

Title	Sexual violence, counterinsurgents, and the legacies of Jean Lartéguy's <i>The Centurions</i>
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Publication date	2020-01-28
Original Citation	Fitzgerald, D. (2020) 'Sexual Violence, Counterinsurgents, and the Legacies of Jean Lartéguy's <i>The Centurions</i> ', <i>Journal of American Studies</i> , pp. 1-28. doi: 10.1017/S0021875819001774
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1017/S0021875819001774
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Download date	2025-09-12 21:45:15
Item downloaded from	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/10468/9736">https://hdl.handle.net/10468/9736</a>

## Sexual Violence, Counterinsurgents, and the Legacies of Jean Lartéguy's *The Centurions*

Jean Lartéguy's 1960 novel, *The Centurions*, which follows a group of French paratroopers through the wars in Indochina and Algeria, is one that has achieved cult status within the US military. In embracing this novel as a valuable how-to guide for counterinsurgents, those who promote *The Centurions* ignore the sexual violence and misogyny at the heart of the work, reflecting deeper silences over the issue of sexual violence in war. This article explores both the depictions of sexual violence in *The Centurions* and the silences that surround those depictions.

In September 2003, six months into the American occupation of Iraq, the Department of Defense's Directorate of Low Intensity Conflict and Special Operations organised a Pentagon screening of Gilo Pontecorvo's 1965 film, *The Battle of Algiers*. The flier for the event promised lessons for modern militaries, telling potential viewers that the film would demonstrate 'how to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas.' It went on: 'children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervour. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film.'<sup>1</sup> This screening of Pontecorvo's film came at a time when the US military was struggling to make sense of its difficulties in Iraq by casting about in search of historical lessons that might provide some illumination.<sup>2</sup> Frequently that search led doctrine writers and theorists back to colonial counterinsurgency campaigns. Among those campaigns, the French War in Algeria stood out

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I am very grateful to Beth Bailey, Shaul Mitelpunkt, Jill Rogers, Sarah Thelen, and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments. Thanks also to the participants in the UCC CASiLaC violence, conflict and gender workshop (especially Nuala Finnegan, Dónal Hassett, and Silvia Ross), and to attendees at the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Transatlantic Studies Association and the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Finally, special thanks to Ruth Lawlor, whose interventions were invaluable at every step of the way.

<sup>1</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, "What Does the Pentagon See in 'Battle of Algiers'?", *The New York Times*, September 7, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/07/weekinreview/the-world-film-studies-what-does-the-pentagon-see-in-battle-of-algiers.html>.

<sup>2</sup> On the American military's search for lessons, see David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

as particularly useful, given that it highlighted the challenges of conducting counterinsurgency in cities and among a largely Muslim population. Along with a renewed interest in *The Battle of Algiers*, Alastair Horne's 1977 history of the conflict, *A Savage War of Peace*, was reprinted in 2006, and the work of French counterinsurgency theorists, such as David Galula and Roger Trinquier, inspired American doctrine writers as they worked to formulate their own concepts for defeating insurgencies.<sup>3</sup>

As the screening of *The Battle of Algiers* made clear, though, cultural products could be just as instructive as more conventional histories. While the Pentagon screening drew headlines, another work of fiction had a more profound effect on US thinking on counterinsurgency. *The Centurions*, Jean Lartéguy's 1960 novel of the Algerian War of Independence, achieved widespread popularity during the Iraq War, appearing on the bookshelves of prominent generals and junior personnel alike. Like Pontecorvo's film, Lartéguy's novel offers a sense of verisimilitude, based as it is on his time as a reporter in Algiers. Lartéguy is blunt about the nature of French strategy in Algeria: his characters torture insurgents, rape women, destroy villages, and express open contempt for their civilian masters. In *The Centurions*, and its sequel *The Praetorians*, his protagonists become progressively alienated from French civil society, to the point of launching a coup against the De Gaulle government. Unlike *The Battle of Algiers*, however, the novel is deeply sympathetic to the French soldiers charged with prosecuting the war in Algeria. Far from condemning extra-legal violence, Lartéguy condones torture and celebrates the worldview of soldiers who see themselves as modern-day Praetorians.

Crucially, the violence in the novel is not only brutal, but deeply gendered. Lartéguy's writing depicts his protagonists as tough and manly, their courageousness the envy of all who

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<sup>3</sup> Alastair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books Classics, 2006).

interact with them. At the same time, they harass and rape Algerian women while attempting to use the very same women as agents to turn the population against the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN). These plot-lines may not have figured in previous analyses of the French influence on American counterinsurgency doctrine, but they are surely worthy of attention for, as the scholar Laleh Khalili argues, the actual practice of counterinsurgency depends as much on gender roles and norms as Lartéguy's fictional portrayal does.<sup>4</sup> From the use of women as counterinsurgents, such as the US military's Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan, to narratives of the liberation of women and girls that have often accompanied such campaigns, to the discourses of toughness that surround the 'warrior scholars' who design and execute them, neither contemporary nor historical counterinsurgency campaigns can be fully understood without reference to gender.<sup>5</sup>

Lartéguy's work appears in the bibliography of FM 3-24, the US Army's Counterinsurgency field manual, and is on the reading lists of organizations like West Point and the British Army, while quotes from his characters are approvingly reproduced in both staff college essays and twitter threads.<sup>6</sup> While some within the US military have expressed unease at the way the French experience in Algeria has been mined for lessons, and have

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<sup>4</sup> Laleh Khalili, "Scholar, Pope, Soldier, Spy," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 5, no. 3 (December 3, 2014): 417–34, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2014.0023>; Laleh Khalili, "Gendered Practices of Counterinsurgency," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011): 1471–91.

<sup>5</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 783–90, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783>; Hope Hodge Seck, "Marine Corps Revives Female Engagement Team Mission," *Marine Corps Times*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.marinecorps.com/news/your-marine-corps/2015/08/05/marine-corps-revives-female-engagement-team-mission/>; Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, "The Army's All-Women Special Ops Teams Show Us How We'll Win Tomorrow's Wars," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/05/19/the-armys-all-women-special-ops-teams-show-us-how-well-win-tomorrows-wars/>.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel P. Bolger, "Two Armies," *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College*, September 1989, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA528291>; Andrew Exum, "This Quote, from a Character in Jean Lartéguy's Novel 'The Centurions,' about French Paratroopers in Vietnam and Algeria, Says Everything I Want to Say about Trump's Military Parade.Pic.Twitter.Com/8yQvr89PdJ," Tweet, @ExumAM (blog), February 6, 2018, <https://twitter.com/ExumAM/status/961025010067525634>; "2016-05-13 Revision of British Army Professional Reading List.," accessed May 27, 2018, <https://militaryreadinglists.com/revisions/110-centre-for-historical-analysis-and-conflict-research-2016-05-13/>; "February 2011 Revision of the United States Military Academy Reading List," accessed May 27, 2018, <https://militaryreadinglists.com/revisions/61-united-states-military-academy-2011-02-01>.

included Lartéguy in this critique, what is striking about the conversations around the US military's understanding of the French War in Algeria is the absence of any mention of gender in discussions of the conflict.<sup>7</sup> This article seeks to address that absence by examining the misogyny inherent in Lartéguy's worldview and his depictions of sexual violence. It also explains how and why his work gained such popularity within the US military. By exploring sexual violence in *The Centurions* we can pose some questions about the particular way in which self-described soldier-scholars absorb history and understand the lessons of past wars. Fundamentally, this article argues that in their search for a compelling story about modern war that depicts the sort of warrior ethos they ascribe to, these soldiers have ignored the gendered violence that lies at the core of Lartéguy's work.

Focusing on how American officers have interpreted *The Centurions* is particularly important because it allows us to see more clearly what was at stake in debates over the US military's fascination with the French War in Algeria, where Americans both reproved the French for their tactics and drew upon them for inspiration. Many contemporary counterinsurgency theorists who have depicted the war in Algeria as offering a rich repository of tactical lessons prefer to emphasize French practices that might be useful to Americans. In their search for historical lessons, the authors of the US Army and Marine Corps' field manual FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* drew heavily on the work of French counterinsurgency theorists, especially David Galula, a veteran of the war in Algeria.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, John Nagl, a central figure

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<sup>7</sup> Jane Mayer, "Whatever It Takes," *The New Yorker*, February 12, 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/02/19/whatever-it-takes>; Robert D. Kaplan, "Rereading Vietnam," *The Atlantic*, August 2007, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/08/rereading-vietnam/306169/>; Lou DiMarco, "Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and Guerre Revolutionnaire in the Algerian War," *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College*. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 63–76. The one exception to this trend is Laleh Khalili, who offers a brief treatment of Lartéguy's sexism in a review article. Laleh Khalili, "Scholar, Pope, Soldier, Spy," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 5, no. 3 (December 3, 2014): 424–26, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2014.0023>.

<sup>8</sup> United States Marine Corps United States Army, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Dept. of the Army Headquarters, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Dept. of the Navy, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2006); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Praeger Security International, 1964); David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006).

in the writing of FM 3-24 , has said that a copy of Galula's book was sitting on his desk whenever he was writing doctrine.<sup>9</sup> Those who have critiqued the US Army's post-2005 approach to counterinsurgency often cite the frequent references to Galula and other French theorists as deeply problematic, given the French record in Indochina and Algeria.<sup>10</sup> Critics argue that there is a gulf between Galula's theorizing about counterinsurgency and his actions in Algeria where he, along with the rest of the French Army, made frequent use of torture and the targeting of civilians.

There has been extensive debate in the literature on counterinsurgency about the role of brutality in these wars. Historians have demonstrated that even in conflicts celebrated as exemplars of a 'hearts and minds' approach, such as the British campaign in Malaya, violence and coercion directed against civilians played a significant role in the defeat of the insurgency.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, in classical accounts of counterinsurgency – such as those written by Galula and other post-colonial counterinsurgents, like Robert Thompson and Frank Kitson – counterinsurgency advocates tended to focus on issues such as good governance and popular legitimacy, arguing that strategies that focus too much on the use of force were counter-productive.<sup>12</sup> These sanitized accounts of post-colonial counterinsurgency wars played an

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<sup>9</sup> John A. Nagl, *Knife Fights: A Memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 133.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 172–99; Grégor Mathias, *Galula in Algeria: Counterinsurgency Practice versus Theory*, trans. Neal Durando (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2011); Terrence Peterson, "Myth-Busting French Counterinsurgency," *War on the Rocks*, December 3, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/12/myth-busting-french-counterinsurgency/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012); David French, "Nasty Not Nice: British Counter-Insurgency Doctrine and Practice, 1945–1967," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 4–5 (October 2012): 744–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2012.709763>; Huw Bennett, "Minimum Force in British Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21, no. 3 (2010): 459–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2010.505475>; Karl Hack, "'Iron Claws on Malaya': The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (March 1999): 99–125; Caroline Elkins, "Royal Screw-up: Why Malaya Is No Model for Iraq," *The New Republic*, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (St Petersburg, Florida: Hailer Publishing, 1966); Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Hailer Publishing, 1971).

important role not only in the American embrace of counterinsurgency in the 1960s, but also in the revival of counterinsurgency associated with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As counterinsurgency scholars Andrew Mumford and Bruno C. Reis have argued, the trope of the ‘warrior scholar’ – highly educated officers who are equally comfortable writing theory and prosecuting campaigns – is a particularly important one in counterinsurgency, and the reading habits of generals can tell us much about their understanding of how such wars should be waged.<sup>13</sup> The bookshelves of American officers in the mid-2000s were full of histories of counterinsurgency campaigns in Malaya, Algeria, and Vietnam. These reading habits extended beyond works of theory and history though: as well as his best-known work, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Galula wrote a widely-read memoir of his time as a company commander in Algeria, and T.E. Lawrence’s memoir, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, has long been a staple of counterinsurgency reading lists.<sup>14</sup> The counterinsurgency canon also includes fiction. Eugene Burdick and William Lederer’s 1958 novel *The Ugly American* served as a means of instructing Americans on how to wage counterinsurgency in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup>

The popularity of these memoirs and novels and the ways in which they have instructed generations of officers indicates that the connections between Lartéguy’s fiction and American thinking on counterinsurgency are worth mapping out. In both fiction and non-fiction, the classical works on counterinsurgency have all emphasized – to a greater or lesser degree – the need to protect civilians to carry out social reforms in order to win the population over to the counterinsurgent’s side. Lartéguy’s novels, which depict counterinsurgency as a brutal and heartless form of war, are rare exceptions to this trend. which makes their popularity all the

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Mumford and Bruno C. Reis, eds., *The Theory and Practice of Irregular Warfare: Warrior-Scholarship in Counter-Insurgency* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958*; T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1958).

more noteworthy. The fact that even critics of the US military's uneasy fascination with the French War in Algeria have overlooked his misogyny makes the necessity of the exercise even more pressing.

### **Jean Lartéguy's Vision of War**

Born as Jean Osty in Maisons-Alfort, Val-de-Marne in 1920, Lartéguy served with Free French Forces during the Second World War, fighting in Italy, France and Germany, before beginning his career as a journalist with *Paris Match* in 1946, taking the *nom-de-plume* Lartéguy.<sup>16</sup> After re-joining the French Army to fight in Korea, he was wounded there before returning permanently to journalism. Over a long career, he covered wars in Indochina, Algeria, Vietnam, Latin America, Cambodia and the Middle East, writing mostly for the popular weekly *Paris Match* but also publishing more than thirty works of fiction and non-fiction about both his experiences and his broader thoughts on politics and war. His writing primarily focused on the revolutionary wars of decolonisation and what he saw as the changing nature of modern warfare. Lartéguy's formative experience in terms of his thinking about war was his time covering the French War in Indochina. During this time he came to believe that the guerrilla warfare practiced by the Viet Minh in Indochina represented the future of conflict. In this endeavour, he was walking the same path as a number of influential French officers – most notably Marcel Bigeard, Jean Pouget and Roger Trinquier – who were attempting to put into practice in Algeria the lessons that they had learned in the French defeat in Indochina.<sup>17</sup>

Lartéguy's best-known attempt to lay out his thoughts on these issues was his pair of novels on the Algerian War, *The Centurions*, published in 1960, and its sequel, *The*

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<sup>16</sup> Hubert Le Roux's biography remains the only book to have fully detailed Lartéguy's career. Hubert Le Roux, *Jean Lartéguy, le dernier centurion* (Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria, the Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine*. (New York: Published for the Center of International Studies Princeton University by F.A. Praeger, 1964); Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency (PSI Classics in the Counterinsurgency Era): A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Praeger Publishers Inc., U.S., 2006).



*Praetorians*, published in 1961.<sup>18</sup> These books may have been works of fiction, but they were in essence thinly veiled *reportages* that drew on the incidents and characters that Lartéguy encountered during his time in Indochina and Algeria.<sup>19</sup> Beginning with the French defeat at Điện Biên Phủ, *The Centurions* follows a band of French paratroopers from their experiences in Vietnamese prison camps through to their return to France and then on to Algeria, where they form a new regiment dedicated to fighting the FLN and maintaining French control over one of its last colonies. The central characters of the books are composites, but some are clearly identifiable as fictionalised versions of real people. Most notably, the commander of the parachute regiment, Lt Col Pierre-Noel Raspéguy is plainly based on the real French parachute officer Marcel Bigeard, and the aristocratic staff officer Jacques de Glatigny is Lartéguy's friend Jean Pouget, while elements of other key French protagonists of the war in Algeria, such as Paul Aussaresses and Roger Trinquier, can be found in other characters.<sup>20</sup>

The intellectual crucible for Lartéguy's paratroopers is their time as Viet Minh prisoners, where they march through hundreds of miles of jungle to a prison camp in order to undergo Marxist re-education. While efforts by the Viet Minh to indoctrinate them have little effect, the officers, over long conversations in the evenings, have an epiphany over the nature of modern war, and they all agree that the clumsy French conventional response to insurgency in Indochina had been ineffective. As one character explains, it was like the French were playing cards with a 32-card pack, whereas the Viet Minh had 52, meaning that 'those twenty cards short will always prevent us from getting the better of them. They've got nothing to do with traditional warfare, they're marked with the signs of politics, propaganda, faith, agrarian

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<sup>18</sup> Jean Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, trans. Xan Fielding, Uncorrected Proof edition (New York: Penguin Classics, 2015); Jean Lartéguy, *The Praetorians*, trans. Xan Fielding (New York, New York: Penguin Classics, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Alistair Horne's history of the war in Algeria draws extensively on anecdotes from Lartéguy's fiction in order to illustrate its points. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*.

<sup>20</sup> Both Aussaresses and Trinquier wrote accounts of the war that justify the widespread use of torture. Paul Aussaresses, *The Battle of the Casbah: Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Algeria 1955-1957* (New York: Enigma Books, 2002); Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*; Roux, *Jean Lartéguy, le dernier centurion*, 193–94.

reform.’<sup>21</sup> Thus, these wars would require a different sort of soldier, one who was as skilled in politics and propaganda as conventional tactics. Upon their return to France, Raspéguy gets into an argument with a retired colonel and World War I veteran about the defeat in Indochina. The colonel complains that ‘we at least won our battles’ and is met with a disdainful response: ‘When there are over a million dead, you can’t call it a victory ... War’s not like that anymore, it’s not like that at all.’ Instead, ‘for our sort of war you need shrewd, cunning men who are capable of fighting far from the herd, who are full of initiative too – sort of civilians who can turn their hand to any trade, poachers, and missionaries too, who preach but keep one hand on the butt of their revolvers in case anyone interrupts them ... or happens to disagree.’<sup>22</sup>

Raspéguy and his Indochina veterans embody this new ethos and on their return to France this band of warriors are disappointed by what they see as the decadence of French society. They jump at the chance to re-join their former commander, who is forming a new parachute regiment to fight the ongoing French colonial war in Algeria. The Indochina veterans form the core of this unit, where they mould a larger band of disaffected reservists into a tough and effective fighting force. Here, Raspéguy and his followers can put the lessons of Indochina into practice, and they go about attacking the FLN relentlessly. In the most famous passage of the book, Raspéguy outlines his vision of what these new wars require:

I'd like to have two armies: one for display with lovely guns, tanks, little soldiers, staffs, distinguished and doddering Generals, and dear little regimental officers who would be deeply concerned over their General's bowel movements or their Colonel's piles, an army that would be shown for a modest fee on every fairground in the country. The other would be the real one, composed entirely of young enthusiasts in camouflage uniforms, who would not be put on display, but from whom impossible efforts would

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<sup>21</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 188.

<sup>22</sup> Lartéguy, 294.

be demanded and to whom all sorts of tricks would be taught. That's the army in which I should like to fight.<sup>23</sup>

The corollary of this transformation was that that this new Army would stop at nothing in order to achieve its objectives: after the death of a popular officer, Raspéguy's soldiers massacre the male inhabitants of an Algerian village and they break the resistance of the FLN during the Battle of Algiers via the widespread use of torture. Famously, Lartéguy's novel is credited as being the first to employ the 'ticking time bomb' as a plot device, and he does not flinch in describing the details of torture.<sup>24</sup> In his author's note, Lartéguy claims that he felt no compulsion to give 'a conventional or idealized picture' of the men who were his confidants in Indochina and Algeria, but on the whole he is extraordinarily sympathetic to their concerns, dedicating the book 'to the memory of all the centurions who perished so that Rome might survive.' He also opens the book with a letter from the Roman Centurion Maximus Flavinus that warns, 'if we should have to leave our bleached bones on these desert sands in vain, then beware the anger of the legions!'<sup>25</sup> It is thus the burning anger and disillusionment of these modern-day centurions that drives his narrative forwards.

*The Centurions* was Lartéguy's fourth book, but his first commercial success. It was extraordinarily popular in France, selling 450,000 copies, and was translated into several languages, including English, in 1961.<sup>26</sup> Lartéguy quickly followed up with a sequel, *The Praetorians*, which explored his paratroopers' involvement in a coup attempt against De Gaulle, and which also sold well. The English-language reviews of *The Centurions* were mixed, with some reviewers critiquing Lartéguy's somewhat didactic style, but the novel did

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<sup>23</sup> Lartéguy, 306.

<sup>24</sup> Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 546.

<sup>25</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, Author's Note. Lartéguy's reference to the Romans, in the title, author's note and in its concluding pages was part of a broader French appropriation of Algeria's Roman past, a move that validated the French Empire by connecting it with its Roman predecessor. See Caroline Ford, "The Inheritance of Empire and the Ruins of Rome in French Colonial Algeria," *Past & Present* 226, no. suppl\_10 (January 1, 2015): 57–77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtu016>; Patricia M. E. Lorcin, "Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 295–329.

<sup>26</sup> David O'Connell, "Jean Lartéguy: A Popular Phenomenon," *The French Review* 45, no. 6 (1972): 1087–97.

well enough to be adapted into a movie: *Lost Command*, starring Anthony Quinn and released in 1966.<sup>27</sup> This film sanitized Lartéguy's depictions of torture and brutality, much to his chagrin, and was largely a commercial and critical failure.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the healthy sales figures for both *The Centurions* and *The Praetorians*, Lartéguy's writings have not been the subject of extensive scholarly attention, either in French or in English. Such studies that do examine his work tend to note his pro-Army politics, his romanticisation of paratroopers and his celebration of their masculinity. What these paratroopers do to women, however, seems to have gone unnoticed or unremarked upon by any of his contemporary reviewers.<sup>29</sup> Later, after the US-led war on terror brought discussions of torture back into popular discourse, scholars looked to *The Centurions* as an example of how torture could be legitimated in fiction, but the gendered form that this violence took in Lartéguy's writing was again absent from view.<sup>30</sup> The lack of critical attention paid to these novels had little impact on Lartéguy's career, however, as he continued his work as a journalist throughout the 1960s, covering the American war in Vietnam and Israel's wars in the Middle

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<sup>27</sup> "THE CENTURIONS by Jean Lartéguy," *Kirkus Reviews*, January 3, 1961, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/jean-larteguy/the-centurions/>; John T. Rickert, review of *Review of The Centurions*, by Jean Lartéguy, *World Affairs* 126, no. 3 (1963): 190–190; Michael W. Schwartz, "What the French Army Needs: A Fighting Man's Ideology," *The Harvard Crimson*, February 24, 1962, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1962/2/24/what-the-french-army-needs-a/>; Orville Prescott, "Books of The Times; Empty Stomach, Full Mind Lapses Enumerated," *The New York Times*, January 3, 1962, <https://www.nytimes.com/1962/01/03/archives/books-of-the-times-empty-stomach-full-mind-lapses-enumerated.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Robson, *Lost Command*, Action, Drama, War, 1966, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060637/>.

<sup>29</sup> For references to Lartéguy in French literary criticism, see Françoise Gerbod, *Introduction à La Vie Littéraire Du XXe Siècle* (Paris: Bordas, 1986), 118; Jean-Marc Moura, *L'image Du Tiers-Monde Dans Le Roman Français Contemporain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 149; Henri Copin, *L'Indochine Des Romans* (Paris: Éd. Kailash, 2000), 139; Pierre de Boisdeffre, *Le Roman Français Depuis 1900* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 90–93. For reflections on Lartéguy and paratrooper culture in English, see Dennis E. Showalter, "Dien Bien Phu in Three Cultures," *War & Society* 16, no. 2 (October 1, 1998): 93–108; Philip Dine, "French Culture and the Algerian War: Mobilizing Icons," *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 051–068; John E. Talbott, "The Myth and Reality of the Paratrooper in the Algerian War," *Armed Forces & Society* 3, no. 1 (October 1, 1976): 69–86; Daniel Just, "The War of Writing: French Literary Politics and the Decolonization of Algeria," *Journal of European Studies* 43, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 227–43.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Morton, *States of Emergency: Colonialism, Literature and Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 152–56; Walter A. Schrepel, "Paras and Centurions: Lessons Learned From the Battle of Algiers," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, Military Ethics and Peace Psychology: A Dialogue*, 11, no. 1 (March 2005): 71–89; Alfred Grosser, *Au Nom de Quoi?: Fondements d'une Morale Politique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 111.

East, and publishing over two dozen more works of fiction and *reportage*. He remained a significant figure in French journalism but he largely faded from view in the English-speaking world after the excitement surrounding the publication of *The Centurions* had died down.

### **Required Reading? *The Centurions* and the US Army**

The one exception to this relative obscurity was in military circles, where *The Centurions* gained something of a cult following throughout the western world. J  r  my Rubenstein has traced the influence of Lart  guy’s novels on the junta-era Argentinian military; in the United States, Lart  guy’s novel was taught at West Point’s Revolutionary Warfare course in the 1970s, assigned as a key reading in the Infantry School and the Command and General Staff College in the 1980s, and turned up in articles in the Army’s professional journals in staff college dissertations.<sup>31</sup> General Stanley McChrystal, who commanded Special Forces in Iraq and the NATO campaign in Afghanistan, recalled reading Lart  guy as a cadet and noted that *The Centurions* had made a deep impression on him as he followed his own career as a parachute officer, taking from the book that “‘People’s Wars’ ... would require something fundamentally different from us than would more conventional struggles.’<sup>32</sup>

It was another American parachute officer that came of age in the 1970s who would later rescue Lart  guy from relative obscurity and bring *The Centurions* back into popular discourse. David Petraeus (who would later overhaul US Army counterinsurgency doctrine and lead the US military campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan) did not read Lart  guy at West Point, but he did encounter his work as a young captain on an exchange programme with a

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<sup>31</sup> J  r  my Rubenstein, “La doctrina militar francesa popularizada. La influencia de las novelas de Jean Lart  guy en Argentina,” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, June 6, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.70524>; Stanley McChrystal, “Foreword,” in *The Praetorians* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2016), vii–viii; Robert H. Berlin, “Historical Bibliography No.8: Military Classics” (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, January 1988), <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA211684>; “Recommended Reading List for Faculty and Students, Military Qualification Standards (MQS) II Reading List.” (Fort Benning, Georgia: US Army Infantry School, January 1983), <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA127190>; Bolger, “Two Armies.”

<sup>32</sup> McChrystal, “Foreword,” viii.

French parachute regiment in the 1970s. There, Petraeus became familiar with, and enamoured of, Marcel Bigeard, the paratrooper on whom Lartéguy based the character of Raspéguy.<sup>33</sup> Even though Bigeard's involvement in torture was no secret, Petraeus kept a portrait of him on his desk for most of his career, and while the two never met, they corresponded several times. Petraeus recalled using some of Bigeard's morale-building tactics (also recounted in *The Centurions*) during his time as junior commander, while Bigeard later claimed in the French press that Petraeus had employed his Algerian tactics in Iraq.<sup>34</sup> Petraeus also wrote from Baghdad to thank Bigeard for his advice and inspiration over the years.

Some French journalists credited Petraeus with spreading Bigeard's fame to the US Army but – since Petraeus' French was not good enough to read Bigeard's own writings – it is more accurate to say that it was Lartéguy's fictionalised portrayal of the French officer that became well-known in US circles.<sup>35</sup> Petraeus read *The Centurions* while he was in France and kept a copy with him in Iraq and Afghanistan, where, according to journalist Robert Kaplan, he frequently took it from his bookshelf to quote to visitors.<sup>36</sup> As an aide to Major General John Galvin in the 1980s, then-Major Petraeus drafted one of Galvin's key speeches on Low Intensity Conflict, 'Uncomfortable Wars: Towards a New Paradigm', where he quoted Lartéguy's 'cards' analogy.<sup>37</sup> On Lartéguy's death in 2011, Petraeus wrote to his widow, Thérèse, to tell her that *The Centurions* was his bedside reading, and he told Lartéguy's biographer, Hubert Le Roux, that he had taken many lessons on the conduct of war from the book.<sup>38</sup> Such was Petraeus' admiration of the book that *The Centurions*, long out of print,

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<sup>33</sup> Paula Broadwell, *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 64.

<sup>34</sup> France 3 Lorraine, *Interview Du Général Petraeus*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2QxHgddvIY>.

<sup>35</sup> Isabelle Lasserre, "Bigeard, l'éternel combattant," *Le Figaro*, November 4, 2009, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2009/11/04/01016-20091104ARTFIG00474-bigeard-l-eternel-combattant.php>.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Powers, "Warrior Petraeus," *The New York Review of Books*, March 7, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/03/07/warrior-petraeus/>.

<sup>37</sup> William F. Furr and Ronald L. Zelms, eds., "Uncomfortable Wars: Towards a New Paradigm, Kermit Roosevelt Lecture, United Kingdom, 1986" (Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict, 1989), 31, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA215365>.

<sup>38</sup> Roux, *Jean Lartéguy, le dernier centurion*, 199, 301.

became difficult to find during his tenure in Iraq, with copies fetching over \$1700 on eBay.<sup>39</sup> At Petraeus' urging, a new edition of the original translation was published in 2011, followed by the republication of both *The Centurions* and *The Praetorians* by Penguin in 2015.<sup>40</sup> These new editions made their way onto the US Military Academy's 'Officer's Professional Reading Guide Top 100 List' in 2011, the US Army's G-2 reading list in 2016, the Australian Army Chief of Staff's reading list in 2010, and the British Army's Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict professional reading list in 2016.<sup>41</sup>

This is not to say that *The Centurions* was read as an entirely unproblematic text. While Lartéguy's novel did make it into the bibliography of FM 3-24, it was presented as a study of the 'leadership and ethical dilemmas involved in counterinsurgency.' Although Colonel Peter Mansoor, the director of the Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center, described *The Centurions* as a 'masterpiece' in which 'one can find many of the principles and paradoxes of counterinsurgency warfare' in *Military Review* in 2006 and recommended it be included in any officer's programme of self-study, he noted that 'the novel also explores the dangers of going too far in the quest for victory.'<sup>42</sup> Similarly, even as Petraeus expressed his admiration for Lartéguy and noted that he adopted some of the methods described in the book in Iraq and Afghanistan, he was careful to make clear that he did not approve of Raspéguy's interrogation methods. The use of Lartéguy in doctrine also proved difficult when Petraeus' team were drafting FM 3-24. An early draft of the manual made use of Lartéguy's ticking time bomb

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<sup>39</sup> "Jean Lartéguy, l'homme qui valait des milliers de dollars," L'Express.fr, February 3, 2011, [https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/jean-larteguy-l-homme-qui-valait-des-milliers-de-dollars\\_958250.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/jean-larteguy-l-homme-qui-valait-des-milliers-de-dollars_958250.html).

<sup>40</sup> Sophia Raday and Matthew Dessem, "David Petraeus Wants This French Novel Back in Print!," *Slate*, January 27, 2011, [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2011/01/david\\_petraeus\\_wants\\_this\\_french\\_novel\\_back\\_in\\_print.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2011/01/david_petraeus_wants_this_french_novel_back_in_print.html).

<sup>41</sup> "2016-05-13 Revision of British Army Professional Reading List."; "February 2011 Revision of the United States Military Academy Reading List"; "2016 Revision of U.S. Army Deputy Chief of Staff G-2 Reading List," accessed May 27, 2018, <https://militaryreadinglists.com/revisions/107-u-s-army-g-2-2016-01-15>; Jeffrey Grey, ed., *Chief of Army's Reading List*, Rev. and updated ed, Study Paper / Land Warfare Studies Centre 323 (Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Peter R. Mansoor, "The Classics Revisited: Review of *The Centurions* by Jean Lartéguy," *Military Review*, December 2006, 102–3.

scenario to illustrate ethical dilemmas in counterinsurgency and featured a long and favourable case study of the French war in Algeria, prompting Colonel Richard Swain, who was responsible for drafting the chapter on ethics in counterinsurgency, to tell the group that ‘we have to get over the romance of colonialism ... we have to get over *The Centurions*.’<sup>43</sup> A brief critique of French methods was included in the final version of the manual, and a longer version of this critique was published by *Parameters*, the journal of the Army War College.<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, as Geoffrey Demarest of the US Army Combined Arms Center notes, Galula and France are referenced 42 times in the manual, usually in a favourable manner.<sup>45</sup> US counterinsurgency advocates were still clearly attracted to Lartéguy’s story, even if they made it clear that that attraction did not extend to endorsing torture. Outside observers, such as the journalists Fred Kaplan and Jane Mayer also noted that *The Centurions* had a jaundiced view of both torture and civil-military relations and questioned why some in the military were attracted to such an account of modern warfare.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the American readers of Lartéguy were split between two camps. The first and largest group consisted of those who expressed a deep admiration for his work but who were careful to distinguish their admiration for Raspéguay’s warriors from an endorsement of torture by reading *The Centurions* as both a primer on effective tactics and a warning about the ethical dilemmas of counterinsurgency. The second saw Lartéguy as a problematic source of inspiration, worrying that the romance of colonial warfare could lead his readers down a morally hazardous path.

## **Gender and Sexual Violence in *The Centurions***

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas A. Keaney and Thomas Rid, eds., “United States,” in *Understanding Counterinsurgency Warfare: Doctrine, Operations, and Challenges* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 66; Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 160.

<sup>44</sup> DiMarco, “Losing the Moral Compass: Torture and Guerre Revolutionnaire in the Algerian War.”

<sup>45</sup> Geoff Demarest, “Let’s Take the French Experience in Algeria Out of U.S. Counterinsurgency Doctrine,” *Military Review*, August 2010, 19–24.

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan, “Rereading Vietnam”; Robert D. Kaplan, “Foreword,” in *The Centurions* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2015); Mayer, “Whatever It Takes.”



What was perhaps most striking about this renewed discussion of Lartéguy's work was that no commentators -- even those who critique *The Centurions* as being emblematic of the problems of a 'warrior ethos' -- have reckoned with a central aspect of Lartéguy's thinking: his thoughts on gender and the role of women. For while both the admirers and critics of Lartéguy have always felt compelled to discuss the use of torture in his novels, none have commented on the extent to which Lartéguy's understanding of gender relations shaped his understanding of conflict. Lartéguy's characters embody a certain type of masculinity, focused on asceticism, physical courage and fitness. Raspéguy's officers also treat women brutally. Prostitutes, girlfriends, and wives are assaulted, and sex scenes in the book almost invariably begin with coercion, even if, in Lartéguy's telling, the women are soon overcome by desire for the paratroopers.

*The Centurions* quite obviously venerates masculine virility; the book is full of descriptions of hard bodies and insouciance under fire.<sup>47</sup> This description of Raspéguy is typical of Lartéguy's writing: 'He had sprung to his feet with astonishing agility. Weihl could not help admiring his lean, muscular body, without an ounce of fat on it. The countless scars on his torso and limbs, far from disfiguring him, on the contrary contributed to his barbaric beauty.'<sup>48</sup> Reading this prose, it is possible to understand how parachute officers such as Petraeus and McChrystal might see parallels to their own lives in the novel. Petraeus famously did push-ups on a hospital room floor after breaking his pelvis when his parachute failed to open during a jump, and during his time in Iraq he made a point of taking both his own staff

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<sup>47</sup> There is an extensive and growing literature on the military, masculinity and bodies. See Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Facade of American Empire, 1898-2001* (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2012); Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Kevin McSorley, ed., *War and the Body: Militarisation, Practice and Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Orna Sasson-Levy, "Individual Bodies, Collective State Interests: The Case of Israeli Combat Soldiers," *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 3 (April 1, 2008): 296–321, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X06287760>; Ben Wadham, "The Dark Side of Defence: Masculinities and Violence in the Military," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and War*, ed. Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 269–87, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-43170-7\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-43170-7_15); Paul Higate, ed., *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 311–12.

and journalists on gruelling runs around the perimeters of American bases. Similarly, McChrystal is reported to eat only one meal a day, and would run a 12 mile round-trip for his commute while he was a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.<sup>49</sup>

In one sense, these parallels between the fictional Raspéguy and his American successors are a product of the culture of the elite units to which they belonged, but this very public display of ascetism and extreme fitness also did political work. In Petraeus' case, one of his challenges in selling the counterinsurgency doctrine that he helped to write was a perception that it was overly cerebral and too detached from the harsh realities of conflict. Retired officers such as Ralph Peters argued that military education had produced a generation of dithering 'Hamlets' too enamoured of the academy rather than the warriors that the Army needed. For Peters, Petraeus' manual 'wasn't about defeating insurgents, but about political correctness.'<sup>50</sup> Petraeus took this criticism seriously and made a point of engaging with Peters and other sceptics to persuade them that counterinsurgency was more than 'armed social work'.<sup>51</sup> Petraeus' own physicality formed part of that persuasion.

Speaking on conservative radio pundit Hugh Hewitt's show after President Bush announced that Petraeus would take over command in Iraq, Peters reflected that 'I, sometimes in the past, have thought that he was a little too hearts and minds, touchy feely. That may be unfair to him.' While referencing Petraeus' skydiving accident and another incident where he

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<sup>49</sup> Tim Ferriss, "General Stan McChrystal on Eating One Meal Per Day, Special Ops, and Mental Toughness," *The Blog of Author Tim Ferriss* (blog), July 6, 2015, <https://tim.blog/2015/07/05/stanley-mcchrystal/>; Spencer Ackerman, "The Petraeus Workout," *The American Prospect*, September 4, 2007, <http://prospect.org/article/petraeus-workout>; Christopher McDougall, "General Petraeus' Workout Routine," *The Daily Beast*, June 25, 2010, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/06/25/general-petraeus-workout-routine>; We Are The Mighty, "Why Star US Gen. Stanley McChrystal Eats Only One Meal per Day," *Business Insider*, accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/why-star-us-general-stanley-mcchrystal-only-eats-one-meal-per-day-2015-7>; Peter Beaumont, "Stanley McChrystal: The President's Stealth Fighter," *The Guardian*, September 26, 2009, sec. From the Observer, <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2009/sep/27/stanley-mcchrystal-commander-us-forces>.

<sup>50</sup> Ralph Peters, "Learning to Lose: Social Science Doctorates Kill Warriors," *The American Interest* 2, no. 6 (July 1, 2007), <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2007/07/01/learning-to-lose/>.

<sup>51</sup> "Lasting Ties Mark Gen. Petraeus' Career," *NPR.org*, accessed September 29, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7193883>.

was shot in the chest during a training exercise, Peters reassured listeners that ‘we’re sending the best we’ve got ... he’s 54 years old, he can still outrun most of the majors and the captains ten, fifteen years younger than him. It’s a matter...he’s one of those men with tremendous strength of will. And really, this kind of fight, that’s what it takes.’<sup>52</sup> A *Washington Post* profile similarly recounted the same stories of extreme physical fitness and surviving near-fatal accidents while noting that Petraeus evoked George Bernard Shaw’s description of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery as ‘an intensely compacted hank of wire’.<sup>53</sup> Thus, much as Raspéguy and his officers celebrated physical fitness and used it to help mould apathetic reservists in to tough warriors, Petraeus was able to use the *mythos* of his own vigour to help sell his counterinsurgency strategy.

While Petraeus may have felt an affinity with the French paratroopers’ physical fitness, there was a dark underside to that culture. Lartéguy depicted masculinity and femininity as mapping onto geopolitics, with feminine characteristics almost always being suspect or corrupting. For instance, the moral rot at the heart of France is symbolised by unthinking ‘pretty girls.’ One character, recovering from dysentery in a Viet Minh prison camp hospital, contrasts his situation with ‘golden skinned girls’ frequenting French beaches and laments that ‘our lovely young French girls don’t know there’s a war going on.’<sup>54</sup> On three separate occasions, female insurgents are overcome by their sexual attraction to the paratroopers and immediately switch sides, even though it costs them their lives. One of Raspéguy’s lieutenants, Pinières, recalled his encounter during the liberation of France in 1944 with a *femme tondue*, a ‘beautiful, rather silly girl’ who had slept with a German soldier. As Pinières ordered his soldiers to shave

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<sup>52</sup> “New York Post Columnist Ralph Peters on Petraeus and Fallon « The Hugh Hewitt Show,” The Hugh Hewitt Show, January 9, 2007, <http://www.hughhewitt.com/new-york-post-columnist-ralph-peters-on-petraeus-and-fallon/>.

<sup>53</sup> “Iraq Will Be Petraeus’s Knot to Untie,” January 7, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/06/AR2007010601185.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 177.

her head, she told him ‘I loved my German, I’d gotten him under my skin. I’m only a woman. I don’t give a damn about war and politics.’<sup>55</sup>

In *The Centurions*, the men who oppose the French are motivated less by ideology than by sexual grievance: insurgents from both Hanoi and Algiers are depicted as being driven into hatred of the French by their romantic rejection by white French women. Lartéguy reveals that the chief propagandist of the Vietnamese prison camp in which the paratroopers are kept had been warned off proposing to his French girlfriend by white French men, which meant that ‘what he believed to be his love for Béatrice had turned into a deep-rooted secret hatred for all whites.’<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Dr Arouche, the Algerian dentist responsible for the bomb-making network in Algiers, had been beaten up by erstwhile friends after making a pass at a French girl in a Parisian night-club, after which ‘hatred had replaced every other sentiment in his heart.’<sup>57</sup> The racial and gendered hierarchies of colonialism assert themselves, as westernized non-white men who have faith in France run up against the limits of the colour line.<sup>58</sup> The emotional reactions of these men, pledging their lives to revolution in the aftermath of sexual humiliation, could be read as an argument that colonial peoples were fundamentally unready for self-government. It is important to note however, that Lartéguy seems to have some sympathy for these men, and his broader treatment of women in the novel (French soldiers may be less prone to romantic commitments than their subaltern counterparts, but they express similar contempt for women) suggests that romantic rejection could indeed be a legitimate *casus belli* for insurgents. Western and non-western men alike are troubled by women.

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<sup>55</sup> Lartéguy, 82.

<sup>56</sup> Lartéguy, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Lartéguy, 208.

<sup>58</sup> Gendered colonial hierarchies have received considerable scholarly attention. See, for instance, Jennifer Boittin, Christina Firpo, and Emily Church, “Hierarchies of Race and Gender in the French Colonial Empire, 1914–1946,” *Historical Reflections* 37, no. 1 (April 1, 2011): 60–90, <https://doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2011.370104>; Helen Bradford, “Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and Its Frontier Zones, C. 1806–70,” *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 3 (1996): 351–70; Mrinalini Sinha, “Giving Masculinity a History: Some Contributions from the Historiography of Colonial India,” *Gender & History* 11, no. 3 (November 1, 1999): 445–60, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.00155>; Durba Ghosh, “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?,” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (2004): 737–55.

While *The Centurions* and *The Praetorians* are full of racist descriptions of Vietnamese and Algerian protagonists, race is not the central animating force in Lartéguy's world. The racial hierarchies of colonialism exist, to be sure, but not in the form of the East/West binaries that the scholar Edward Said describes in his seminal text, *Orientalism*. As Melani McAlister argues, 'not all stereotypes, even those of Asians and Arabs, are Orientalist; they might be racist, imperialist, and exoticising without engaging in the particular logic of Orientalism.'<sup>59</sup> Lartéguy feminises some of his Vietnamese and Algerian subjects, depicting them as emasculated or decrepit, but others are strong and courageous. Similarly, a stable 'West' does not exist in the novel, as Raspéguy and his men have little sympathy for the *pied noir* settlers attempting to hang on in Algeria, and who are depicted as lazy colonizers expecting metropolitan French troops to do their fighting for them.<sup>60</sup> Among those doing the fighting are Dia, a doctor from French Guinea, and Mahmoudi, an Algerian lieutenant who eventually leaves the paratroopers' ranks to join the insurgency. Mahmoudi's defection to the FLN is treated sympathetically, as are the band of insurgents, who in the last section of *The Praetorians* have gone in the opposite direction and joined Raspéguy as he fights a lonely, losing war while the political sands shift elsewhere. In the end, both the Algerian guerrillas and the French paratroopers are betrayed by their politicians, and the Centurions of both sides are left without a meaning beyond combat. If there is a binary in *The Centurions* and *The Praetorians* then it is between warriors of all persuasions and the weak, who can equally be disaffected left-wing

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<sup>59</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 12. McAlister argues that American views of the Middle East can best be understood via a 'post-orientalist' framework that acknowledges the analytical value of Orientalism but moves beyond its emphasis on east/west binaries and the feminisation of colonial subjects to describe a more complex relationship. McAlister notes that 'the meanings of the Middle East in the United States have been far more mobile, flexible, and rich than the Orientalist binary would allow. Appropriation, affiliation, and distinction were all evoked by an evolving set of uneven relationships' (p.270).

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Christopher Lloyd argues that Lartéguy's semi-fictional portrayal of the Katanga crisis betrays a scepticism about Western neo-colonial interventions in Congo. Christopher Lloyd, "Revisiting the Congo's Forgotten Wars: Jean Lartéguy's *Les Chimères Noires* and the Secession of Katanga," in *Representing Wars from 1860 to the Present: Fields of Action, Fields of Vision*, ed. Claire Bowen and Catherine Hoffmann (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 154–66.

French journalists, or out-of-touch senior officers who prefer the officer's mess to the battlefield. For Lartéguy, the band of brothers transcends race and class – the only people excluded are civilians, and women.

The only exception to the apolitical and submissive women in Lartéguy's writing is Isabelle, the *pied noir* settler's daughter who takes it as her mission to seduce Captain Phillipe Esclavier – a key figure in the parachute regiment who is ambivalent about whether the rights of the colonists were worth fighting over – in order to recruit him for the cause of French Algeria. Isabelle is depicted as a symbol of white Algeria, unifying herself with the Army through sex:

At another moment, she saw herself as the land of Algeria. The warrior bending over her was fertilizing this land with his strength and by this union she became part of him forever. It was the first time she had found any pleasure in the act and when the wave receded, leaving her inert on the shore, when she saw Philippe lying beside her, naked but by no means shameless and repellent as every other man's body had seemed to her hitherto, she felt that no harm could come to her ever again, that Algeria was saved all the dangers dispelled.<sup>61</sup>

Isabelle's seduction of Esclavier had been inspired by her father, who told her 'our women must choose their husbands or lovers among the men who are capable of protecting us.'<sup>62</sup> Thus, even Isabelle's political act of using sex as a way of uniting the Army with the cause of the *pieds noirs* is one carried out on the instructions of a man.

While Lartéguy's admirers sometimes recast his depictions of torture and the civil-military divide as more of a warning than an endorsement, the same approach is less credible when it comes to his depictions of women. Lartéguy had a long history of opposing feminism,

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<sup>61</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 434.

<sup>62</sup> Lartéguy, 431.

most notably in his 1972 pamphlet, ‘Open Letter to Good Women’, which attacked the women’s liberation movement.<sup>63</sup> Not only that, but one of the pivotal scenes of *The Centurions*, in which Raspéguy’s officers torture FLN prisoners in order to find and diffuse the ticking time bombs hidden around Algiers, is centred around sexual violence. The most important captured FLN insurgent in Lartéguy’s novel is the Muslim woman Aicha, who had been in a relationship with the aristocratic French staff officer Glatigny while hiding her active membership in the FLN. Aicha is not simply tortured into revealing the location of the FLN bombs; her ordeal is inflicted in ways designed explicitly to reinforce her subordinate position as a female subject when Glatigny rapes her. Crucially, Aicha is depicted as embracing her rape and even being liberated by it: ‘Aicha gave a loud scream and clumsily returned his kisses. “I love you and I hate you,” she said to him a little later on. “You’ve raped me and I’ve given myself to you; you are my master and I shall kill you; you hurt me terribly and I want you to start all over again.”’<sup>64</sup> Here, Lartéguy depicts Glatigny in a manner very much in keeping with what some feminist scholars have described as ‘the myth of the heroic rapist.’<sup>65</sup> In *The Centurions*, rape serves as a tool to unlock the secrets of the FLN and to help win the Battle of Algiers.<sup>66</sup>

Like so much else in Lartéguy’s novel, such depictions of rape are based on a pastiche of real events. French historians and journalists have done much work in recent years to uncover the role of sexual violence in French strategy in Algeria, and the use of rape as a

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<sup>63</sup> Jean Lartéguy, *Lettre Ouverte Aux Bonnes Femmes* (Paris: Paris Match - éditions Rombaldi, 1972).

<sup>64</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 500.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 283–308; Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: The “Heroic” Tradition and Its Alternatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Margaret D. Carroll, “The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence,” *Representations*, no. 25 (1989): 3–30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928464>.

<sup>66</sup> Harriet Gray and Maria Stern have recently argued that categorizing sexual violence as torture could unwittingly open up the possibility that sexual violence could be reframed as a legitimate, rational act, as torture sometimes is. However in this case, the rape of Aicha occurs very much in the context of the torture chamber, so it makes sense to speak of it as torture. Harriet Gray and Maria Stern, “Risky Dis/Entanglements: Torture and Sexual Violence in Conflict,” *European Journal of International Relations*, March 5, 2019, 1354066119832074, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119832074>.

method of torture in Algeria has been well documented.<sup>67</sup> Even more directly, the character of Aicha seems to be in part based on Djamilia Bouhired, the female FLN insurgent captured and tortured by French forces during the battle of Algiers, and forced into revealing details of FLN operations. Bouhired was sentenced to death and her case became an international *cause célèbre*.<sup>68</sup> During this time, Lartéguy visited her in prison, interviewing both her and her interrogator, later claiming in the French press that any allegations of torture were an exaggeration and that she had ‘merely’ received a few slaps, whereupon she freely gave up important details about the FLN plot in Algiers.<sup>69</sup>

The character of Aicha goes much further than the real Bouhired ever did though, voluntarily taking part in a parade of suspects, where she picks out FLN insurgents for the French Army. In Lartéguy’s interpretation of Bouhired’s story, ‘Aicha was consumed by a fire, the fire of her love, and she was feeding it with everything in her past life that had been of any importance. When she had nothing more left, she would plunge into the flames herself.’ Lartéguy also used Aicha as a vehicle through which to explore the possibilities of a sort of anti-Islamist feminist counterinsurgency because ‘this state of mind could be traced to her inordinate and passionate nature, but still more to her spirit of rebellion against the social system in which she lived.’<sup>70</sup> Aicha is depicted as rebelling against the strictures of Islamist societies in a way that could be useful to the French. The intelligence officer, Mardinelle, picks up on this potential and ‘through the medium of Aicha, [he] realized what immense power lay

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<sup>67</sup> Florence Beaugé, *Algérie, une guerre sans gloire: Histoire d’une enquête* (Calmann-Lévy, 2005); Raphaëlle Branche, “Des viols pendant la guerre d’Algérie,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* no 75, no. 3 (January 1, 2006): 123–32; Marnia Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Natalya Vince has documented both the experiences of the women who fought for Algerian independence and the ways in which their image has been used to promote the Algerian Revolution. Natalya Vince, “Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities: Women Veterans of the ‘Battle of Algiers,’” *French History and Civilization* 2 (2009): 153–68; Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954-2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Jean Lartéguy, “J’ai Interrogé Dans Leur Prison Les Condamnées à Mort,” *Paris-Presse l’Intransigeant*, April 11, 1958.

<sup>70</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 513.



in this spirit of rebellion which had been stored up for centuries by millions of women. There was enough explosive there to blow the whole of the Maghreb sky-high.’ The question for Marindelle was ‘how could one awaken the Muslim women, how could one make them feel that their emancipation might come from us? Certainly not by treating to them to feminist lectures.’ Marindelle’s solution was instead to humiliate them in a such a way that they, like Aïcha, might turn in gratitude towards those who violated them. Lartéguy describes Marindelle’s stratagem:

On the following morning he had a number of women and young girls rounded up in the Kasbah; he filled three trucks with them and drove off to a wash-house. There he made them scrub away at the paratroopers’ sweat-stained vests and pants. These women had been hauled off without any of their men-folk raising a finger to protect them. They thereby lost their prestige as warriors, which suddenly reduced the ancestral submission of their wives and daughters to nothing. Bent all morning at their washing, these women felt as though they were submitting to being raped over and over again by the soldiers whose garments they were purifying. When they came back to the Kasbah without having been molested, when these strong young men had helped them out of the trucks with a courtesy which they were rather inclined to exaggerate (more often than not their fiancés or husbands were old, decrepit and ill-mannered), some of them thought of abandoning the veil, and others thought that they might take on a lover who was not a Muslim.<sup>71</sup>

This short passage contains many of the key themes in Lartéguy’s writing: the endorsement of humiliation of women, the emasculation of Algerian men, and the celebration of the strength and cunning of French soldiers. Given his general hostility to feminism

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<sup>71</sup> Lartéguy, 514.

however, it is noteworthy to see his characters using women's liberation as psychological warfare by positioning it in opposition to Islam and connecting it to the French Army's attempts to win hearts and minds.<sup>72</sup> Later, in *The Praetorians*, Aicha can be found leading a mass unveiling ceremony, where the Muslim women of rural districts were brought together to town squares and then encouraged to take off their *haiks*.<sup>73</sup> Again, this parallels the actual French conduct of the war, with mass unveiling ceremonies a key part of their propaganda operations in 1958. As with so much as else in *The Centurions*, Lartéguy's anecdotes are as much *reportage* as they are fiction. The rape of Aicha and the subsequent attempt to 'awaken the Muslim women' both had analogues in French strategy.<sup>74</sup> Marindelle's interest in 'emancipating' Muslim women can hardly be read as a genuine interest in women's rights, but rather is a tactical move that is more to do with humiliating Muslim men than liberating Algerian women.<sup>75</sup> Far from being emancipated, these women are coerced into performing menial service for French soldiers, and, in reality, the women who participated in unveiling ceremonies were almost universally coerced into doing so. Thus, misogyny is not just a marginal part of Lartéguy's writing; it is central to his worldview, as both the politics animating

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<sup>72</sup> Marindelle's tactics are a clear example of the practice of 'White men saving brown women from brown men', described in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?.' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 92.

<sup>73</sup> Lartéguy, *The Praetorians*, 213.

<sup>74</sup> Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 135–37; Elizabeth Perego, "The Veil or a Brother's Life: French Manipulations of Muslim Women's Images during the Algerian War, 1954–62," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 349–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2015.1013942>; Ryme Seferdjeli, "French 'Reforms' and Muslim Women's Emancipation during the Algerian War," *The Journal of North African Studies* 9, no. 4 (January 1, 2004): 19–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362938042000326272>; Neil McMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the "emancipation" of Muslim Women, 1954-62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> The discourse of the veil and the connections between feminism and Islam are of course the subject of long-running debate. Leila Ahmed persuasively argues that in the contemporary debate over the veil 'the very subject ... of the "oppression of women in Islam" ... is above all a political construct conjured into being to serve particular political ends. As in British imperial days, the subject remains fraught and charged with the political agendas of war and domination.' Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 230–31. See also Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Valentine M. Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (2002): 1135–71, <https://doi.org/10.1086/339639>; Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt," *Temenos - Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 42, no. 1 (2006), <https://journal.fi/temenos/article/view/4633>.

the war in Algeria and the tactics used by the French Army to fight it are driven by ideas about gender.

Lartéguy's depiction of the use of women in counterinsurgency did not just have echoes in contemporaneous French practices, but in the strategies adopted by the United States in the post-9/11 wars as well. From the early days of the war in Afghanistan, the 'liberation' of women was a common trope in Bush administration speeches. In November 2001, First Lady Laura Bush characterized the US invasion of Afghanistan as 'a fight for the rights and dignity of women', and girls' access to education was a frequent topic in military press releases.<sup>76</sup> As the International Relations scholar Synne Dyvik has argued however, women are not just targets but also practitioners in contemporary counterinsurgency.<sup>77</sup> Much as Aicha was enlisted to help the French Army with their campaign to win over, 'the Muslim women', the US Marine Corps' Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan – which were made up entirely of women – aimed to improve American engagement with Afghan women, enhance American 'soft power', and access a previously untapped source of intelligence. More darkly, contemporary American practice has, at times, included the use of women as torturers. While Darius Rejali has argued that Lartéguy's fiction and American TV shows such as *24* offer the message that 'only real men will have the courage to torture', women were intimately involved in torture at both Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, and the CIA's 'black sites' around the world.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, at Abu

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<sup>76</sup> David Stout, "A Nation Challenged: The First Lady; Mrs. Bush Cites Women's Plight Under Taliban," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/18/us/a-nation-challenged-the-first-lady-mrs-bush-cites-women-s-plight-under-taliban.html>; NATO, "NATO-ISAF Supports Education in Afghanistan," NATO, accessed July 10, 2019, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_22095.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_22095.htm); "Afghanistan: ISAF to Help Rebuild Logar Girls' School - Afghanistan," ReliefWeb, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-isaf-help-rebuild-logar-girls-school>.

<sup>77</sup> Synne Laastad Dyvik, "Women as 'Practitioners' and 'Targets': Gender and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 3 (2014): 410–29.

<sup>78</sup> Darius M. Rejali, "Torture Makes The Man," *South Central Review* 24, no. 1 (March 27, 2007): 153–54, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scr.2007.0015>; Jeremy Scahill, "U.S. Navy Reserve Doctor on Gina Haspel Torture Victim: 'One of the Most Severely Traumatized Individuals I Have Ever Seen,'" *The Intercept* (blog), May 17, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/17/gina-haspel-cia-director-torture/>; Amy Davidson Sorkin, "Gina Haspel and the Enduring Questions About Torture," May 10, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/gina-haspel-and-the-enduring-questions-about-torture>.

Ghraib, the women who tortured did so *as women*.<sup>79</sup> Here, women were employed to sexually humiliate Arab men in an inversion of the French tactic of sexually humiliating Algerian women.

### **Stanley McChrystal and the Band of Brothers**

Curiously, none of Lartéguy's modern-day readers seem to have noted the role of sexual violence in his work. Both admirers of *The Centurions* and critics of the American fascination with the French war in Algeria acknowledge the role of torture in the book, but none reckon with the gendered nature of the violence or the ways in which Lartéguy himself saw the world through a lens that could only be described as deeply misogynistic. One of the few commentators to come close to acknowledging the presence of this sort of thinking in Lartéguy's work is General Stanley McChrystal. In his foreword to the new Penguin edition of *The Praetorians*, McChrystal notes that while he and his colleagues in parachute units tried to model themselves on Raspéguy's officers, 'it would have been impossible to be quite as competent, courageous and attractive to women as our French counterparts.' Tongue-in-cheek as this comment is, it is the only one that comes remotely close to grappling with Lartéguy's worldview. It is worth noting that McChrystal comes from the Special Forces world, the community that is both the spiritual home of the contemporary 'warrior ethos' and the one that, in McChrystal's words, 'most closely resemble[s] the small society that Lartéguy describes.' McChrystal is more open than most admirers of *The Centurions* when he acknowledges that

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<sup>79</sup> Ryan Ashley Caldwell and Stjepan G. Mestrovic, "The Role of Gender in 'Expressive' Abuse at Abu Ghraib," *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 3 (November 2008): 275–99; Clarke D. Olson and Kirt A. Shineman, "En/Gendering Dystopia: The Performance of Torture at Guantanamo Bay Prison," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 38, no. 1–2 (2018): 95–108. It is worth noting that several scholars have argued that media depictions of the torture at Abu Ghraib focused on the role of women in a way that both obscured the predominant role of men in these crimes and that served to legitimate criticism of gender integration in the military. See Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, "Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?," *Politics & Gender* 1, no. 4 (December 2005): 597–619, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X05050178>; Marita Gronnvoll, "Gender (In)Visibility at Abu Ghraib," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 3 (2007): 371–98; Shannon L. Holland, "The Enigmatic Lynndie England: Gendered Explanations for the Crisis at Abu Ghraib," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 246–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420903049744>.

‘for some, the paratroopers are an arrogant, swaggering lot who abandon the sacred covenants that govern the profession of arms.’ He counters, though, that:

In the minds of the soldiers I led and knew ... there is no consensus or simple conclusion. The constant tension between politically correct and practically expedient, or between unquestioning obedience and a broader interpretation of responsibility is undeniable. The academic debate feels irrelevant in the complexity of the alleys of a violence-wracked city in Iraq or astride the illogic of the Durand Line. There is a very real temptation to abandon the confines of conventionality and ‘do what it takes.’<sup>80</sup>

In taking this stance, McChrystal presents the actions of Raspéguy’s paratroopers as those forced to make terrible choices in difficult situations, and his dismissal of the ‘academic debate’ elides real questions about how Lartéguy’s Centurions saw the world, not to mention the ways that soldiers following this model have behaved – in the real world.

McChrystal’s remarks are significant, not least because of his command of Camp Nama, an interrogation facility in Iraq run by US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). During McChrystal’s tenure at JSOC, at least two prisoners were tortured to death while the *New York Times* and Human Rights Watch both independently documented extensive detainee abuse.<sup>81</sup> McChrystal’s remarks are also telling, though, for the rationale that he uses to look past Lartéguy’s politics. In McChrystal’s telling, as in Lartéguy’s, there are those who served, and those who didn’t, and those who didn’t couldn’t possibly understand the challenges of war. For both, what matters above all else is the band of brothers who have to live and survive in these ambiguous worlds. Indeed, for Lartéguy, this bond transcends all other divisions. At one point, Raspéguy muses that ‘men in camouflage uniforms, agile and silent, who followed him

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<sup>80</sup> McChrystal, “Foreword,” xi.

<sup>81</sup> Eric Schmitt and Carolyn Marshall, “In Secret Unit’s ‘Black Room,’ a Grim Portrait of U.S. Abuse,” *The New York Times*, March 19, 2006, sec. Politics, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/19/world/middleeast/in-secret-units-black-room-a-grim-portrait-of-us-abuse.html>; Human Rights Watch, “‘No Blood, No Foul: Soldiers’ Accounts of Detainee Abuse in Iraq,” Human Rights Watch, July 22, 2006, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/07/22/no-blood-no-foul/soldiers-accounts-detainee-abuse-iraq>.

in the dark’ were ‘the only ones that mattered to him now ... No matter their race or the colour of their skin, he would lead them, clean-limbed, youthful and upstanding, far from this rottenness, this feebleness, this cowardice, towards a sort of brutal paradise which was only open to fighters and the pure in heart and from which would be banished all cowards, cranks, women ...’<sup>82</sup> as long as they are tough, pure and – above all else – manly, anyone could belong to Raspéguy’s brotherhood in arms.

As the political scientist Megan MacKenzie has argued, this sort of ‘band of brothers’ rhetoric has played a crucial role in recent years in affirming the centrality of the all-male combat unit in the face of women’s integration into the American military.<sup>83</sup> McChrystal’s admiration for Lartéguy must be read in that context. Indeed, if we turn to a near-contemporary of McChrystal, we can see how deeply toxic this kind of rhetoric can be. Brigadier General Jeffrey Sinclair followed a similar career trajectory to Petraeus and McChrystal: a long career in the infantry, including years serving with the elite 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment, where his Commanding Officer, Col. Stanley McChrystal, rated him as ‘one of the most talented majors in the Army.’<sup>84</sup> He went on to serve at JSOC before commanding a battalion in Iraq in 2004. Media reports lauded his efforts to pacify the Iraqi city of Tikrit, and he returned to Iraq again in 2007 and then Afghanistan in 2011, where he deployed as Deputy Commanding General of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.<sup>85</sup> A few months before his tour of Afghanistan ended, he was

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<sup>82</sup> Lartéguy, *The Centurions*, 285.

<sup>83</sup> Megan MacKenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers: The US Military and the Myth That Women Can’t Fight* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10–19. Victoria Basham, Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward have argued that feminist scholars need to do more to reckon with how the integration of women in the military destabilizes norms around heroism and war. Victoria Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State: Everyday Experiences of the Geopolitical in the Armed Forces* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Claire P. Duncanson and Rachel Woodward, “Regendering the Military: Theorizing Women’s Military Participation,” *Security Dialogue*, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Alan Blinder and Richard A. Oppel Jr, “How a Military Sexual Assault Case Foundered,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/us/how-a-military-sexual-assault-case-foundered.html>.

<sup>85</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, “Charges Tarnish High-Profile Career of Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Allen Sinclair,” *Fayettesville Observer*, October 10, 2012, <https://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fayobserver.com%2Farticles%2F2012%2F10%2F09%2F1208154%3F%3Dfo.local&date=2013-02-15>.

relieved of command and sent home for trial by court martial, only the third General Officer in sixty years to face such charges.<sup>86</sup> He was accused of sexually assaulting a younger female officer with whom he was having an affair, as well as threatening her family and forcing her to send him explicit photos. As the trial went on, details emerged of a command climate under Sinclair that sustained and encouraged sexist behaviour.<sup>87</sup> At one stage soldiers put on a skit acting out his affair at a going away party for Sinclair, and – as the charge sheet noted – when criticized for using “derogatory and demeaning words to refer to female staff officers,” Sinclair allegedly responded, “I’m a general, I’ll say whatever the [redacted] I want.”<sup>88</sup>

Despite the allegations, Sinclair was only found guilty of committing adultery and having improper relationships with two other female officers, avoiding any jail time. Men’s Rights Activists and conservative commentators rushed to declare Sinclair a victim of political correctness, while critics of the US military’s track record on sexual violence argued that the trial demonstrated the need for an overhaul of the military justice system.<sup>89</sup> The way in which the trial played out, however, points to difficulties not only with the formal system of military justice, but the entire ethos of ‘elite’ units. Sinclair would not have been out of place as one of Lartéguy’s characters, and the fact that he rose to such heights and suffered so little in the way

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<sup>86</sup> Craig Whitlock, “Disgraced Army General, Jeffrey A. Sinclair, Receives Fine, No Jail Time,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2014, sec. National Security, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/disgraced-army-general-jeffrey-a-sinclair-receives-fine-no-jail-time/2014/03/20/c555b650-b039-11e3-95e8-39bef8e9a48b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/disgraced-army-general-jeffrey-a-sinclair-receives-fine-no-jail-time/2014/03/20/c555b650-b039-11e3-95e8-39bef8e9a48b_story.html).

<sup>87</sup>For an account of how casual and sexism and misogyny exists on the same continuum as sexual violence, see Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Lynn K. Hall, “‘I Wish All the Ladies Were Holes in the Road’: The US Air Force Academy and the Gendered Continuum of Violence,” *Signs* 40, no. 4 (2015): 865–89, <https://doi.org/10.1086/680328>.

<sup>88</sup> Mark Thompson, “When the Skit Hits the Fan: The Army’s Sexual-Assault Woes Persist,” *Time*, March 20, 2014, <https://time.com/31890/military-sexual-assault-jeffrey-sinclair-trial/>; Spencer Ackerman, “Army Says This General Sexually Abused an Officer, Then Threatened Her Career,” *Wired*, December 19, 2012, <https://www.wired.com/2012/12/sinclair/>.

<sup>89</sup> Allie Jones, “Men’s Rights Activists Embrace the Complex Rape Case Against Brigadier General Jeffrey Sinclair,” *The Atlantic*, March 12, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/mens-rights-activists-embrace-complex-rape-case-against-brigadier-general-jeffrey-sinclair/359087/>; Craig Whitlock, “Sordid Details Spill out in Rare Court-Martial of a General,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sordid-details-spill-out-in-rare-court-martial-of-a-general/2013/08/14/f6c89c68-008d-11e3-a661-06a2955a5531\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sordid-details-spill-out-in-rare-court-martial-of-a-general/2013/08/14/f6c89c68-008d-11e3-a661-06a2955a5531_story.html); Karen McVeigh, “Jeffrey Sinclair: US General Guilty of ‘inappropriate Relationships’ Avoids Jail,” *The Guardian*, March 20, 2014, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/20/army-jeffrey-sinclair-no-jail-time-trial-sexual-assault>.

of consequences for his actions indicates that the culture of sexual violence that *The Centurions* depicts has its parallels in the contemporary US military.<sup>90</sup> Both McChrystal's embrace of Lartéguy's paratroopers and Sinclair's record of abuse speak to how the 'band of brothers' mythology can serve to enable misogynistic practices.

## Conclusion

McChrystal and Petraeus may not see women as belonging outside of their band of brothers; neither are on record expressing sentiments that even approach that level of animus. Indeed, McChrystal has spoken in favour of having women join combat units.<sup>91</sup> However, their silence on Lartéguy's depiction of women surely matters in the context of the contemporary US military. We can look not just to the Sinclair case, but also to the Tailhook and Aberdeen Proving Ground sexual assault scandals of the 1990s, to the more recent Marines United nude photo sharing scandal, to the alarming statistics about the prevalence of sexual violence within the US military, both overseas and within the United States, to see that the armed forces have ongoing problems when it comes to the treatment of female service-members.<sup>92</sup> The generation of veterans who fought (and are still fighting) the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and countless other locations is a large and diverse cohort, but popular veteran social media channels such as OAF

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<sup>90</sup> Arguments that the US military has a particular problem with sexual violence are longstanding. For one of the formative articles in this subfield, see Madeline Morris, "By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture," *Duke Law Journal* 45, no. 4 (1996): 651–781, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1372997>. For more recent commentary of the historical impunity of elite combat units when faced with accusations of sexual violence, see Ruth Lawlor, "When Commemorating D-Day, Don't Forget the Dark Side of American War Efforts," *Washington Post*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/06/06/when-commemorating-d-day-dont-forget-dark-side-american-war-efforts/>.

<sup>91</sup> Chuck Williams, "Retired Gen. McChrystal Says Doors Opening for Female Soldiers," *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.ledger-enquirer.com/news/business/article32405400.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Winerip, "Revisiting the Military's Tailhook Scandal," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2018, sec. Booming, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/13/booming/revisiting-the-militarys-tailhook-scandal-video.html>; Francis X. Clines, "Drill Sergeant Gets 6 Months For Sex Abuse at Army Post," *The New York Times*, May 31, 1997, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/31/us/drill-sergeant-gets-6-months-for-sex-abuse-at-army-post.html>; Shawn Snow, "Seven Marines Court-Martialed in Wake of Marines United Scandal," *Marine Corps Times*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2018/03/01/seven-marines-court-martialed-in-wake-of-marines-united-scandal/>; Jessica A. Turchik and Susan M. Wilson, "Sexual Assault in the U.S. Military: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for the Future," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15, no. 4 (July 1, 2010): 267–77, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2010.01.005>.



Nation (whose aim is ‘cultivate and motivate the warrior class’) speak in a language which would have been familiar to Raspéguy’s *Centurions*.<sup>93</sup>

Not only that, but by placing Lartéguy’s fiction at the heart of their advice for counterinsurgents, senior officers also implicitly endorse misogyny and rape as effective tactics, as well as a particularly hypermasculine form of military identity.<sup>94</sup> While these officers may be careful to underline that they do not – unlike their French predecessors – support torture, the particularly gendered character of the violence in *The Centurions* seems to have escaped their notice. Even more remarkably, the very ‘academic debate’ that McChrystal expressed ambivalence about itself has not reckoned with misogyny and the ways in which the masculinity that Lartéguy celebrates is connected to sexual violence. Of the commentators who remarked upon the American interest in Lartéguy, few thought it worth mentioning that women were a central target of violence in his retelling of the war in Algeria. The fact that rape isn’t even worthy of being named in these discussions points to problems inherent in the sort of militaristic masculine virility that both Petraeus and McChrystal celebrate, and to limitations within much of the broader discourse on counterinsurgency and contemporary conflict.

What seems clear from the ways that US officers have embraced *The Centurions* as a useful tale of modern war is that soldiers may read voraciously, but they do not always do so critically. The fact that so many readers of *The Centurions* found the gendered violence at the core of the book to be essentially unremarkable – even as they felt moved to demarcate their admiration for Lartéguy from any notion that they might support torture – indicates that when these readers, many of whom are senior officers, celebrate the ‘warrior ethos’ of the contemporary US military, they do so while at best possessing a major blind spot as to the more

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<sup>93</sup> “OAF Nation - Home,” accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/oafnationactual/>; “OAF Nation - About,” *OAF Nation* (blog), June 1, 2016, <http://oafnation.com/about/>.

<sup>94</sup> For the links between military identity and masculinity, see William Arkin and Lynne R. Dobrofsky, “Military Socialization and Masculinity,” *Journal of Social Issues* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 151–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1978.tb02546.x>.

troubling aspects of such a worldview. Petraeus and McChrystal may not wish to be associated with Lartéguy's views on women and sexual violence, but they – and all those who profess to see in *The Centurions* an instructive fable of modern war that has useful things to say to contemporary soldiers – would do well to reckon with these attitudes.