public of the problems faced by combat veterans assumed a prominent place in the postwar zeitgeist. Through early postwar popular culture, the American public generally understood why war related struggles of combat veterans would not necessarily end when the war ended. Americans expected combat veterans to come home and independently face their personal struggle to reintegrate back into a normal life away from the violence of the battlefield.

Through a presentation of historical evidence, the second chapter sets the stage for a literary analysis of the characters Chris, Stanley, and Arthur. When one understands what the public expected from combat veterans, one can better appreciate how and why the playwrights depicted those expectations in their plays. Following the historical analysis, the literary analysis uses a close reading of the plays to thoroughly investigate the portrayal(s) of psychologically troubled combat veterans in early postwar American drama.

The third chapter considers why each of the playwrights could accurately write

about combat veterans. In order for the playwrights to capitalize on the early postwar anxieties regarding combat veterans, Miller, Williams, and Kingsley needed more than a casual understanding of psychological troubled combat veterans. Throughout their careers Miller, Williams, and Kingsley wrote plays informed by a wide range of context. All three are recognized as being deeply responsive to social issues in American society. Yet few literary scholars question how and why the Second World War profoundly affected the early postwar writing of these prominent playwrights.

The third chapter considers the personal backgrounds of the playwrights to identify and discuss their connection to combat veterans. This analysis considers secondary sources in the form of biographies along with primary sources in the form of letters, notebooks, memoirs, and other published works. The analysis reveals, as with most Americans who lived during the 1940s, the war represented a formative part of each playwright's life.

The aftermath of the Second World War provided Miller, Williams, and Kingsley personal insight about combat veterans. The analysis of their personal writings, reveal the playwrights to be both products and critics of the postwar veteran experience. They each had direct connections with combat veterans and those connections fueled their interpretation of the problems faced by combat veterans as they assimilated back into civilian society. Miller and Williams each had a close personal relationship with a psychologically troubled combat veteran. Kingsley's connection to combat veterans came from his own wartime military service. Set in context of the early postwar period, the playwrights made use of their personal connections with combat veterans to better exploit the audience's response to the play.

The fourth chapter provides textual analysis of the plays. The textual analysis focuses on how each playwright used a different anxiety regarding combat veterans to pull an audience into a specific theme of their play. Miller emphasized a combat veteran's resentment of civilian individualism to interact with his play's theme that criticizes unrestricted capitalism. Williams emphasized the fear and sympathy Americans felt for combat veterans to interact with his play's theme that criticizes insensitivity in society. Kingsley emphasized the guilt Americans felt toward combat veterans to interact with his play's theme that criticizes unchecked and uncaring government power.

To give additional depth to my textual analysis, the fourth chapter integrates evidence from outside the plays. When applicable, the textual analysis section of the thesis also includes a literature review of secondary sources that address the combat experience of the characters. Following the interdisciplinary approach of this thesis, I also include historical primary source evidence that supports the literary analysis in these chapters. The historical evidence helps explain how the playwright matched specific components of the character to the societal expectations of combat veterans as displayed in early postwar popular culture.

The story that emerges in the next two chapters shows a strong connection between the first postwar plays of Miller, Williams, and Kingsley. The shadow of the Second World War provides that connection. As members of an early postwar audience recognized, in each play, a main character on the stage still had to make their personal peace with the aftershock of the war. This one aspect of a main character within the play holds greater significance than an uninformed present-day viewer might realize.

Chapter Two

Psychologically Troubled Combat Veterans

This chapter attempts to understand what early postwar theater audiences might expect from a dramatic character with combat experience. A review of a wide array of primary source materials provide the historical evidence through which to analyze the relationship between combat veterans and early postwar American society. The primary sources examined include the following: military reports, syndicated newspaper columns, newsreels, popular magazines, advice books, political cartoons, and Academy Award Best Pictures.

The analysis presented in this chapter identifies three key points regarding combat veterans and early postwar American society. First, most Americans did not have a close personal relationship with a combat veteran. Second, popular culture created a collective view of combat veterans as psychologically troubled men prone to antisocial and violent behavior. Third, this collective view of combat veterans caused anxiety regarding combat veterans. As a first step in understanding these points, this analysis identifies combat veterans as a surprisingly small subgroup of American Second World War veterans.

A traditional historical interpretation of the American experience in the Second World War presents a distorted interpretation of war veterans. This interpretation considers all war veterans as the men and women who fought to win the war. In a sense they did, but not in the way most people think. In reality, most of these veterans did not directly engage in any actual fighting. They did not see combat. Instead, they provided

logistical support to a small minority of military personnel who engaged in the actual fighting.

Encouraged by several popular history books that enjoyed commercial success most Americans currently hold a misconception that almost all Second World War veterans experienced combat. Books such as Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* and Steven Ambrose's *Citizen Soldiers* tell a narrative of a common effort to fight and win the war. While today Americans tend to conflate all Second World War veterans together as a single group, Americans in the late 1940s did not. In the early postwar period, Americans understood that only a small percentage of military personnel put themselves at risk of physical harm from contact with the enemy. When the war ended and millions of military personnel returned home, early postwar American society clearly distinguished the difference between a war veteran and a combat veteran.

Following the Second World War, rapid military demobilization quickly changed American society. Demobilization created a new large segment within the American population – young war veterans. They arrived home, most still only in their late twenties, after being in the military for an average of three years and deployed overseas for almost two years (Kennet 22, Havighurst, et al. 68). As civilian society reabsorbed these young adults, war veterans assumed an almost ubiquitous place in early postwar American life.

By 1947, 15 million war veterans rejoined a civilian society of 80 million adults (*Selected Manpower* 8, Ullman 9). This means within a short period of time war veterans quickly came to account for nearly one out of every five American adults. When war veterans returned home, they repopulated a key age demographic in civilian society.

Although war veterans accounted for only 19% of all American adults, they accounted for 64% of civilian men under the age of 40.[2] The large percentage of young men who served in the wartime military ensured most Americans had a personal connection to a war veteran. A similar statement cannot be made about combat veterans.

During the Second World War, most American military personnel did not experience combat. In the last two decades, social historians began to examine the American Second World War experience from the perspective of ordinary people. Several of these studies focus on the wartime and postwar experiences of combat veterans. As a component of these studies, multiple social historians estimate that just under one million Americans experienced combat.[3] While one million sounds like a large number, in actuality this estimate means a remarkably small percentage of American military personnel experienced combat. Although the United States mobilized a massive wartime military of 16.1 million personnel, only 6% of American military manpower experienced combat. An even smaller percentage survived the war to return home as combat veterans.

In early postwar American society, combat veterans accounted for an extremely small percentage of adult males. Not all combat veterans returned home. During the war, almost one third of Americans who experienced combat died in battle (Debruyne 2). In 1947, the 700,000 American combat veterans who survived the war accounted for only

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[2] During the Second World War, the United States mobilized a wartime military with 15.8 million men and 350,000 women (*Selected Manpower* 8, Poulos 1). After subtracting 300,000 battle deaths and 100,000 non-battle deaths, I estimate 15.4 male veterans survived the war (Debruyne 2). After subtracting an estimated 700,000 war veterans who, in 1947, still remained in the active military, I estimate 14.7 million male war veterans rejoined civilian society (*Selected Manpower* 8, Sparrow 141-142, 339).

[3] See the following: Adams 123, Burns and Novick, Gambone 65, Huebner 17, Kennet 129, Linderman 1, McManus 4, and Rose 45.

5% of war veterans and only 3% of men under the age of 40 (Debruyne 2, Ullman 9).

While most Americans probably had a personal connection to a war veteran, the low

number of combat veterans meant few Americans, even superficially, knew a combat

veteran.

Since most Americans did not know a combat veteran, they did not possess first-

hand knowledge of how combat changed men. Instead, most Americans relied on

secondhand knowledge about how combat veterans behaved once they returned home.

For most Americans, exposure to portrayals of combat veterans in popular culture,

whether accurate or not, provided their only means in which to learn about combat

veterans. Thus, learning vicariously about combat veterans through popular culture

represents a pivotal fact in understanding what theater audiences might expect from a

dramatic character with combat experience. Before examining how popular culture

portrayed combat veterans, the foundation of this argument needs additional discussion.

Obviously, the low number of combat veterans in early postwar American society

serves a crucial role in this thesis. The claim by several historians that only 6% of

American military personnel experienced combat during the Second World War might

appear as too low of an estimate. Therefore, such an estimate should not be accepted

without question. The percentage of Americans who experienced combat during the

Second World War warrants a closer examination.

Although multiple social historians repeat the estimate that just under one million

Americans experienced combat, they do so without adequate academic documentation.

They either do not cite a source, or they only cite another historian -- retired University of

Michigan History Professor Gerald Linderman. The root of this estimate comes from

Linderman's social history book *The World Within War* published in 1998 by Harvard University Press. Unfortunately, Linderman neither substantiates his estimate with documentation of primary sources nor does he provide any justification for the estimate. Therefore, to ensure the argument presented in this thesis rests on an accurate premise, this chapter briefly considers why so few Americans experienced combat during the Second World War.

During the Second World War, American industrial strength averted the need for most American military personnel to experience combat. A major component of the American grand strategy leveraged the nation's ability to mobilize its civilian manufacturing industry and convert factory production from consumer goods to war production. A year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt explained this strategy when he declared the nation must become "the great arsenal of democracy" (1940, 643). One month after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt told Congress "powerful enemies must be out-fought and out-produced" (1942, 6). The American war effort with its overwhelming capacity for war production enabled American political and military leaders to place greater emphasis on weapon power rather than on manpower. While the nation increased all types of war production, the production of large quantities of aircraft and munitions greatly changed modern warfare. Through industrial mobilization, Allied military leaders prioritized long-range bombing campaigns as a decisive factor in the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Strategic bombing replaced soldiers with machines as the primary instrument of war. In his end of the war report, Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall stated the overall American war strategy allocated 98% of the war effort to "exploit American

technology" (210). According to Marshall, instead of directly facing off with the enemy, the vast majority of American military personnel found themselves "largely fighting a war of machinery" (210). A modern war of technology and machines did not yield an American war effort completely void of intense combat. But it did mean, in contrast to earlier American wars, only a small percentage of American military personnel engaged the enemy in direct combat.

The allocation of manpower within the Army indicates why so few Americans experienced combat. The Army, which accounted for 70% of American military manpower, assigned over two thirds of all soldiers to logistical support units located well behind the front line. Marshall claimed within the Army Air Forces 90% of personnel provided ground support for the 10% who flew combat missions (210). The rest of the Army assigned only a quarter of its soldiers to ground combat divisions (R. Palmer 18). Being assigned to a ground combat division did not necessarily mean an individual soldier experienced combat. Marshall estimated only 53% of soldiers in a ground combat division fought at the frontline (92). This information cited from wartime reports indicate the Army waged a modern war. Although the Army engaged in both air and ground combat, the emphasis on modern weapons required a heavier manpower allocation to logistical support roles than on roles that directly engaged the enemy.

Compared to the Army, the Navy, which accounted for 26% of the entire wartime military, had an even lower percentage of manpower directly engaged in combat. Second World War casualty statistics provide a good indicator of how many personnel saw combat in each branch of the military. While the Army suffered 7% battle casualties, the Navy suffered only 2% battle casualties. The Marine Corps with 13% battle casualties

had the highest percentage of personnel engaged in combat, but the Marine Corps

accounted for only 4% of the entire wartime military (Debruyne 2). Casualty statistics

reinforce the low ratio of combatant personnel to logistical personnel.

Based on the information examined in previous paragraphs, one can make three

fact-based conclusions. Wartime manpower reports considered alongside statistics of

battlefield casualties clearly confirm an extremely low percentage of American military

personnel experienced combat. When one considers the small number of combat

veterans, one can conclude most Americans did not have the opportunity to acquire first-

hand knowledge about combat veterans. Hence, a review of early postwar popular culture

provides a viable means to gain insight into what most Americans thought about combat

veterans.

As part of investigating how Americans perceived combat veterans, one must

consider if, in the 1940s, the public had knowledge of how few military personnel

experienced combat. Two types of primary sources reveal the general public did have an

informed awareness that only a minority of war veterans could legitimately call

themselves combat veterans. During the war, newsreels and newspapers informed the

general public about the American war effort. Both of these wartime news sources

regularly communicated to those Americans on the Homefront that the majority of

military personnel provided logistical support and did not engage the enemy.

Throughout the war, newsreels regularly appeared in civilian movie theaters

playing prior to the featured Hollywood film. The Federal Office of War Information

produced newsreels to keep the public informed about the war. Although produced by the

government, these short films provided fairly balanced and accurate views of the wartime

American military and its overseas war effort. Newsreels frequently communicated the superior ability of the United States to wage a modern war of technology and machinery.

A review of wartime newsreels in the U.S. National Archives reveals a large number of titles focused on American airpower.[4] Several 1944 newsreels discuss the newly introduced B-29 Superfortress long-range heavy bomber. One newsreel described how this aircraft flew combat missions of 15 hours to attack previously unreachable industrial targets and cities on mainland Japan (*The Last Bomb*). Each B-29 had a crew of eleven airmen and bombing missions included less than 400 bombers. Therefore, B29 bombers could attack Japan with a relatively small contingent of men compared to the massive manpower employed in traditional ground combat. One newsreel described how B29 bombers flying from bases in China to attack Japan gave the U.S. "a global weapon for global warfare" (*U.S. Planes Attack Japan*).

Several newsreels showed how the overall American military strategy in the Pacific sought supported the ability to use airpower instead of manpower. The island-hopping campaign in the Pacific Theater of Operations provided locations to build modern airfields progressively closer to mainland Japan (*U.S. Rushes New Bases in the Pacific*). On each remote island military construction units turned tropic jungles into airfields capable of supporting heavy bombers (*Saipan: Base for the B-29s*). These newsreels stress the large numbers of support personnel required to build the airfields as well as supply heavy bombers with fuel and munitions (*Latest War Films from U.S. Forces in the South Pacific*).

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[4] See the complete list of digital newsreels available for viewing on the *National Archives* website, Record Group 208: Records of the Office of War of Information, 1926-1951; Series: Motion Picture Films from United News Newsreels 1942-1945.

The newsreels clearly gave the American public a realistic view of how the military allocated manpower to wage a modern war. This newsreel evidence about the application of American technology through airpower aligns with the previously noted evidence from General Marshall's official postwar report on the conduct of the war. Both the newsreels and Marshall's report show U.S. airpower reduced the number of men needed to fight in combat.

Newsreels did more than discuss the conduct of the war as the government also needed to prepare civilians for the eventual postwar demobilization of millions of military personnel. A 1945 newsreel about veterans coming home reminds the public that most war veterans are not combat veterans. Although the narrator initially states half of all military personnel served in a combat zone, he then clarifies that most personnel within a combat zone did not experience combat. The narrator states, "only a small percentage of these, not nearly as many as you may imagine, were in the front-lines in bullet and shell range of the enemy. For any one of this latter group, a very special experience, he was at any moment expendable" (*Welcome Home*). Newsreels gave Americans an overview of the military as a whole and helped them understand that most war veterans did have combat experience.

Much of the general public's knowledge about military personnel and their roles in war effort came from the syndicated newspaper column written by Ernie Pyle. Until he died in battle in 1945 on a small Pacific island, Pyle's six times per week column gave Americans on the Homefront an up-close description of the war. His column appeared in 700 different daily or weekly newspapers ("Reporting America at War"). From November 1942 to April 1945, as a war correspondent embedded in military units, Pyle

followed the American military forces almost everyplace they fought. He lived alongside airmen, Marines, sailors, and soldiers, in the African, European, Mediterranean, and Pacific Theaters of Operation.

Although Pyle reported about the war from around the globe, Pyle's descriptions and interpretations of the war provided a bottom-up or soldier's view of the war. This approach to war reporting gave the average American back home an insider view of the war. His columns described the war at an individual level down on the ground in Army foxholes, up in the sky in Air Force bombers, and out on the ocean on board Navy warships. In doing so, he transformed a massively, horrific global event into a story about average men and women who performed an assortment of military jobs in the overseas warzones.

Pyle's columns gave press coverage to all types military personnel. Unlike wartime Hollywood films about the war that focused exclusively on men in combat, Pyle provided a more complete description of the nation's wartime military. His columns covered the combatants, but he also gave attention to the vast majority of military personnel who supported the small minority of men in combat. Pyle made it clear to his readers the American war machine required what he called a "gigantic and staggering supply system" (Ernie's War 358). He spent time with military personnel in combat roles and in logistical roles as he reported from both the frontlines and the supply lines.

His columns about support personnel included a wide array of Army and Navy jobs. Pyle wrote about Army support personnel to include Quartermaster Corps soldiers who supplied the force, and Ordnance Corps soldiers who repaired damaged equipment. He wrote about Navy support personnel to include sailors who transported invasion

forces, and Navy nurses who cared for the wounded on board hospital ships (*Ernie's War* 263-265, 267-270, 314-330; *Brave Men* 22-30, 195-199). Pyle also apologized for his inability to write about all the logistical roles. He told the American public "the Army over here is just too big to cover it all" (Ernie's War 358). This apology ensured the American public knew the war effort needed more than men engaged in combat with the enemy. His columns emphasized how men and woman in all types of military jobs came together to create a unified and well-supported team.

Although Pyle gave the logistical arms of the military public attention, he repeatedly reminded his readers of the sacrifices made by the limited few who endured the burden of combat. In a column about air crewmen Pyle wrote, "To me all the war of the world has seemed to be borne by the few thousand front-line soldiers here destined merely by chance to suffer and die for the rest of us" (*Ernie's War* 200). Not only did Pyle recognize the sacrifices of combatants, he deemed them to have a higher status than those in the logistical fields. Pyle described the logistical personnel as more on par with civilians than with those men who face the enemy in battle. In a column about the infantry Pyle contended, "The front-line soldier differs from all the rest of us. All the rest of us – you and me and even the thousands of soldiers behind the lines" (*Ernie's War* 104). Pyle clearly identified a distinction between those military personnel who comprised the tip of the American military spear, and those military personnel who, from protected areas, supported the fighting men. Thus, through Pyle's newspaper columns the general public learned the truth about the millions of military personnel deployed overseas – only a limited few faced the enemy in combat.

Pyle's newspaper columns gave him national recognition. Millions of Americans

avidly read Pyle's columns. His fame and readership steadily grew throughout the war as did his hold on the public's understanding of the military. When he began his war reporting in November 1942 he had a circulation of 3.3 million, but within only six months his circulation increased to 8.8 million and the next year it reached 12.2 million ("Man About the World" 48). In May 1943, *Time* magazine already referred to Pyle as "America's most widely read war correspondent" – high praise considering both Ernst Hemingway and John Steinbeck also worked as war correspondents during the Second World War ("Man About the World" 44). By the time of his death in April 1945, *The New York Times*, in its obituary of Pyle, estimated his circulation at 14 million ("Ernie is Pyle Killed" 14). Therefore, before his death, Pyle's column reached 16% of all adult Americans on the Homefront and roughly 30% of those who read newspapers (Hansen 26, Waldman 35).

Pyle's column held a universal appeal across American society. His readership went beyond the general public. When Pyle took a brief trip back home from the war zone, he accepted an invitation for a private visit with Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House. The First Lady publicly declared herself a devoted fan of Pyle's column when she stated, "I have read everything he has sent from overseas" ("Ernie is Pyle Killed" 14). In her own syndicated newspaper column Mrs. Roosevelt commented on the lasting importance and accuracy of Pyle's wartime journalism. She asserted, "historians will turn [to Pyle's columns] to explain the kind of men who fought this war" ("My Day"). His wartime friendships spanned from Eisenhower to Steinbeck. Pyle's widespread reach across American society even included collaborating on a 1944 Hollywood film

screenplay with the as-yet-unknown writer Arthur Miller.[5]

Pyle's also achieved critical acclaim. In 1944, Pyle's war reporting won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism and *Time* magazine featured his picture on its front cover. This high level of popularity and praise of Pyle's newspaper columns ensured most Americans read Pyle's account of what American military men and women did while deployed overseas.

Through the wartime news media, the general public received the truth about the American war effort. Although the United States mobilized a massive military force to fight a modern global war on two fronts, 94% of American military personnel served in a support role. In a modern war, one could use the oversimplification that all American war veterans fought the war, but only a small percentage risked their lives in combat.

The low number of American combat veterans meant few Americans could personally connect to the horror of the war. Without a personal connection to a combat veteran, most Americans remained far removed from the carnage of a global war responsible for an estimated 60 million deaths (Beevor 1). In contrast to the general American public, combat veterans had firsthand exposure to the brutal violence of war. Casualty statistics reveal 95% of surviving combat veterans received wounds in battle. (Debruyne 2). Exposure to the violence of war separated combat veterans from the rest of American society. This separation caused anxiety among the general public regarding potential negative psychological effects of battlefield violence and how it might change the men who experienced combat. This anxiety stemmed from the unknown.

Most Americans formed their opinion of combat veterans based on early postwar popular cultural. As early as 1944, as the war still raged overseas, American popular

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[5] See the third chapter of this thesis for a complete discussion of the collaboration between Miller and Pyle.

culture already began commenting on postwar American society. Two years before the

bulk of the troops returned, diverse print coverage in books, magazines, and newspapers

began a national discussion regarding combat veterans and their potential postwar

problems. This discussion continued well into the early postwar period. An article in

Readers Digest magazine observed, Americans could not avoid exposure to the wave of

"when he comes home articles" (Wharton 15). This heavy volume of media attention

ensured most Americans gained an awareness that combat veterans would experience

psychological problems after the war.

Benjamin Bowker, a wartime Pentagon official and postwar *New York Post* editor,

authored a guidebook for civilians who sought to better understand war veterans. In his

book, *Out of Uniform*, Bowker described a widely used media term "the veteran

problem" (27). According to Bowker, the media created a genre of print activity focused

on negative social issues associated with the integration of war veterans into civilian

society. Bowker warned veterans and their families this genre of print activity influenced

the way American society perceived veterans. Much of the media attention focused on

warning the American public about combat veterans.

William Waller, a sociologist from Columbia University, offered an alarming

discussion of "the veteran problem." In his book, *The Veteran Comes Back*, Waller

argued combat veterans will become "America's gravest social problem" (13). Waller

claimed when war veterans received their discharge from the military, they would have a

large number of immediate economic and social needs. Waller concluded without

substantial government funded programs to support war veterans, "the veteran is a threat

to society" (13). Unless American society made an adequate effort to help fulfill the

postwar needs of veterans, the nation would face potential acts of violence from combat veterans. Waller warned combat veterans would use their skills as killers to take what they needed without regard to the law. While Waller's warnings might appear extreme, his position as a professor at a prestigious university gave his book a degree of credibility. Not all of the media attention toward "the veteran problem" came from reputable print sources.

Social historian Thomas Childers describes how, during the mid-1940s, a sizable tabloid press sought to increase circulation through sensational warnings about the violent tendencies of combat veterans. According to Childers, tabloids regularly ran alarming headlines such as "Will Your Boy Be a Killer When He Comes Back" (6). Bowker warned veterans about tabloid tainted civilian opinions of combat veterans. Bowker argued these headlines seemed to blame combat veterans for almost all violent crimes around the nation. As examples, Bowker listed tabloid headlines "Veteran Beheads Wife with Jungle Machete," "Ex-Marine Held in Rape Murder," and "Two Veterans Held as Holdup Suspects" (25-26). These types of spectacular tabloid headlines reinforced the idea that combat veterans trained in killing and emotionally hardened by battle presented a threat to civilian society.

There are inherent difficulties associated with conducting primary source research of what exactly appeared in the 1940s-tabloid press. Few libraries catalog microfilm of non-reputable tabloids from seventy years ago. But mainstream popular magazines from the 1940s are readily available on microfilm. Therefore, mainstream popular magazines offer a primary source to understand the extent of the tabloid manipulation of "the veteran problem."

A wide range of popular magazines criticized and attempted to rebut the tabloid portrayal of combat veterans. The commentary that appeared in the mainstream press offers evidence that the tabloid press provided a sensationalized depiction of combat veterans. One can argue these rebuttals actually contributed to the problem and served as additional media impressions of combat veterans as psychologically troubled men. Examples taken from four different mainstream popular magazines reveal the widespread influence the tabloid press had on forming a collective view of combat veterans as dangerous violent men.

Saturday Review magazine argued the tabloids issued a "gloomy prophecy" that "every veteran will return bitter and hateful, maladjusted and resentful." The article claimed, "You cannot pickup up a magazine or paper that doesn't carry in it somewhere a terrible warning to beware of the returning soldier. As if we won't have enough battle casualties to care for, we must be made to believe that every boy who returns is fit only for an asylum" (Lynch 8).

Life magazine used satire to subtly comment on ridiculous tabloid portrayals of combat veterans as violent men. In a fictional vignette a college administrator considers combat veterans turned students as "a nasty problem." The administrator questions the feasibility of violence prone combat veterans with their "values altered in the war" attending classes on a college campus. The administrator stated, "How do they expect us to fit you people back into college life? You come back from the battlefields brutalized, narrow-eyed killers. You're restless. You're lawless. You crave violence. You have been turned into a ravening beast, a bloodthirsty engine of destruction" (Schulman 41-43).

The New Yorker magazine asserted tabloids fostered unwarranted fear among wives

toward their combat veteran husbands. The tabloids used comments from psychiatrists regarding a need for "special handling" of combat veterans to allude to how everyday family life could spark a violent reaction. The article scoffs at warnings such as "he will leap up in rage when he hears the sound of a crying baby" ("Talk of the Town").

The Saturday Evening Post magazine condemned the tabloid press for its harsh characterization of combat veterans. The article claimed the tabloids portrayed combat veterans as "tamed dogs gone wild" (Best 112). This descriptive term reinforced how the tabloids depicted combat veterans as once civilized men who, after combat, became men forever prone to take violent action. Popular magazines did not provide the only voice that denounced the tabloid portrayal of combat veterans. Newspaper editorial cartoons also attacked the tabloid treatment of combat veterans.

The anxiety surrounding combat veterans appeared as a subject in early postwar editorial cartoons. After the war, Bill Mauldin, a former Army Sergeant and famous wartime cartoonist for the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, represented veterans as he had basic infantryman – as subjects for his cartoons. Mauldin returned home from the war with a national reputation and a Pulitzer Prize for Journalism. His postwar career as a syndicated editorial cartoonist would earn him another Pulitzer Prize. As a war veteran himself, many of Mauldin's early postwar editorial cartoons dealt with "the veteran problem." In his 1947 book, *Back Home*, Mauldin provided a collection of his cartoons that chronicled the troubles faced by retuned war veterans or as he called them "new citizens" (33). Alongside the cartoons Mauldin offers additional insight on "the veteran problem." One Mauldin cartoon provided commentary on the tabloids and their extensive negative portrayal of combat veterans (Appendix B, Figure 1). Mauldin asserted, "An

ordinary killing or assault seldom rated the front page, but if it involved a jealous veteran

or a battle-fatigue case, it could be sure of a prominent play" (54).

Even advice books written specifically for returning veterans and their families

sought to counter the extremely negative portrayal of combat veterans as presented in the

tabloids. In his 1945 advice book, *Back to Life*, military psychiatrist Herbert Kupper

argued tabloids falsely convinced American society to fear combat veterans. Kupper

claimed Americans "dreaded" the return of combat veterans as "pariahs who must be

somehow disinfected before being returned to society" (19). In Bowker's *Out of Uniform*,

he discussed how "dreary forecasts about the future behavior of veterans" pushed all

combat veterans to question if they too might act violently when they return to peacetime

society. (35). The evidence from postwar advice books serves to reinforce similar

evidence from mainstream popular magazines. Clearly lurid tabloids of the 1940s

portrayed combats veterans as dangerous men. But occasionally a sensationalized

portrayal of combat veterans also appeared in well-respected popular magazines.

Look magazine made a turn toward tabloid journalism when it warned its readers

about the violent nature of combat veterans. A four-page spread article with the title "The

Mental Road Back" introduced and briefly reviewed Kupper's book *Back to Life*. The

editors of *Look* took what might otherwise be classified an acceptable subject for a

national popular magazine and gave it a twist of tabloid sensationalism. The article

featured four graphic images each covering two-thirds of a page with a film noir style

illustration. Each image communicated different ways in which veterans might be a

menace in postwar American society. The images crudely attempted to persuade readers

that combat veterans had a psychological dark side. Two of these images included

depictions of troubled combat veterans who either could not reestablish normal family relations or who would apply their military training toward violent crime. One image depicted a young man physically manhandling his elderly mother (see Figure 2 in Appendix B). The caption stated, "He lived in the frontline of blood and bullets. We cannot expect his life to resume its normal course" (28). Another image showed a police officer murdered by a combat veteran (see Figure 3 in Appendix B). The caption stated, "The veteran who before the war had criminal tendencies and has learned to use a gun is a potential gangster" (29). Within mainstream popular magazines such a sensationalized portrayal of combat veterans remained a rare occurrence. When popular magazines did discuss combat veterans, a common reoccurring theme of the articles addressed mental health problems.

In the 1940s, popular media coverage of "the veteran problem" made the term psychoneurotic closely linked with combat veterans. The military used the term psychoneurotic casualty to describe combat veterans who suffered from combat fatigue or what psychiatrists today define as PTSD. Media coverage of veteran health problems made the term psychoneurotic a commonly recognized term throughout early postwar American society. Unfortunately, the term psychoneurotic sounded as if an afflicted veteran suffered from a permanent mental illness or in the lay terms of the time period the veteran had gone crazy. Hence, when the media reported on hundreds of thousands of returning psychoneurotic casualties it generated both concern and fear within the general public. The public feared an onslaught of mentally unstable combat veterans discharged into civilian society. This fear created drama and the media exploited this drama to portray combat veterans as psychologically troubled men.

Magazine editors capitalized on the drama associated with psychoneurotic casualties as a means to help sell magazines. The quantity of articles about psychoneurotic combat veterans went beyond a national conversation about veteran healthcare. The media coverage of the mental health problems faced by combat veterans became so pervasive social historians describe it as a "blizzard" or "avalanche" of press coverage (Childers 232, Van Ellis "How to Be a Civilian" 52). As a military psychiatrist, Kupper understood the media overplayed news reports about psychoneurotic casualties. In his advice book, Kupper sounded an alarm to veterans and their families about this excessive media coverage. Kupper warned about "the psychoneurosis fad which is sweeping the country and which is based on the belief that every homecoming veteran is maladjusted" (19). The legitimate press used a different approach to offer a narrative similar to how the tabloid press portrayed combat veterans. The popular media coverage of psychoneurotic casualties portrayed combat veterans as unstable and therefore dangerous men. This negative portrayal of combat veterans helped make the general public wary about combat veterans.

Even General Dwight Eisenhower reacted to extensive media attention given to the subject of veterans' mental health problems. During a June 1945 press conference, Eisenhower received a question about what Americans could do for veterans. Eisenhower stated, "For God's sakes don't psychoanalyze them. They are perfectly normal human beings. They have been through a lot and very naturally they want a pat on the back and they want to be told they are pretty good fellows and they are. But they want to be treated just like they were treated when they went away" (9). Despite Eisenhower's plea, a review of mainstream popular magazine articles reveals the nation remained fixated on

the mental health problems of combat veterans. Magazine articles on psychoneurotic

casualties appeared in a wide spectrum of popular publications with national circulation.

Collier's magazine interviewed military psychiatrists in an effort to help the general

public better understand the mental health problems of combat veterans. In an article

titled "Repairing War Cracked Minds," psychiatrists predicted many combat veterans

would become chronic alcoholics (23). The psychiatrists argued the real job of caring for

psychologically troubled veterans would happen in the years following the war. Combat

veterans would continue to experience psychological problems as repressed wartime

memories came to the surface. The psychiatrists stated:

> We are convinced that the so called well personnel differ from those whom we
> diagnose as sick and in need of definite psychiatric cure only by the quantity of
> emotional disturbances. One may expect for many years after the war that soldiers
> outwardly well, but carrying hidden weights of psychological conflicts and anxiety
> loads will break under the stress of some trivial difficulty, some last straw (54).

In a national popular magazine, military psychiatrists candidly and openly described

combat veterans as the psychological equivalent of ticking time bombs that could explode

in the future.

Newsweek magazine published multiple articles regarding veteran mental health

problems. An article titled "How to Sleep in a Bed," reported on the large number

psychoneurotic casualties or as the article called them "crack ups." The article reported

government statistics from 1944 which revealed military psychiatrists diagnosed 300,000

psychoneurotic casualties and discharged these men into civilian society. The article

questioned the ability of the United States to properly care for the large numbers of

psychologically troubled veterans. The article stated the nation had only 3,000

psychiatrists with only 900 of them treating veterans and military personnel. In addition,

the government lacked the necessary facilities to care for psychological troubled veterans. The Department of Veteran Affairs operated only thirty psychoneurotic hospitals (104-106). In another article titled "Nervous in the Service," *Newsweek* also reported that in 1943 psychoneurotic cases accounted for 50% of all military discharges (65).

Time magazine reported on the postwar volume of new psychoneurotic casualties who sought care from the government. The article described the situation at one Veteran Affairs mental hygiene clinic in New York City that received an average of fifty new cases every day. The article asserted the government had to conduct mass mental medicine to keep pace with the growth rate in veterans who needed psychiatric care. The most surprising statistic stated 63% of the postwar psychoneurotic casualties had "stoically endured" during combat and "cracked" after their discharge from the military. The article mentioned government psychiatrists suggested one reason for the postwar uptick in veterans who sought mental health care – the housing shortage. According to the psychiatrists a lack of housing forced "jittery veterans to live with jittery relatives" (68).

The Saturday Evening Post magazine published an article under the title "They All Won't Be Psychoneurotic." The article sarcastically claimed psychiatrists are "looking forward to the postwar world as a sort of experiment in which the veteran will play a star role as a guinea pig" (Best 112). In an article titled "We Psychos Are Not Crazy," *The Saturday Evening Post* printed an essay written by a long-term war correspondent who reported from many war zones to include the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. The essay defined war related neurosis as a common but temporary affliction suffered by almost all combat veterans. When diagnosed as a psychoneurotic, a combat

veteran did not become permanently mentally ill or "crazy" (Gorrell 16). The essay discussed the common desire among combat veterans to return to combat, so their neurosis did not make them feel like an outsider. The essay made comments such as "The battlefield beckoned him to return" and "I wish I was back at the front where people understood war" (105). While the essay argued against defining war neurosis as a long-term problem, the essay did imply all combat veterans suffered some level of psychological problems soon after their experience with combat.

The Saturday Evening Post gave a graphic description of psychoneurotic casualties. An article title "They Learn to Live Again," described the hospitalization of thousands of combat veterans who suffered what the article called "mental and emotional breakdowns." The article described these men as "war shattered service men fighting personnel battles against darkness and despair" (20).

Reader's Digest magazine reported most psychoneurotic casualties would not remain permanently psychoneurotic. An article titled "What is Happening to the Veterans Who Come Home," cited military medical officials who claimed psychiatrists in military hospitals cured two-thirds of psychoneurotic cases in under two months. The military claimed combat induced psychological problems are normally only temporary nervous breakdowns. Consequently, Americans learned most combat veterans diagnosed as psychoneurotic casualties would not stay long in a hospital under the care of a military psychiatrist. Instead, these men would be quickly discharged from the military (80).

Reader's Digest interviewed a group of combat veterans in an effort to expose how veterans perceived the media attention focused on psychoneurotic casualties. An article titled "The Soldiers Say Don't Do It!" provided combat veterans a public forum. The

article allowed combat veterans to speak out against the media frenzy that gave all combat veterans a reputation as "strange neurotics." As a group, the combat veterans in the interview asked the general public to "stop trying to practice amateur psychiatry" because "much of the stuff being printed is nonsense." One claimed, "my wife is reading a lot of tripe." Another considered the articles on psychoneurotic combat veterans. The veteran sarcastically remarked how the general public must think "we are all mental cases." After reviewing the comments from the combat veterans, the article warned "maybe it's we civilians who have been getting neurotic about this; losing are perspective" (Wharton 15-17).

Ladies Home Journal magazine avoided the use of the term psychoneurotic. In an article titled, "Combat Fatigue," readers learned almost all combat veterans would arrive home with some degree of combat fatigue. The article provided a list of serious symptoms that would make any civilian wary about interactions with a combat veteran. The article claimed combat veterans would display unreasonable irritability and take any harmless remark as an insult. Their outbursts of temper and rage would bewilder family, friends, and the man himself (146).

Near the end of the war and through the early postwar period almost every print article that discussed veterans included a side story of at least one combat veteran with mental health issues. Just consider the following examples as a brief sample of how combat veteran mental health problems seeped into almost all media representations of combat veterans.

Reader's Digest printed a wartime article titled "What Does it Take to Bomb Germany." After the combat mission the pilot describes the four casualties suffered by

his ten-man crew of his long-rang bomber. One man killed in action. Two men seriously wounded by shrapnel. One psychoneurotic casualty. According to the pilot, the cumulative stress of all the combat missions flown by the crew caused the copilot to finally "crackup" under pressure (Lay 51). The pilot considered his former copilot done for the remainder of the war.

The New York Times Magazine printed a postwar story titled, "What's going on in a GI's Mind." The author described a cross country automobile trip in which he gave rides to twenty different hitchhiking veterans. Of course, one of the veterans has psychological problems that hamper his ability to readjust to civilian society. A Marine combat veteran described his inability to work and his need to delay all his postwar plans until a time in the future "when his nerves get steadier" (Robbins 61).

Within popular culture the attention given psychologically troubled combat veterans extended beyond print journalism and the sensationalism of veteran's mental problems. Several psychology advice books, intended for combat veterans and their families, dealt with the reality of combat stress induced psychological problems. These books include the following titles: *War Neuroses, A Psychiatric Primer For The Veteran's Family and Friends*, *Men Under Stress*, *Sex Problems of the Returned Veteran*, and *Psychology for the Returning Serviceman*.

The subject of psychologically troubled combat veterans provided the entertainment industry with both a topical and marketable story. After several years of print portrayals of combat veterans as psychologically troubled men, Americans had well-established expectations of a character with combat experience. In the late 1940s, writers used these expectations to play into larger themes of multiple award-winning

Hollywood and Broadway dramas. For two consecutive years, the Academy Award for Best Picture and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play went to dramas with combat veterans as main characters.

In 1947, the separation between combat veterans and civilian society assumed a prominent place in the theme of each top award-winning drama. The Best Picture, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, tells the story of three recently returned combat veterans and their varied psychological problems as they readjust to civilian life. The film received eight Academy Award nominations and won seven Oscars. The Best Play, *All My Sons*, depicts a combat veteran who resents civilians for their focus on their self-interest.

In 1948, as Americans began to move on from the war, anxieties regarding combat veterans are less obvious in award-winning dramas. Yet these anxieties still play into a larger theme of the drama. The Best Picture, *Gentleman's Agreement*, depicts two combat veterans who resent civilians for their lack of social unity. The Best Play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, reflects the anxiety that combat transformed men into violent psychopaths who should be feared.

When the entertainment industry reinforced the print media portrayal of combat veterans as psychology troubled men, early postwar popular culture created at a collective view of combat veterans. Therefore, in the late 1940s, theater audiences had an expectation that dramatic characters with combat experience had psychological problems that would play into the theme of a play. In the chapter that follows, a review of the personal lives of Miller, Williams, and Kingsley reveal each playwright had firsthand knowledge of the psychological problems of combat veterans.

Chapter III

The Playwrights

When one considers how the media spotlighted potential psychological problems in combat veterans, one can understand why Miller, Williams, and Kingsley made use of that attention in their first early postwar play. The characters Chris, Stanley, and Arthur, reveal these three playwrights did more than superficially address the issues of troubled combat veterans. Instead, the playwrights exhibited a deep understanding of combat veterans. This chapter attempts to show how each playwright acquired that understanding.

Arthur Miller

Of the three playwrights considered in this thesis, Miller had the most varied connections with combat veterans. During the war, Miller had two key opportunities to closely interact with and learn from combat veterans. In his professional life, Miller worked for a Hollywood studio on a screenplay for a wartime film about men in combat. In his first published book, *Situation Normal*, Miller recounted his research for the screenplay. In his personal life, Miller's older brother, Kermit, experienced combat as an infantry officer. The combination of these professional and personal events shaped Miller's perspective about how combat affected men. Miller's books *Situation Normal* and his memoir *Timebends* along with wartime letters he received from Kermit provide points of evidence that illuminate how Miller developed an understanding of combat veterans.

Throughout much of 1943, Miller worked as the original screenwriter for *The Story of GI Joe* – a war movie based on the newspaper columns of war correspondent Ernie Pyle. The film project initially began as a documentary effort by the Army Pictorial Service to glamorize the role of the average combat infantryman. As the war progressed and Pyle's reputation continued to grow with the American public, Universal Pictures recognized the commercial potential of Pyle's story. The project transitioned from a military propaganda film to a Hollywood film financed and managed by a major movie studio.

When the film project moved to Hollywood, the scope of the story increased. The project began as an attempt to visualize Pyle's first book *Here Is Your War* a collection of his newspaper columns written about the American war effort in North Africa. The project eventually went beyond the book to include Pyle's experiences as he followed alongside infantryman engaged in combat in both North Africa and Italy. When the overall film project expanded, Miller, who had yet to have a successful play on Broadway, found himself collaborating on a major Hollywood film.

As Miller worked on the transformation of Pyle's wartime newspaper columns into a Hollywood script, he gained an opportunity to understand combat veterans at a personal level. The American general public regularly followed Pyle's newspaper columns because Pyle reduced the war down to the personal level of an individual soldier on the battlefield. Amy Dunkleberger, a researcher at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, points out *The Story of GI Joe* differed from other Second World War era Hollywood films because of its source. Dunkleberger argues Pyle's firsthand accounts of infantrymen in combat gave the film an "emotional veracity" missing from other

patriotic war films of the 1940s. During the war, the novelist John Steinbeck, who also

worked as a war correspondent, attested to the honesty of Pyle's writing. Steinbeck told

Time magazine:

> There are really two wars and they haven't much to do with each other. There is
> the war of maps and logistics, of campaigns, of ballistics, armies, divisions and
> regiments--and that is General [George] Marshall's war. Then there is the war of
> the homesick, weary, funny, violent, common men who wash their socks in their
> helmets, complain about the food, whistle at the Arab girls, or any girls for that
> matter, and bring themselves through as dirty a business as the world has ever
> seen and do it with humor and dignity and courage--and that is Ernie Pyle's war
> ("Ernie Pyle's War" 65).

The Army and Hollywood considered Pyle's focus on individual soldiers as an ideal

source from which to create a realistic war film.

In contrast to those managing the film project, Miller did not think highly of

Pyle's newspaper columns. Miller complained, "Ernie Pyle has no point of view"

(*Situation Normal* 165). Even though Miller acknowledged Pyle's reputation as

"America's best-loved war reporter," he thought Pyle's writing lacked interpretation and

insight regarding the greater purpose of the war (*Timebends* 276). In Miller's professional

opinion Pyle's columns from the warzone reported "a series of essentially disconnected

incidents" in a "too fragmentary, too letter-like" format (*Situation Normal* 163).

According to Miller, the content of Pyle's syndicated column read like a folksy small-

town newspaper that reported on mundane details of local events and local people. Miller

argued Pyle reported from the frontline as if "the war was simply Main Street with

sudden death" (*Timebends* 281). Miller summed up his disappointment about Pyle's work

with combat veterans when he stated, "the meaning I was seeking in their lives never

seemed to penetrate his columns" (*Situation Normal* 163). From Miller's perspective

Pyle's eyewitness accounts of the battlefield provided an incomplete understanding of combat veterans.

Miller's reservations about Pyle's newspaper columns pushed Miller to seek out a greater understanding of why soldiers willingly entered battle. He considered the film project an opportunity to break new ground in terms of war movies. He argued "the greatest mystery of World War II is undoubtedly the mind of the American soldier, Hollywood pictures had shown practically no detailed interest in his mind" (*Situation Normal* 2). Miller believed the true story of combat veterans went deeper than Pyle's descriptive battlefield observations. Therefore, to take the screenplay beyond Pyle's columns, Miller attempted to find out what combat veterans thought.

To give Miller additional source material for the screenplay, the Army allowed him to travel around the country and meet hundreds of soldiers. Among these soldiers, Miller spent time talking with combat veterans recently returned from the battlefields of North Africa. The Army reassigned combat veterans back to the United States, so they could prepare the next wave of infantrymen for the frontlines. Miller spent two months visiting eight military bases where he followed alongside soldiers as they fired machine guns, parachuted from planes, and drove tanks. During these visits, Miller interviewed an assortment of soldiers from privates to generals as well as wounded combat veterans in military hospitals.

What Miller learned from these interviews did not support his original plan for the screenplay. Miller tried to find what he called the "higher purpose operating among these men" (*Timebends* 277). The interviews revealed soldiers did not fight for a greater cause. The clear majority of combat veterans did not understand the reasons for the war beyond

responding to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. When he began his interviews, Miller

had a preconceived idea about what motivated soldiers in combat. He assumed combat

veterans understood the defeat of fascism as the grand cause behind the American

involvement in the war (*Situation Normal* 170). What Miller learned surprised him. He

claimed that for "each of these men their being in the war has no more sense than an auto

accident and just as much to offer in spiritual repayment" (*Situation Normal* 176).

Decades later, in his memoir, he described his frustration with the interviews: "I kept

searching for some ideological conception animating them, but the war was about little

more than what a game of football is about – something that had to be won for prides

sake" (*Timebends* 277). Miller's interviews with combat veterans countered his

hypothesis that political ideology motivated American soldiers in combat.

  After Miller did not hear what he expected during his interviews with combat

veterans, he softened his approach toward the screenplay. Although Miller did not write

about soldiers ideologically motivated to defeat fascism, he still took a political approach

to his screenplay. Miller's screenplay did not follow the Hollywood formula of one or

two main characters, but instead emphasized the egalitarian bond formed among a unit of

soldiers in combat. He made every man in the unit "the center of the war, equal in

importance" (*Timebends* 279). Miller described his creative idea for the screenplay as

soldiers in combat are motivated by "democratic ideals" (*Timebends* 280). In contrast,

Christopher Bigsby, a prominent biographer of Miller and critic of his work, argues

Miller's screenplay offered an unrealistic socialist interpretation of *The Story of GI Joe*

(*Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* 49). Hollywood executives managing the film gave

Miller disapproving feedback on his overly political approach to the screenplay. Miller

recalled the warning he received from a senior studio executive who had combat

experience in the First World War:

> One thing you've got to watch in your script – don't try to make it mean too much. Battle is never about beliefs and ideas, it's about your buddy and you and not coming off as a shitass or a coward. War is the whole world turned into a drunken barroom (Timebends 280).

Clearly Miller's portrayal of combat veterans needed to become less political before the

studio would accept his screenplay.

Criticized by the studio, Miller turned to Pyle for insight into the mind of combat

veterans. Miller made a visit to Pyle's home in New Mexico to get the famous war

correspondent's input and approval on the screenplay. But Pyle could not provide much

assistance to Miller. During the four days that he spent with Pyle, Miller gained firsthand

experience in the problems of a psychologically troubled combat veteran.

Only days before Miller's visit, Pyle returned home from Italy after he suffered a

nervous breakdown from too much time in combat. Miller described Pyle's problem –

"he saw more combat than almost any other soldier" (*Timebends* 281). While the Army

regularly rotated units off the frontline for rest and recuperation, Pyle remained almost

constantly at the frontline. In his column Pyle told the public, "the frontline soldier has to

harden his inside as his outside or he will crack under the strain" (*Brave Men* 5). Combat

eventually took its toll on Pyle and he cracked. In his column, Pyle described to his

readers why he had to leave the warzone:

> I had come to despise and be revolted by war clear out of any logical proportion. I couldn't find the Four Freedoms among the dead men. Personal weariness became a forest that shut off my view of events about me (*Ernie's War* 166).

In Miller's opinion Pyle "had told as much of what he saw as people could read without vomiting. It was the part that would make you vomit that bothered him" (*Situation Normal* 165).

The psychologically troubled Pyle had little interest in Miller's political approach to the screenplay. Miller recalled "every time I started to talk about the significance of the war in any terms approaching the political he seemed a little uneasy" (*Situation Normal* 168). Pyle provided Miller with a short but to the point response, "war is about people not ideas" (*Situation Normal* 166). Thus, Pyle reinforced what the combat veteran Hollywood studio executive had previously told Miller – ideas did not motivate men in combat. Men fight for the other men in the unit.

Without Pyle's support for a political approach to a story of men in combat, Miller knew the studio would not move forward with what he considered an innovative war movie. Rather than rewrite the screenplay, Miller quit. Despite almost a year of research and writing, Miller's name did not appear on the credits of the movie. Yet Miller gained a key understanding from the experience – political ideology did not motivate men in combat.

Miller found the same sentiment in the wartime letters his older brother sent from the battlefields of Europe. Kermit Miller landed at Normandy, France on D-Day June 6. 1944 as an Army Infantry officer. He fought with his unit across France and almost lost his feet to frostbite in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. Upon his return to civilian life he suffered from war related psychological problems and spent time at a psychiatric hospital where he received electroshock treatment for his ongoing severe depression (Gottfried 82-83). Bigsby quotes an email from Kermit's son: "All of my

relatives spoke about his [Kermit's] change in personality after the war" (*Arthur Miller: 1915-1962* 245).

During Kermit's time in combat, he sent multiple letters to his younger brother Arthur. In these letters Kermit often described an overwhelming sense of respect and comradeship amongst the infantrymen in his unit. Bigsby quotes several letters from Kermit with comments about battlefield comradeship. In October 1994, from the Battlefield in France, Kermit wrote, "our men are magnificent" (236). In December 1944, a wounded Kermit wrote from a hospital in England. Kermit praised his men, but hinted at future psychological problems. Kermit stated:

> Much can be written about the boys up on the front, but I must wait to catch my breath. Unheralded bravery and courage which must remain unrewarded are commonplace. My subconscious has tucked away, ineradicably, detached shots that must wait for interpretations, and then again perhaps never (244).

One letter from the hospital described Kermit's true level of personal connection he shared with his fellow infantrymen. Kermit wrote:

> My belief was not in one god but in many. Every man about me was a God. He was something intrinsic not ethereal. His valor and basic goodness now relieved of all subterfuge became for me an altar and something man did not have to accept blindly because he could recognize it within himself (Arthur Miller 1915-1962 245).

During the Second World War, Miller's own concept of what motivated men in combat clashed with reality. His research for *The Story of GI Joe* and his brothers experience in combat forced Miller to change his view point on combat veterans. After he quit his job as a screenwriter, he finally admitted soldiers did not fight for reasons of political ideology. He stated his search for political motivation in combat veterans "might not only be untrue, it could easily be nonexistent" (*Situation Normal* 164). When Miller developed the character Chris Keller for *All My Sons*, he did not make Chris a man driven

by a political ideology. Instead, Chris sought to regain the sense of community he experienced among a unit of men in combat.

<div align="center">Tennessee Williams</div>

Like Miller, Williams' ability to leverage the tensions regarding combat veterans came from knowledge gained through personal experience. The playwright's own life and the characters he created in *A Streetcar Named Desire* had common elements. Williams' romantic life informed his view of combat veterans.

During the eighteen months when Williams finalized *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he had a long-term affair with a violent combat veteran. In 1946 and much of 1947, Williams' lover Amado Rodriquez y Gonzalez, who went by the nickname Pancho, provided Williams with both excitement and terror. The director Elia Kazan described Pancho's violent behavior as "always on trigger edge" (Kazan 350). In his comprehensive biography of Williams, John Lahr offers key information on Pancho's antisocial behavior, but Lahr does not fully connect this information to identify Pancho as a violent combat veteran.

Williams described Pancho's turbulent anger as a "horror" and a "terrifying thing" driven by alcohol abuse and internal demons (*Memoirs* 106, 133-134; *Notebooks* 443, 465-464; *Selected Letters* 131). When evaluating his unstable violent tendencies, Pancho classified himself as a "causality of war" (qtd, in Lahr 100). According to Williams, Pancho spent two years "in the thick of it" fighting in the South Pacific before he received an administrative discharged from the Army for homosexuality (*Selected Letters* 75).

Pancho displayed the behaviors that tabloid magazines warned combat veterans would display. In letters that Williams received from family and friends, they warned him that Pancho's erratic behavior represented a danger to the playwright's career and life (*Selected Letters* 90, 129). Williams described multipe incidents of Pancho violent behavior such as: attempting to run Williams down with a car, cutting up all of Williams' clothes, demolishing Williams' typewriter, and being violent enough that the police intervened (Memoirs 106, 133, 135). Kazan described one violent event when he stayed in the same hotel as Williams and Pancho. After Kazan heard loud screams, breaking furniture, and death threats, Williams came bursting into Kazan's room seeking protection from Pancho (350).

From another perspective, one friend noted Williams' efforts to exploit Pancho's psychological problem. Frtiz Bultman, Williams' friend in New Orleans, described how the playwright harnessed Pancho's personna in the creation of Stanley. Bultman claimed that in order to fine tune Stanley's violent outbursts, Williams would purposely provoke Pancho's explosive temper. Williams sought to observe and study what he called Pancho's "tempest of rage" (*Memoirs* 106). According to Bultman, "he [Williams] did so by using Pancho for real-life scenes that he created – and then transformed them into moments in *A Streetcar Named Desire*" (Spoto 123-124). Gregg Barrios who wrote a play about the volatile relationship between Williams and Pancho claims the writer Gore Vidal also recalled Williams use of Pancho to create situations that Williams would later incorporate in his plays and short stories (54). In an interview with *Playboy*, Williams admitted Pancho raped him. The rape might possibly be the real-life basis for Stanley's rape of Blanche (Jennings 229).

Kazan noticed the connection between Williams' relationship with Pancho and the characters he created for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Williams patterned Stanley after Pancho and Blanche after himself (350-360). The New York Public Library Performing Arts Collection has a record made by Pancho and Williams in an arcade recording booth in New Orleans. They read a scene from *A Streetcar Named Desire* with Pancho as Stanley and Williams as Blanche.

Williams ended his relationship with Pancho soon after he finished writing *A Street Car Named Desire*. He then started a long-term romantic relationship with Frank Merlo a more subdued Second World War combat veteran. Daivid Kaplan describes the key difference between the relationships: "Merlo made a home for Williams, Pancho made a good story" (74). Clearly, Pancho inspired Williams to create Stanley as a psychologically troubled, violent combat veteran.

Sidney Kingsley

Unlike Miller and Williams, Kingsley served in the Army during the Second World War. His wartime military service began before the United States officially enter the war. One year before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor the Army drafted the thirty-four-year-old writer. Before the American entrance into the war, laws governing the selective service had yet to place a requirement on drafting only young unmarried men. When Kingsley received his draft notice, the media gave a great deal of attention to his plans to enter the military. Kingsley did not fit the profile of a typical draftee. He won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1933 for his play *Men in White.* He authored two other highly successful Broadway plays which he also directed. In addition to his success on Broadway, he wrote screenplays for several successful Hollywood films. After a review

of his age, his bad health, and his marital status the military doctors offered to declare

Kingsley unfit for service, but Kingsley requested they allow him to serve. Kingsley

completed three years in the Army and left the military in 1943 for medical reasons.

Despite his wartime military service, Kingsley's connection to combat veterans

remains surrounded in mystery. While no scholar published a comprehensive biography

of Kingsley, an extension discussion of Kingsley's life can be found in an introduction to

a collection of his most prominent plays (Couch). The published historical record of

Kingsley's military service shows a soldier who did not deploy overseas. The description

of his military service focuses almost exclusively on Kingsley's work to revise his play

The Patriots which debuted on Broadway in 1943 and won the New York Drama Critics

Circle Award for best drama.

Kingsley, like Miller, viewed the war as a struggle over political ideology. Before

Kingsley entered the military, he wrote *The Patriots* to reinforce the ideas of American

democracy by dramatizing the difference in the political ideals of Thomas Jefferson and

Alexander Hamilton. As a sergeant in the Army Kingsley managed to complete his

military duties during the day while revising the play at night. The success of the play

brought it to the attention of President Roosevelt who invited Kingsley to sit beside the

President during the dedication of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, DC.

Kingsley's unique wartime experience as a soldier during the day and a Broadway

playwright during the night does not seem the norm, yet his wartime military service had

an even more interesting twist. Research for this thesis uncovered Kingsley belonged to a

Top-Secret military unit within the Office of Strategic Services – the predecessor to the

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This unit contained military personnel who had

previous motion picture industry experience and they reported to the famed Hollywood director John Ford who served as a Navy Officer. Declassified CIA documents now reveal Ford did more than direct military propaganda films. Ford also managed Top Secret film crews comprised of military personnel from all of the military services who captured film footage from behind enemy lines ("A Look Back . . . John Ford: War Movies").

Hints of Kingsley's Top-Secret wartime experience are in his unpublished autobiography. In 1986, Kingsley began work on his autobiography, but he never completed the task. The unfinished autobiography now resides with his personal papers in the Ohio State University Theater Archives. Within a chapter titled "The War" Kingsley provides two details that link him to John Ford's Top Secret combat film unit. But Kingsley does not describe the unit as part of a classified military operation.

Kingsley describes the death of his brother-in-law Tom Evans who, as a member of the Coast Guard, served on a combat camera crew reporting to John Ford (*Dreaming True,* 6, 17).[6] Kingsley's wife, Madge Evans, grew up as a childhood movie star, and continued as a leading Hollywood actress throughout the 1920s and 1930s. One can assume her brother Tom also had motion picture industry experience. Kingsley describes receiving a phone call from John Ford to inform him of Tom's imminent death from pneumonia contracted during what Ford described as a "training mission" (*Dreaming True* 18).

Kingsley also discusses his own involvement with another of Ford's secret combat film units. Kingsley wrote:

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[6] All entries from *Dreaming True* are from the following Box 319, Folder 2, revisions October 21, 1986 and December 21, 1988.

I was waiting to go overseas with a camera crew to cover the invasion of Normandy. I was in the Signal Corps. The group of us were slated to precede the invasion by parachuting into Normandy four days before the invasion, hopefully if we survived, to film the beaches of Normandy and the invasion as troops came ashore" (*Dreaming True,* 10).

A 1994 article in the *Los Angeles Times* revealed the existence of the Top-Secret Normandy mission described in Kingsley's autobiography (Reza). The men who participated in the secret combat film units signed agreements not to disclose information about the mission for fifty years. The military did not declassify the missions until the mid-1990s.

According to Kingsley he received a medical discharge nine months before the Normandy invasion due to back problems and pneumonia. While Kingsley never discussed his relationships with combat veterans, one can assume his participation in training for a Top-Secret behind enemy lines mission brought him in contact with combat veterans.

Kingsley did discuss the level of resentment veterans had over the time they lost in the military while others continued to progress in their careers. In his autobiography, Kingsley describes his intense rivalry during the 1930s and early 1940s with Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Maxwell Anderson (*Dreaming True,* 4). Quite possibly this rivalry pushed Kingsley to write at night in his Army barracks as he revised *The Patriots*. He wrote while sitting on his footlocker in an open bay barracks room that housed over ninety men. He wrote while the other soldiers played craps (*Dreaming True,* 4). When he created the character Arthur Kindred, Kingsley would use the issue of combat veterans competing with those who did not serve in the wartime military.

Chapter IV

The Characters

Miller, Williams, and Kingsley developed characters who displayed behaviors Americans expected in combat veterans. But they also added their own personal understanding of how combat veterans behaved.

Army Combat Veteran Chris Keller

All My Sons tells the story of industrialist Joe Keller who in 1943, under pressure to fulfill a wartime government contract, ships defective engine cylinders for military aircraft. Twenty-one military pilots die because of the bad cylinders. Joe frames his business partner, Herbert Deever, who goes to jail for the crime. In 1946, when Joe's son Chris, a combat veteran, seeks to marry Ann the daughter of Joe's jailed partner, Joe's life unravels as his family comes to realize the truth.

Elia Kazan, who directed many of Miller's and Williams's most successful plays, claimed the difference between the two famous playwrights to be "Miller's need to instruct the audience" (Kazan 350). In *All My Sons* Miller instructs the audience with a sociopolitical message. Miller himself described *All My Sons* as a political play. In his original draft of the introduction for *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* he wrote, "I was trying to be a Marxist, and *All My Sons* could not have been written in the precise way it was by someone who was not trying to be a Marxist" (qtd. in Nilsen 156).

In writing a sociopolitical play during the 1940s, Miller assumed he would face audience resistance to his message. He referred to *All My Sons* as "conceived in wartime

and begun in wartime" (*Arthur Miller Collected Plays* 22). Miller described the

sensitivity of his message based on the wartime culture. He wrote:

> There was a kind of implicit cease-fire on social criticism during World War II after the explosively contentious years of the Depression. I wrote *All My Sons* during the war, expecting much trouble, but the war ended just as I was completing the play, leaving some room for the unsayable, which everyone knew – that the war had made some people illicit, sometimes criminal fortunes. (*Arthur Miller Echoes Down the Corridor* xi*)*.

One can view Miller's use of Chris's status as a combat veteran as a means to provide a

slightly vailed critique of unchecked capitalism. Instead of having the theme focus on the

evil of Joe's materialistic greed, Miller shifts the focus to Chris's postwar idealism. As

Miller learned during his work on *The Story of GI Joe* and from his letters from Kermit,

combat veterans fought for each other rather than political ideology.

Miller uses Chris's combat experience to translate battlefield comradeship to

social responsibility. In Act One, when Miller establishes Chris as a combat veteran, he

also provides the audience with the main message of the play. After Chris states that he

served as a company commander who lost most of his men in combat, Chris imparts the

lesson he gained through the unselfish sacrifice of his soldiers:

> CHRIS: It takes a little time to toss that off. Because they weren't just men. For instance, one time it'd been raining several days and this kid came to me, and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That's only a little thing – but…that's the kind of guys I had. They didn't die; they killed themselves for each other. I mean that exactly; a little more selfish and they'd've been here today. And I got an idea – watching them go down. Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of - responsibility. Man for man. You understand me? – To show that, to bring that onto the earth again like some kind of a monument and everyone would feel it standing there, behind him, and it would make a difference to him (Act One).

Chris's speech about frontline unit cohesion and the brotherhood of battle leads to his

critique of civilian society.

CHRIS: And then I came home and it was incredible. I – there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was a kind of a – bus accident. I went to work with Dad, and that rat-race again. I felt - what you said – ashamed somehow. Because nobody was changed at all. It seemed to make suckers out of a lot of guys. I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see a war, but when you drive that car you've got to know that it came out of the love a man can have for a man, you've got to be a little better because of that. otherwise what you have is really loot, and there's blood on it. I didn't want to take any of it. (Act One).

Chris expresses resentment toward an overall lack of social obligation in civilian society. He correlates this to a lack of respect for the sacrifice made by the combat soldiers who won the war.

Miller's use of veteran disillusionment with civilian society reflects an accurate aspect of the postwar veteran experience. Social historian Kenneth Rose describes his reason for this feeling:

When the boys came back home eager to make up for lost time, there was less concern for those beyond your immediate family. Making it yourself was what it was all about. Inevitability, the pressures of competition and class loosened the ties among veterans that had once seemed indissoluble (235).

In his study of the Second World War in American Drama, Albert Wertheim comments on Chris's psychological struggle and resentment toward the values of civilian society. According to Wertheim, Miller uses Chris's disillusionment to offer the audience. "a way of putting the lessons of the war into practice for a renewed and better America" (231).

Miller reinforces Chris status as a combat veteran by including an element of how early postwar popular culture negatively portrayed combat veterans. Miller portrays Chris as a quick tempered and potentially violent man. Chris threatens his father with harm as a means to force an admission of guilt. Chris tells his father, "Then explain it to me. What did you do? Explain it to me or I'll tear you to pieces!" (Act Two). The portrayal of Chris as a potentially violent man reinforces his background as a combat veteran.

Beyond the text of the play, Miller's other wartime writing offers insight into Chris as a combat veteran. A close reading of Miller's book *Situation Normal* helps one understand the origin of the character. During his research for *The Story of GI Joe*, Miller formed his understanding of the tremendous loss experienced by combat veterans as they transitioned to civilian society. In his book, Miller observes: "No man has ever felt identity with a group more deeply and intimately than a soldier in battle" (*Situation Normal* 156). In combat, men had a shared responsibility for each other, but in civilian life self-interest takes priority. According to Miller, returned combat veterans no longer experienced the "exhilaration" gained from the "emotional unity" shared among men committed to a common cause (*Situation Normal* 156-159). Miller describes a combat veteran's return home: "Now he must live unto himself, for his own selfish welfare. Half of him, in a sense, must die, and with it must pass away half the thrill he knew in being alive. He must, in short, become a civilian again" (*Situation Normal* 157).

In *All My Sons*, the father-son conflict between Chris and Joe Keller, reflects Miller's opinions of returning combat veterans. When Chris rejects his father, he represents Miller's perception that combat veterans rejected the self-interest of civilian society. Chris rejects what Miller describes as the fallacy of the American premise that: "If every man privately takes care of his own interests, the community and the nation will prosper" (*Situation Normal* 158). Chris also rejects, what Miller expresses as the American ambition: "Our lifelong boast is that we got ahead of the next guy" (*Situation Normal* 158). Thus, the character Chris, gave voice to Miller's opinion that combat veterans yearned to once again belong to a community with a strong sense of unity.

Army Combat Veteran Stanley Kowalski

A Streetcar Named Desire tells the story of a mentally disturbed woman in her late thirties, Blanche, who with no other options, moves in with her pregnant younger sister Stella and her husband Stanley. Blanche, a woman who behaves like an aristocrat, clashes with Stanley, a working class brutish returned combat veteran. Without a means of financial support Blanche soon hopes to marry Mitch, one of Stanley's war buddies. When Stanley learns of Blanche's past sexual indiscretions, he tells Mitch who ends his relationship with Blanche. Being rebuked by Mitch pushes Blanche further away from reality. When Stella is in the hospital giving birth to Stanley's child, Stanley rapes Blanche causing her to lose her tenuous grip on reality. When Stella returns, she agrees to have Blanche admitted to a mental health institution. Despite Stella's knowledge of the rape, she stays with her husband.

In a letter to his literary agent, Audrey Woods, Williams revealed how Stanley's combat experience could influence the audience and play into a larger theme of the play. Williams wanted the battle between Blanche and Stanley to have neither a victim nor a villain. Williams explained: "I don't want to focus on guilt or blame particularly on any one character but to have it a tragedy of misunderstanding and insensitivity to others" (*Selected Letters* 118). Stanley's experience as a combat veteran places him in a similar mental health situation as Blanche. As a psychologically troubled combat veteran, Stanley becomes less of a villain. The audience can have a degree of sympathy for Stanley.

Williams subtly worked Stanley's combat experience into the play. Williams did not make Stanley's combat experience a prominent aspect of the dialog; however, Williams deliberately wove references to Stanley's veteran status throughout the play. In

five of the eleven scenes, to include the first and last scenes, multiple characters discuss

Stanley's time in the Army. All four main characters, Blanche, Stanley, Stella, and Mitch,

comment on Stanley's military service. To an early postwar audience, who had daily

exposure to war veterans and their issues, Stanley's war record served as an integral part

and a clarifying aspect of his background. Part of Stanley's violent personality can

potentially be linked to his combat experience.

In Scene One, Williams introduces Stanley's veteran status through a wartime

photograph of Stanley in his Army uniform. A discussion between Stella and Blanche

includes Stanley's war record as a highly decorated senior Non-commissioned Officer in

a prestigious part of the Army combat ground forces.

STELLA: Here's a picture of him!

BLANCHE: An Officer?

STELLA: A Master Sergeant in the Engineers' Corps. Those are decorations!

BLANCHE: He had those on when you met him?

STELLA: I assure I wasn't just blinded by all the brass.

BLANCHE: That's not what I –

STELLA: But of course, there were things to adjust myself to later on.

BLANCHE: Like his civilian background

In this discussion between the two sisters we see Blanche acting unimpressed by

Stanley's social status. Blanche wonders if Stanley's medals made him seem more

impressive than his actual status as an enlisted soldier. Blanche reinforces her lack of

regard for Stanley by discussing his civilian status which now is lower than his former

military status.

Despite Blanche's lack of respect for Stanley's wartime accomplishments, an early postwar audience would be highly impressed by what they heard about Stanley. In wartime, an Army Master Sergeant held a great deal of responsibility for equipment and up to two hundred men. In addition, Stanley succeeded in a combat position that required a high degree of intellect. Military Historian John McManus describes the Engineers as men who fought in combat alongside the infantry while also working with high explosives to destroy enemy obstacles (5). Finally, the medals on Stanley's chest classify him as a hero who made sacrifices during the war. Thus, in the discussion about Stanley's military photo, the audience would move slightly away from supporting Blanche with her condescending attitude and they would move closer to supporting Stanley with his status as a war hero.

In Scene Six, Williams introduces the element of wartime comradeship between Mitch and Stanley. When Blanche inquiries about Mitch's friendship with Stanley, the audience hears about a strong almost unbreakable bond between the men.

MITCH: We was together in the Two-Forty-first.

An audience in the late 1940s would understand this reference as a military unit.

In Scene Seven, Stanley validates Mitch's reference to the 241st. Stanley uses his combat comradeship with Mitch as justification for his allegiance to Mitch over a member of Stella's family.

> STANLEY: Mitch is a buddy of mine. We were in the same outfit together –
> Two-forty-first Engineers. We work in the same plant and now on the same
> bowling . . . I'd have that on my conscience the rest of my life if I knew all that
> stuff and let my best friend get caught.

In the late 1940s, most of the male audience members under the age of forty would

understood the power of the comradeship between two soldiers who served together in

combat.

In Scene Eight, Blanche once again takes a condescending attitude toward Stanley

the war hero. When Blanche calls Stanley a Polack, his response reinforces what he did

during the war.

> STANLEY: I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But
> what I am is one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest
> country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack.

As a true war hero, Stanley will not stand for anyone questioning his status in postwar

American society.

In Scene Eleven, the final scene of the play, Stanley briefly clarifies his status as a

combat veteran. Stanley states that he fought in the 1943 invasion of the Italian mainland

at the Battle of Salerno.

> STANLEY: You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky. Take
> Salerno. I believed I was lucky. I figured that 4 out of 5 would not come through
> but I would … and I did. I put that as a rule. To hold front position in this rat-race
> you've got to believe you are lucky.

With the reference to Salerno, Williams reveals to the audience that Stanley experienced

intense frontline combat. A present-day audience might easily miss the significance of

the Salerno reference. In contrast, in the late 1940s, theatergoers had recent knowledge of

Salerno.

The Battle of Salerno nearly resulted in an American defeat. To prevent being

pushed off the beachhead and into the sea, almost all soldiers at Salerno had to fight

alongside the infantry (Blumenson, 96-112). Although Stanley served in an Engineer

unit, his comment about Salerno means that he fought on the frontline in a desperate

battle. During the Second World War, two military psychologists tracked soldiers in combat to determine the psychological breaking points. After thirty days of ground combat most soldiers showed signs of emotional exhaustion (Swank and Marchland 243). The Battle of Salerno alone represented 13 days of continuous combat for Stanley. Thus, Stanley can be considered a likely psychiatric casualty of the war.

With Stanley's comment about Salerno, Williams gave the audience insight into Stanley's personality. In the late 1940s, when the audience considered Stanley's experience at Salerno, they could construe a possible root cause for his violent behavior. More importantly, the audience now had a reason to view Stanley from a different perspective. Rather than view Stanley only as a violent beast, a postwar audience could also view Stanley as a psychologically traumatized man who suffered from the aftershock of war. When an audience recognized Stanley as a combat veteran, they felt sympathy for Stanley on a level similar to what they felt for the psychologically vulnerable Blanche. Williams' personal papers reveal why he wanted the audience to have sympathy for Stanley.

In commenting on Marlon Brando's audition for the role of Stanley, Williams observed: "He seemed to have already created a dimensional character, of the sort that the war has produced among young veterans" (*Selected Letters* 118). The letter suggests that Williams made Stanley a combat veteran to move the play beyond the black and white of his script. Stanley's combat experience pulled the audience into the struggle that waged between Stanley and Blanche.

As Stanley and Blanche vied on stage for control of Stella's loyalty, Stanley's combat experience made a late 1940s audience part of the equation. Williams understood

and tapped into tensions the audience felt regarding combat veterans. To engage the audience on a personal level, Williams used their preconceived feelings of fear, guilt, and sympathy regarding violent combat veterans. In doing so, Williams prevented the audience from easily condemning Stanley as a villain. A critical review of the original Broadway production concluded: "the play becomes the triumph of Stanley Kowalski with the collusion of the audience, which is no longer on the side of the angels" (Clurman, 134). Thus, with a reference to a specific battle, Williams effectively used the tensions regarding combat veterans to guide the audience toward a theme in his play.

Navy Combat Veteran Arthur Kindred

Detective Story tells the story of a day in a New York City Police detective squad room. Detective Jim McCloud considers himself in a war against crime and he acts as the judge and jury. Among several criminal cases in the play, McCloud arrests Arthur Kindred, a young twenty-seven-year-old Second World War hero, for embezzlement of funds at his work. Arthur took the money to impress Joy, his prewar girlfriend, who has since become a high paid model who only dates older wealthily men. Joy's younger sister brings enough money to repay the money stolen by Arthur. The manager of Arthur's business wants to drop the charges, but McCloud refuses. A Detective Brody, who lost his son in the war, asks McCloud for leniency for Arthur, but again McCloud refuses. In McCloud's opinion if you commit a crime you are and always will be a criminal. In the end, McCloud suffers a mortal wound in a shootout with a criminal. Before he dies, McCloud agrees to give Arthur a second chance.

In a story about the evils of an uncaring police state, Kingsley uses Arthur's veteran status to gain sympathy from the audience. After being arrested Arthur remains a

modest hero and only tells the detectives he served in the Navy for five years as a Chief

Petty Officer. In Act One, when Susan arrives at the police station, she provides the full

details on Arthur's wartime military service.

> SUSAN: Arthur was cited four times. He got the silver star. He carried a sailor up three decks of a burning ship. He had two ships sunk under him. He floated around once in the Pacific Ocean for seventeen hours with sharks all around him. When they picked him up, he was out of his head, trying to climb onto a concrete platform that wasn't there. He was in the hospital for ten weeks after that. any more questions?

In her description of Arthur's wartime record the audience learns that Arthur received the

third highest American military decoration for valor in combat. They also learn Arthur

suffered severe psychological problems from being stranded at sea in shark infested

waters.

In Act One Arthur explains how his wartime service changed his life plans.

BRODY: You went to college? What did you study?

ARTHUR: Majored in History.

BRODY: History? What for?

ARTHUR: To Teach. I wanted to be a teacher.

BRODY: Much of a career in that?

ARTHUR: I used to think so.

BRODY: You're a long way from home.

ARTHUR: Yes.

BRODY: Why didn't you finish?

ARTHUR: No time. The war washed that up. There's no time. You can't start from

scratch at 25.

Arthur entered the Navy as a young man halfway through his undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan. Now at twenty-seven, Arthur thinks his age makes him too old to go back to Ann Arbor and complete his degree. But a postwar audience would understand how the strain of Arthur's combat service makes him feel older than his actual age.

The problem Arthur discusses represents a common problem with combat veterans. With 15 million veterans reentering the civilian marketplace, competition became fierce for the initial jobs available upon returning stateside. Younger veterans initially did not seek to use their educational benefits due to the competitive pressure for jobs. Combat veterans resented non-combat veterans who arrived home early and landed jobs. Leo Chrene in his 1944 advice book, *The Rest of Your Life*, argues young veterans will feel pressured not to return to school, so they may assume a more mature position in society (42).

> In Act Two, Arthur justifies his stealing based on the time he lost during the war.
>
> ARTHUR: I did it because I was hungry. Hungry. You can be hungry for other things besides bread. You've been decent to me, Mr. Pritchett. You trusted me, and I let you down. I'm sorry…It's hard to explain, even to myself. I'd been separated from my girl for five years—five long, bloody years! The one human being in the world I loved. She's very beautiful, Mr. Pritchett. Tall, a silvery blonde girl, warm, understanding.

In making a comparison that embezzling money equates to stealing for food, Arthur raises the issue of combat veterans feeling the laws do not pertain to them. Following the war, the general public feared a veteran inspired crime wave. When Arthur creates an excuse for his crime Arthur hopes to take advantage of civilian guilt. In his 1946 advice book to veterans, *How to Be a Civilian,* Morton Thompson discusses what he called a "super-anxiety" among civilians created by a guilt complex (202-203). The civilians felt

guilty because they did suffer during the war. To some degree this guilt complex could also exist in the millions of war veterans who did experience combat.

The guilt complex works on Detective Brody who lost his son in the Pacific when a Japanese submarine sank his son's destroyer. Brody identifies with the young Arthur who served on several Navy ships that sank due to enemy fire. Brody asks Mr. Pritchett for Arthur's company to drop the charges.

> BRODY: This kid has a fine war record, too, remember.
>
> MR. PRICHETT: I know.
>
> BRODY: He took a lot of chances for us. Maybe we ought to take one for him you see, these kids today got problems nobody ever had. We don't even understand them. New blood. We're varicosed. If a new world is gonna be made outa this mess looks like they're the ones gotta do it.

Kingsley use of the guilt complex surrounding combat veterans allowed him to move the audience toward forgiving Arthur of what otherwise might be an open and shut case of stealing money for one's own desires rather than needs.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter attempted to show how Miller, Williams, and Kingsley constructed the background of the characters Chris, Stanley, and Arthur to reinforce the main theme in their plays. The general public had several expectations of psychological troubled combat veterans. These varied expectations gave Miller, Williams, and Kingsley different vehicles to influence their audience. Miller used a combat veteran's disillusionment with civilian society to raise the subject of political ideology. Williams used a veteran's combat induced brutality to generate sympathy for a character who otherwise would be a villain. Kingsley used civilian guilt over veteran sacrifice to make an audience question the execution of inflexible state power.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Social historians who examine the early postwar period identify issues of

resentment and anxiety surrounding the relationship between returned Second World War

combat veterans and the rest of American society. On one side of the relationship, some

combat veterans resented those men who remained in safe locations during the war and

especially those who benefited monetarily from the war (Adams 157; Kennet 78; Rose

227-230). On the other side of the relationship, Americans felt anxiety about combat

veterans. Some Americans experienced guilt regarding their level of wartime sacrifice in

comparison to the sacrifice made by combat veterans (White). Other Americans feared

combat veterans. When combat veterans became civilians, some Americans worried these

battle-hardened men would remain prone to violence and unable to live as law-abiding

citizens. (Childers, 5-7). One can see the issues of resentment and anxiety reflected in the

portrayal of combat veterans in the prominent theater and film of the early postwar years.

While combat veterans represented an extremely low percentage of early postwar

American society, they remained visible on stage and screen.

Modern Viewers of these classic plays do not have the knowledge to fully

appreciate the problems of characters with combat induced psychological problems.

Therefore, elements of these plays are easily overlooked.

Today, as we attempt to deal with almost two decades of war, we have a civilian

society far removed from our veteran community. The number of combat veterans in

American society in 2019 represent a much lower percentage than it did in the late 1940s.

As a result, Americans today know less about the problems of psychologically troubled

combat veterans than Americans in the late 1940s. While PTSD receives a great deal of

public attention through the news media, it receives little attention from the entertainment

industry. The average American does not engage with psychologically troubled veterans

either through real life or through art. In 2008, *The Hurt Locker* was the last major award-

winning film or play to address the issue of combat stress. Without adequate expression

of the problems of combat veterans represented in major entertainment, the combat

veterans of today feel less accepted than those in the late 1940s.

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Appendix A

BROADWAY

	DATES	PERFORMANCES	AWARDS
All My Sons	JAN 1947 – NOV 1947	328	<u>NY DCC</u> Best Play <u>Tony Awards</u> Best Author Best Director
A Streetcar Named Desire	DEC 1947 – DEC 1949	855	<u>Pulitzer Prize</u> Best Drama <u>NY DCC</u> Best Play <u>Tony Awards</u> Best Actress
Detective Story	MAR 1949 – AUG 1950	581	

Sources: *Internet Broadway Database* website
               New York Drama Critics' Circle (NY DCC) website

HOLLYWOOD

	DATE	MOVIE STARS	ACADEMY AWARDS
All My Sons	1949	Edward G. Robinson Burt Lancaster	
A Streetcar Named Desire	1951	Vivien Leigh Marlon Brando Kim Hunter Karl Malden	<u>Won</u> Best Actress Best Support Actress Best Supporting Actor <u>Nominated</u> Best Actor Best Picture Best Director Best Screenplay
Detective Story	1951	Kirk Douglas Eleanor Parker Lee Grant	<u>Nominated</u> Best Actress Best Support Actress Best Director Best Screenplay

Source: *Academy Awards* website

Figure 1: Bill Mauldin Cartoon

"There's a small item on page 17 about a triple ax murder.
No veterans involved."

Note: the cartoon identifies the man as a returned veteran by his discharge lapel pin

commonly known as the Ruptured Duck emblem (Mauldin 54).

Appendix B

Figure 2: Look Magazine Film Noir Style Illustrations

War had changed
a teen-age veteran

The Mental Road Back from War
A new book by a military psychiatrist shows why war changes all men, some to a degree requiring professional help

Appendix B

Figure 3: Look Magazine Film Noir Style Illustrations

Appendix C

The Story of GI Joe

1945 United Artists

Release Year	1945	
Leading Man	Robert Mitchum	
Character Actor	Burgess Meredith	War Correspondent Ernie Pyle