

**2018 Award Winner**  
**USAWC Student Awards Program**

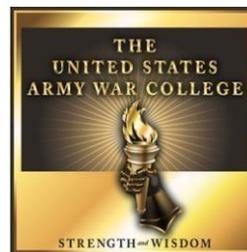
Selected for publication in *The Army War College Review*

Heroes and Villains:  
Walter Reed and the All-Volunteer  
Force

by

Colonel Richard G. Malish  
United States Army

Under the Direction of:  
Professor Jeffery Broughton



United States Army War College  
Class of 2018

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release  
Distribution is Unlimited

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 01-04-2018		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> PROGRAM RESEARCH PROJECT		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Heroes and Villains: Walter Reed and the All-Volunteer Force				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Colonel Richard G. Malish United States Army				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Professor Jeffery Broughton				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> Word Count: 5365					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> When the Washington Post revealed unacceptable living quarters and frustrating administrative process at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2007, the public reacted to support the hospital's war-wounded patients. The public's outrage changed Army medicine forever. In seeking to understand these events, this paper posits that outcomes at Walter Reed were connected to a broader evolution of the relationship between the modern All-Volunteer Force (AVF), the government, and the public. Specifically: 1) the public attributes heroic and altruistic characteristics to the AVF, 2) the public perceives the government establishment as a self-serving bureaucracy –resulting in a widened perception gap between it and the AVF, 3) the public demands that the establishment support the AVF, and finally, 4) the public will support upward mobility for the AVF to such a degree that its future use, by the government, will be constrained.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> All Volunteer Force, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Walter Reed, Military Evolution, Future Military					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 24	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UU	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UU	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UU			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)</b>

Heroes and Villains:  
Walter Reed and the All-Volunteer Force

(5365 words)

Abstract

When the Washington Post revealed unacceptable living quarters and frustrating administrative process at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2007, the public reacted to support the hospital's war-wounded patients. The public's outrage changed Army medicine forever. In seeking to understand these events, this paper posits that outcomes at Walter Reed were connected to a broader evolution of the relationship between the modern All-Volunteer Force (AVF), the government, and the public. Specifically: 1) the public attributes heroic and altruistic characteristics to the AVF, 2) the public perceives the government establishment as a self-serving bureaucracy – resulting in a widened perception gap between it and the AVF, 3) the public demands that the establishment support the AVF, and finally, 4) the public will support upward mobility for the AVF to such a degree that its future use, by the government, will be constrained.

## **Heroes and Villains: Walter Reed and the All-Volunteer Force**

In February 2007, as 20,000 U.S. troops deployed to stabilize an insurgency and civil war in Iraq, the *Washington Post* published a series of articles describing shameful conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the United States Army's flagship hospital and main evacuation hub for hostilities overseas. The Pulitzer prize-winning articles depicted a system that provided state-of-the-art medical care but that had broken down in multiple other ways: 1) physical conditions in barracks were squalid, with clear signs of neglect in some buildings ("mouse droppings, belly-up cockroaches, stained carpets, cheap mattresses");<sup>1</sup> 2) out-patient soldiers had to navigate a "bureaucratic maze" to receive treatment and benefits;<sup>2</sup> and finally, 3) out-patients were "neglected," "chewed out by superiors," and treated with "petty condescension."<sup>3</sup>

The American public reacted with "fury."<sup>4</sup> How could such things happen at Walter Reed, of all places? How could America's heroes be so mistreated? How could Walter Reed's leadership not be aware of these conditions, or if they were, think that they were acceptable? The articles may have focused on a single hospital, but their implications reached far. The events at Walter Reed were indicative of a government and senior military leadership that were insensitive to the needs of those that it had asked to sacrifice so much in pursuit of the nation's objectives.

Using Walter Reed as a case study, this paper will argue that extraordinary public esteem for the modern U.S. All Volunteer Force (AVF) places unexpected constraints upon its use. First, the paper will explore the public's relationship with the military when the *Washington Post* articles broke. Second, it will demonstrate that public adulation of the military created a significant gap in perception between the wounded

and the establishment that managed them. The Walter Reed leadership did not realize that it was dealing with a clientele whose relationship with the public differed from its own. Third, in exploring this divergence, the paper postulates an ongoing transition from a military characterized by austerity towards a fully-resourced elite warrior class. The events at Walter Reed demonstrate that the public moved faster in acceptance of a 'special' status for its military than did governmental leadership. Finally, the paper will demonstrate that, because of the widened differences of perception between heroic soldiers and the establishment that manages them, the public will increasingly intervene in the care and protection of the upwardly-mobile military. The result will be constraints upon the nation's use of the military as an instrument of national power.

#### I. The Heroes within its Walls

The soldiers that were evacuated to Walter Reed from 2002 to 2007 had a different relationship with the public than did any soldiers in American history. A 2011 Pew poll found that 90% of Americans "felt proud of the soldiers serving in the military" since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began.<sup>5</sup> A term commonly used to describe the force was "heroic." In fact, positive public support for the military continues to be so pervasive that it is hard to remember or justify any other paradigm. Nevertheless, history demonstrates considerable variation in the relationship between public and military. As recently as the Vietnam War, the military was the object of the American public's "ire."<sup>6</sup> Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz used his famous 'paradoxical trinity' to indicate that war, and its features of reason, chance, and passion, make the relationship between soldier, people, and government unbalanced, unpredictable, and constantly changing. The current relationship between the American people and its military is, generationally speaking, new and evolving.

Julian Legrand, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and author of *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens*, explains that opinions about how groups behave in the public arena are based upon societal perceptions of their agency (what they do or have the capability to do) and motivation (why they do it).<sup>7</sup> Unspoken in his observation is that such judgements are often created in an otherwise uninformed setting. If we accept this construct, the worship of today's American warriors can be said to be the result of three factors: (1) members of the military are anonymous to most; (2) the group fights and sacrifices for the benefit of the Nation; and (3) the group is perceived to be altruistic.

Members of today's AVF are unknown to the vast majority of Americans. In spite of conducting combat operations in two theaters, the U.S. military is the smallest since before World War II.<sup>8</sup> In that war, 12 million joined the military – including roughly 50% of males between the ages of 18 and 49. Today, because “less than 0.5% of the population [now] serves in the armed forces,”<sup>9</sup> few Americans have personal connections to the military. Anonymity is important because it provides a blank slate upon which to superimpose one's own judgements of agency and motivation. As James Wright, author of *Those Who Have Borne the Battle*, states, “If we have no personal relationships with those who are fighting our wars, then we think of war as a geopolitical drama, and we think of those fighting it as heroic action figures.”<sup>10</sup> Essayist and critic, William Deresiewicz, elaborates, explaining how a lack of personal familiarity with members of the military is an important factor of modern-day military hero worship:

The greater the sacrifice that has fallen on one small group of people, the members of the military and their families, the more we have gone from supporting our troops to putting them on a pedestal. In the Second World War, everybody fought. Soldiers were not remote figures to most of us;

they were us. Now, instead of sharing the burden, we sentimentalize it. It's a lot easier to idealize the people who are fighting than it is to send your kid to join them.<sup>11</sup>

The observations of Deresiewicz and Wright are useful for reasons other than illustrating the impact of the force's namelessness. They acknowledge the agency (or actions) of the uniformed services at war: the force "fights" and "sacrifices" to benefit national interests. The public is thankful because it understands that the military shoulders the weight of society's physically and psychically injurious work. The 2011 Pew study revealed a near-universal public belief that the military sacrificed (99%) – with 83% quantifying such sacrifice as "a lot."<sup>12</sup> The patients at Walter Reed had realized enormous, and in many cases permanent, sacrifices in pursuit of the Nation's work.

While elements of sacrifice are evident to all, the motivations for that sacrifice emanate from within society's collective imagination. Moreover, resonant narratives color imagination. Professors John Lawrence and Robert Jewett (coauthors of *The Myth of the American Superhero*) contend that Americans are captivated by a narrative that has been repeated to such a high degree in fiction and arts that it both informs American belief and reflects it:

Americans have not moved beyond mythical consciousness... the following archetypal plot formula may be found in thousands of popular-culture artifacts: A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity.<sup>13</sup>

When Americans speak of 'heroes,' according to Lawrence and Jewett, they have something like this in mind. By emerging when normal institutions fail, heroes elevate themselves to a plane of capability and righteousness higher than the

authorities left behind. When the crisis ends, heroes recede into obscurity. Their time on stage is constrained to when they are needed most. We shall see how these attributes influenced prevailing thought to impact Walter Reed.

It is Lawrence and Jewett's "selflessness," however, that provides crucial insight into heroic motivation. Monomythic heroes are motivated by altruism. Le Grand uses the term 'knight' instead of 'hero' to describe those who put the needs of the public above their own: "[k]nights are individuals who are motivated to help others for no private reward and indeed who may undertake such activities to the detriment of their own private interests."<sup>14</sup> A widespread public perception of selflessness in the military is only possible in an AVF. Voluntarily sacrificing comfort to address community-afflicting problems that 'normal institutions' have failed to solve, the AVF's motivations and actions harmonize with repeated and reinforced narratives of selfless heroism. As a result, Americans reflexively worship the AVF. Commonly expressed as 'patriotism,' the designation of altruism to the modern U.S. AVF is so pervasive that even non-American contemporary military historians make the connection.<sup>15</sup>

Without attribution of patriotic motivation, anonymous militaries may be perceived as victims, pawns, or worse. Five years into the Vietnam War, for example, public opinion polls about its political and moral merits were as negative in scale as those of the war in Iraq in 2007.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, however, only 27% of the U.S. population thought favorably of the non-volunteer force conscripted to fight in that conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Impressions of the modern day military have not developed serendipitously. They have been amplified by a media long immersed in American myth and culture. Embedded reporters (such as Sebastian Junger and David Finkel) have found heroes

where they have looked and returned their stories to the American public – reinforcing mythic themes like echoes in a chamber. Aided by the internet, ubiquitous battlefield cameras, and satellite networks, the speed and accessibility of information about the AVF is something never before seen in warfare. Not distanced from the narratives of its volunteers by time or media clearing houses, the public learns about their triumphs and tragedies in real-time. With confirmation bias lubricating the process, the public is able to constantly affirm the fight and sacrifice of its heroic force.

The military services are active in reinforcing the public's admiration for the AVF. They do so by crafting the military's image to resemble that of the superheroes of mainstream American culture. Recruiting advertisements present service members as dual in identity. In combat they are fierce warriors, masked by protective equipment and in control of marvelous futuristic machines capable of extraordinary destruction. In times of peace, their alter egos are revealed: good-looking and proud in their dress uniforms, they are invited to experience the public's admiration and gratitude. This template is how the public is invited to imagine its AVF. Crafted by deliberate intention as well as mythic belief, the heroic image of the American service member is not without consequences.

### The Villains of the Establishment

Unfettered public adulation of the military creates a significant perception gap between the AVF and the establishment that manages it. In the public's eyes, nothing less than superheroes were housed and treated at Walter Reed in 2007. One can understand how such an elevated class would kindle the public's expectations of a level of care characterized as nothing-but-the-best. The *Washington Post* articles, in revealing a starkly different reality, were significant because they forced the public to

contemplate its role in an egregious breach of trust. The public's "outrage" fueled decisive and immediate action by both the Congress and the Secretary of Defense. Within less than two weeks of the articles, Secretary of the Army, Francis J. Harvey relieved MG George Weightman, Walter Reed's senior commander. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, endorsed the firing, stating that, "[t]he care and welfare of our wounded men and women in uniform depend on the highest standard of excellence and commitment that we can muster as a government. When this standard is not met, I will insist on direct corrective action."<sup>18</sup> His 'direct corrective action' did not spare Harvey. Gates fired him two days later.<sup>19</sup> Less than ten days later, the Acting Secretary of the Army, Pete Geren, announced that the Army Surgeon General, LTG Kevin Kiley, would be retiring precipitously.<sup>20</sup> When the smoke cleared, command of Walter Reed rested in the hands of then-MG Eric Schoomaker who was charged with cleaning up the aftermath and charting a course for Walter Reed that was consistent with congressional, senior leader, and public expectations. Even with his best efforts, many would argue that Army medicine never recovered from the reputational damage it incurred because of the events at Walter Reed.

The factors leading to the physical, climatic, and bureaucratic conditions in Walter Reed were complex and multidimensional. Even so, it is clear that the leadership and staff did not perceive their patients with the same amount of 'specialness' as did the public. If they had, they would have brought attention to their injustices before the *Washington Post* did so through outside-in investigative reporting. Specifically, the leadership did not understand that the power of the public's adulation for the 'mythic' soldier had elevated their patients to a plane of respect higher than the one to which

they themselves were entitled. Many factors contributed to this confusion of identities. 1) Because the hospital routinely and cyclically deployed its uniformed staff to Iraq, many were combat veterans. 2) The uniformed members of the staff (and many civilians) received their care at Walter Reed – mixing with the wounded routinely. 3) Members of the Walter Reed treatment team were revered, alongside the wounded, in previous news features about the campus. Finally, 4) Walter Reed workers developed traditional provider-patient alliances with the wounded. A division between patients and providers in terms of goals, approach, and motivation was thinking anathema to their bonds. While the system was inefficient, leaders, providers, administrators, and patients navigated it, as best they could, together.

The *Washington Post* revealed the fallacy of the collective thinking of Walter Reed's staff and leadership. COL (ret.) Chuck Callahan, the hospital's senior physician in 2007, describes the impact of the articles on the staff's vision of reality: "The hospital staff failed [the patients]. Among [Walter Reed] staff members, the Post's articles evoked an incredulity shared with the American public, and when we were honest with ourselves, we asked along with the public, "How did an organization that was the most successful in history...break down?"<sup>21</sup> The hospital's leadership recognized that the shift of its public perception from highly-regarded to negligent was justified. According to LTG (ret.) Schoomaker, leaders at all levels had "failed as systems thinkers."<sup>22</sup> They should have done more for America's heroes. Instead, by choosing to accept, on a day-to-day basis, the constraints of the system, they represented a traditional bureaucracy – impersonal, inflexible, and accepting of little accountability to change rigid processes.

The events at Walter Reed illustrate that the more the public ascribes heroic motivation to the fighting class, the higher the expectations for the establishment that supports, manages, and leads it, and the less tolerance for shortcomings in and by that group. The perception of 'the establishment' has not varied over time as has that of the 'fighting' military. Furthermore, it will never reach a heroic threshold. To understand the origin of this dichotomy, it is useful to evaluate the establishment's notoriety, agency, and motivation.

First, the senior military and civilian ranks are fewer in number than the mass of the AVF. In the internet-enabled era of information, their actions and decisions are available to the public in detail never before seen. As a result, they cannot exist anonymously and therefore cannot benefit from the public attribution of characteristics derived from romanticized myth. Second, while they have enormous capability and agency, they neither fight nor sacrifice. Instead they pursue the nation's work in conditions of comfort and safety. Most importantly, the public increasingly perceives their motivations differently from that of the junior ranks. Former Marine Corps officer and Congressman Seth Moulton uses the following language to characterize them: "the highest ranks [have become populated], by careerists, people who have gotten where they are by checking all the boxes and not taking risks."<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the AVF, observers perceive the motivations of senior leadership as career-serving and not altruistic. Self-servitude is the only requirement for the widespread perception of a class to be considered "knavish," according to Le Grand.<sup>24</sup> For context, Merriam-Webster defines a knave as a "tricky deceitful fellow," and provides the term "villain" as a synonym.<sup>25</sup> Regrettably, there is no escape – even for

the once-heroic senior military ranks. By the act of persisting in the profession, they outlast the crisis for which they were called upon as saviors, and expose self-serving motivations – defying essential tenets of the American monomyth. Forfeiting forever their heroic stature, they instead join the ranks of the failed institutions that require defending. The resonant narratives that inform the stereotype of the group include themes ranging from incompetence to villainy – but selfishness is central to all.

Thus emerges a phenomenon of importance to the AVF. Best articulated by the fictional Harvey Dent, the hero-turned-villain in the movie ‘The Dark Knight,’ the phenomenon is one of transformation: “[y]ou either die a hero or you see yourself live long enough to be become the villain.”<sup>26</sup> Professor of Literature, Joseph Campbell, writing in 1949, characterized the narrative of the hero-to-villain conversion as recurring and ancient. In his version of the ‘the Dark Knight Phenomenon,’ “[t]he hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today.”<sup>27</sup> While government administrators have always been perceived as a ‘necessary evil,’ the simplistic attribution of heroic motivations to soldiers and self-serving motivations to senior civilian and military leaders has become increasingly fashionable. In the recent past, the literary short-cut has become pervasive in academic essays,<sup>28</sup> the mainstream press,<sup>29</sup> and contemporary historical accounts.<sup>30</sup>

Reflecting on scores of opinion pieces and political cartoons depicting the Walter Reed senior leadership as heartless, distanced, boorish, and self-serving, LTG (ret.) Schoomaker recognized that Walter Reed’s early public affairs strategy was unmindful to the perception gap between AVF and senior leadership: “[t]oo often we put general officers in front of [the media] and when we did, we exacerbated the distance between

the public and us.”<sup>31</sup> To rectify this issue, he intentionally minimized the presence of general officers and senior leaders as ‘the face of Walter Reed’ in press conferences.<sup>32</sup>

The difference between the stereotype used to characterize senior leaders and that used to characterize the remainder of the AVF is what makes media accounts of villainy, knavishness, and misconduct so harmful for the senior leader class and inconsequential for junior ranks. In the former group, they reinforce negative stereotypes. In the latter, they are at such odds with the prevailing standard as to be considered the behavior of outliers.

While soldiers are increasingly unassailable in respect and admiration, their senior leadership continues to be susceptible to scrutiny, criticism, and characterizations of self-serving motivations. Because public respect for the military has grown while opinions of its caretaking agents have remained stagnant, the perception gap has widened.

#### From Austerity to Amenities

Contributing to the events at Walter Reed was the presence of a generational transition from the conscripted armies of World War II and Vietnam; characterized by communal living, stoicism, and austerity, to a paradigm of a fully-resourced elite warrior class. The rate at which the AVF achieved heroic status outpaced Walter Reed’s capabilities to meet the public expectations for its care. But, more significantly, it outpaced the military’s understanding of a larger ongoing sociologic shift. If soldiers are to be regarded, by the public, as a heroic elite – then the establishment must do so as well. Without such alignment, the perception gap will result in crises of the scale and type of Walter Reed. But transformation to something new requires the elimination of what was once the status quo. The reason that the leadership at Walter Reed didn’t

come forward (before the *Washington Post* articles) to demand the resources it needed was because the action was resisted by decades of competing notions about what represented suitable standards for the treatment of soldiers.

The senior ranks at Walter Reed could likely not buy into the soldier-as-exceptional myth as completely as did the public. Their reality competed with it. They were perhaps influenced by the common-person recollections of their parents and grandparents who served in miserable conditions in previous conflicts. In their careers, they may have served, on active duty, with Vietnam veterans. They potentially witnessed that the act of volunteering was motivated, in many cases, by drives other than pure patriotism. Senior leaders acknowledged that soldiers fought and sacrificed in Iraq – but these actions were not coated in heroic luster. Instead, they were so institutionalized as to be mundane.

Another important feature of the current senior military culture is that nuanced ‘sacrifices,’ have, over time, created a mind-set of stoicism. In order to be successful, leaders have adopted ‘can-do’ attitudes to contend with the conditions of austerity and scarcity they experienced both in combat and peace. They have eaten many substandard meals; spent many long nights in training; and lived in many hangers, tents, and abandoned structures. Luxury, in the Army, was once considered ‘three hots (warm meals) and a cot.’ At the organizational level, leaders have waited months for pay and administrative issues to be resolved; essential equipment repaired; and ‘key’ positions filled. At the strategic level, acquisition of modern equipment has routinely taken decades, gone over budget, and under-delivered on promises. This has been the climate of the military lifestyle for decades. The Center for Strategic and International

Studies succinctly summarized it best almost twenty years ago: “U.S. military forces are highly motivated but overcommitted and under resourced.”<sup>33</sup> Survival in this atmosphere requires resilience. Leaders have been conditioned to never to ask for luxury and to complain only in the guise of humor.

LTG (ret.) Schoomaker identified this tendency in the investigation of the hospital commander at Walter Reed: “He had visibility of what the problems were – but was unable to solve them...[for] compelling reasons...I had to reprimand him not for failing to recognize what was happening but because he did not notify higher command...He was such a terrific soldier that he was unwilling to call attention to the issues.”<sup>34</sup> Instead the commander endured the deficiencies in resourcing and strove to complete the mission with what he had. Representative Christopher Shays also insightfully identified this predisposition as a root-cause for the conditions at Walter Reed. In his questioning of hospital leaders, he stated, “I believe that basically it’s part of your mindset that says, if you’re not going to get the resources, your job is to basically come to Congress and say, “We’re getting the job done.”<sup>35</sup>

Walter Reed proves that, when it comes to caring for the current AVF, patterns of thought that reflexively accept conditions of austerity and scarcity for the AVF are no longer suitable. The public expects leaders to overcome resourcing constraints to ensure that the care, boarding, protection, and equipping of modern warriors matches their heroic station. According to LTG (ret.) Schoomaker, if there is a lesson to be learned from Walter Reed, it is that leaders must fight the tendency to ‘drive on’ in resource-constrained environments. Instead, they must elevate the existence of sub-par physical and administrative conditions to the level needed to assure correction.<sup>36</sup>

Upward mobility of the AVF is a product, not just of public expectations, but of the government's need to compete with civilian society to recruit and retain volunteers. To this end, pay and living conditions for soldiers have improved significantly over the past 45 years. Even in combat in Iraq, soldiers were provided catered meals, private air-conditioned living quarters, and indulgences such as internet cafes. It is not yet clear where and when the military's evolution from austerity and stoicism to luxury and stewardship will end. But Walter Reed demonstrates that the pace of the provision of material goods and services in combat has eclipsed that of administrative processes on the home-front - in at least one case. Without out any signal to suggest otherwise, the military will continue its journey 'upward' not only in public perception – but in the resourcing needed to ensure that its existence meets all the conditions suitable to its elevated station.

The military's upward mobility leads to a question worth considering: did the events at Walter Reed trigger change or were they simply a continuation of the larger process of the public forging a new relationship with its force? In supplying an illustration of an antiquated and insensitive bureaucracy, Walter Reed provided the energy and urgency needed to usher in several new programs that benefited the nation's wounded. Warrior Transition Units were created to ensure that soldiers were properly case-managed through their medical transitions. Soldier and Family Assistance Centers were likewise erected across the Army. The disability system was reformed – substantially reducing the timelines endured by soldiers. Through the disruptive change of Walter Reed, the nation arrived at a system for the care of its wounded acceptable to the public. The impact on the existing establishment (and all of its downstream

consequences), were necessary prices to pay for the satisfying equilibrium the Walter Reed revelations achieved in matching the public's expectations with the actual care provided to the AVF. The modern public will support its heroic military whatever the consequences to the establishment and its larger goals. This is an important lesson of Walter Reed.

### Too Prized to Fight?

The military to which we are evolving will have increased constraints upon its employment. When the less-honorable government fails to meet the public's progressively-heightening standards for the AVF, the people will intercede to protect and care for it. The 1993 Somalia intervention, 1996 Khobar Towers incident, and late-1990s Kosovo intervention are examples in which, by demonstrating "an excessive aversion to casualties," the American public altered the prosecution of military interventions.<sup>37</sup> Walter Reed demonstrates that the public's feelings have broadened to an 'aversion to austerity' for its military class.

The argument that public adulation will restrict the military's employability is not universally accepted. Some claim that the same qualities that make the AVF cherished by the public make it more liberally employable by the government. Because the force is anonymous and willing to fight and sacrifice voluntarily, it enables (even encourages) national adventurism. This concept has been advanced by select prominent authorities. Professor, author, and contemporary military theorist, John Nagl, states that, "The American public is completely willing to let this professional class of volunteers serve where they should, for wise purpose. This gives the president much greater freedom of action..."<sup>38</sup> Others testify that the situation is more menacing. Andrew Bacevich, author, American historian, and international relations professor, claims that, "[b]y rescinding

their prior acceptance of conscription, the American people effectively opted out of war.”<sup>39</sup> It follows that, “persuaded that they have no skin in the game, they will permit the state to do whatever it wishes to do.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, if nothing changes, Bacevich argues, “Americans can look forward to more needless wars or shadow conflicts...more wars that exact huge penalties without yielding promised outcomes.”<sup>41</sup>

While history indicates a trend of increased American military expeditionary intervention, no evidence supports the contention that the public has or will become indifferent to the wellbeing of the AVF in times of hardship. Such analysis is at odds with the adulation of the military discussed previously. Indeed, the public’s reaction to the conditions at Walter Reed disproves the hypothesis. To suggest that the government and its military could be divorced from the people would mean that Clausewitz’s reason and chance could be isolated from passion. The bonds between the military and the people are not weakening but strengthening. Contrary to Bacevich’s claims, it is the bonds between the military and the government that are fraying.

Underestimating the public’s power and desire to affect war is a pit into which senior military leaders have repeatedly fallen. Public support for military intervention varies according to the nature of the threat, the merit and progress of the endeavor, and ultimately, its cost. This last variable, cost – particularly human cost – is what has changed in the era of the AVF, the instant information age, and the resulting elevation of the military to heroic heights.

Only when the force encounters success at little human cost will the public remain silent. But the human costs are increasingly visible. Furthermore, even relatively rare losses or inequities may produce soul-touching impact in the realm of public

opinion –as they did at Walter Reed. When the internet and mainstream media deliver stories of human injustice or tragedy (no matter how tactically or statistically insignificant), public emotion of strategic scale may emerge. Because they are held in in such high esteem, harm to superheroes is abhorrent. As they are killed, disfigured, or mistreated, their anonymity is lifted and, without armor, they appear smaller, younger, ordinary, and vulnerable. In the moment their sacrifice is realized, they instantly resemble our children, and it matters not whether the force volunteered or was conscripted.

A public united in opposition to harm or discomfort affecting its heroes will retain the power to affect the course of warfare through its representatives in Congress. After reflexively criticizing the self-serving character and marginal competence of civilian and military leadership, it will intervene to hobble its power and limit its autonomy with the AVF. Specifically, it may demand excessively defensive rules of engagement, major changes in strategy, the AVF's outright withdrawal from combat, or the fast-tracking of protective equipment at the cost of other acquisition programs.

Walter Reed demonstrates that the missteps of greatest significance occur when the public believes that the establishment neither shares its beliefs about the AVF's (extremely high) value nor the costs of its employment. A leadership that appears to devalue or dismiss the heroic agency and motivation of the AVF is profoundly out of synch with current public sentiment. Defaulting on perceived moral contracts to protect and care for the military is unforgiveable. A risk for this outcome, in the immediate future, exists if additional vestiges of 'the old way' – the paradigm of military stoicism and austerity – persist in the establishment's beliefs or behaviors.

Hopefully, ongoing discrepancies will be discovered and corrected in incremental steps. The public will not greet blind-spots of the scale of Walter Reed with Bacevich's indifference. Instead, it will revolt at the insensitivity of the government towards the plight of the force it exposes it to harm or inequity. "Self-Imposed Strategic Surprises" will result.<sup>42</sup> A salient example of such a surprise is that associated with the 2007 acquisition of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles. In that case, congress, reacting to public outcry over the death and injury of soldiers in Iraq due to primitive roadside explosive devices, demanded the immediate acquisition of safer vehicles for troops. The fast-tracking of MRAP acquisition occurred at a cost. Specifically, a plurality of the military's major modernization efforts were abandoned – creating persisting strategic vulnerabilities.

To avoid future self-imposed strategic surprise, the U.S. national security apparatus will need to increasingly consider the public's feelings about the AVF as too precious to lose and too honored to harm. With time, the force will only be available for threats of the most existential kind.

### Conclusion

The events examined by this study were path-dependent on the creation of an AVF in 1973. Specifically, abandonment of the draft created a largely anonymous force of tremendous agency and perceived altruistic motivation. Forty-five years later, with the help of lessons drawn from Walter Reed, we are beginning to understand the repercussions of an AVF in American society. Specifically, the relationship between the government, the public, and the AVF is maturing in the following way: 1) The public elevates the AVF in accordance with the cultural patterns of American hero worship, which is to say it accords superhero characteristics and status to it. 2) Such a status

widens the gap between the AVF and the establishment that governs it – framing civilian and military leaders as self-serving and therefore ‘below’ the AVF in character and competency. 3) The public increasingly supports the highest care, protection, and treatment of the AVF. 4) Finally, the perception gap between the AVF and the agents of its management will increasingly lead the public to ‘intervene’ in the conduct of war as standards for the treatment of the AVF heighten. As a result, new constraints will develop on the nation’s ability to employ the AVF. Walter Reed was located half-a-world-away from the conduct of war in Iraq. Even so, the voices of its heroes and villains may serve to create a better understanding of the future of American warfare.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dana Priest and Anne Hull, “Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration at Army’s Top Medical Facility,” Washington Post, February 18, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Raz, “Pentagon Tackles Criticism of Military Hospital,” NPR Online (February 23, 2007), <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7570932> (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Dana Priest and Anne Hull, “Soldiers Face Neglect.”

<sup>4</sup> David Stout, “General Steps Down in Walter Reed Furor,” New York Times, March 12, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> “War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era – Executive Summary,” Pew Research Center Online (October 5, 2011), <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/> (accessed April 28, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Erik Schoomaker, Army LTG (ret.) 42<sup>nd</sup> Army Surgeon General, interview by author, Bethesda, MD, 6 April, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Julian Le Grand, *Motivation, Agency, and Public Policy – Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Jim Tice, “Army Shrinks to Smallest Level since before World War II,” *Army Times Online* (May 7, 2016), <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2016/05/07/army-shrinks-to-smallest-level-since-before-world-war-ii/> (accessed 8 May, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Karl W. Eikenberry and David M. Kennedy, "Americans and Their Military, Drifting Apart," *New York Times Online* (May 26, 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/27/opinion/americans-and-their-military-drifting-apart.html> (accessed 8 May, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> James Wright, *Those Who Have Borne the Battle* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs™, 2012), 276.

<sup>11</sup> William Deresiewicz, "An Empty Regard," *New York Times*, August 20, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> "War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era."

<sup>13</sup> John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Le Grand, *Motivation, Agency, and Public Policy*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> John Keegan, The Making of the American GI, *Time Online* (Dec 29, 2003), <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1006532,00.html> (accessed April 26, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Jodie T. Allen, Nilanthi Samaranayake, James Albright, Jr., "Iraq and Vietnam: A Crucial Difference in Opinion – The Military's Prestige Remains High despite Discontent with War," Pew Research Center Online (March 22, 2007), <http://www.pewresearch.org/2007/03/22/iraq-and-vietnam-a-crucial-difference-in-opinion/> (accessed 19 May, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "General in Charge of Walter Reed Hospital has been Relieved of Command," *USA Today Online* (March 1, 2007), [https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-03-01-walter-reed\\_x.htm](https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-03-01-walter-reed_x.htm) (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Chuck Callahan, "Forty Days of Winter – Walter Reed and the Washington Post February – March 2007," briefing slides provided to the author by email, April 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Chuck Callahan "To Stay a Soldier," *Parameters Online* (Autumn 2009), <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/articles/09autumn/callahan.pdf> (accessed April 27 2018).

<sup>22</sup> LTG (ret.) Schoomaker interview.

<sup>23</sup> James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military," *The Atlantic Online* (January February 2015) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516/> (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Le Grand, *Motivation, Agency, and Public Policy*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Merriam-Webster Online, "Knave," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/knave> (accessed May 16, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Nolan, "The Dark Knight" (Feature length movie, Warner Brothers, 2008). Quote available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfcemNhlqyA> (accessed April 28, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York, NY: Princeton University Press, 1949), 353.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal Online* (May 1, 2007), <http://armedforcesjournal.com/a-failure-in-generalship/> (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, "General Failure," *The Atlantic Online* (November 2012) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/11/general-failure/309148/> (accessed April 27, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust. How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country* (New York, NY: Picador, 2013), 190.

<sup>31</sup> LTG (ret.) Schoomaker interview.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Edwin Dorn and Howard D. Graves, eds. *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century – A Report of the CSIS International Security Program* (Washington, DC: The CSIS Press, February 2000), 17.

<sup>34</sup> LTG (ret.) Schoomaker interview.

<sup>35</sup> "Congressional Hearing on Walter Reed Army Medical Center. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs.," *Washington Post*, CQ Transcripts Wire. March 5, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> LTG (ret.) Schoomaker interview

<sup>37</sup> Edward Dorn and Howard D. Graves, *American Military Culture*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military."

<sup>39</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Ending Endless War. A Pragmatic Military Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, September October, 2016, 40.

<sup>40</sup> James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military."

<sup>41</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 190.

<sup>42</sup> Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, "Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy," (Strategic Studies Institute, September 2009), 96, [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB939.pdf](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB939.pdf) (accessed April 28, 2018).