Author: Kenneth MacLeish  
Title: *Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community*  
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Reviewed by Keith Veronesi

“Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community” by Kenneth MacLeish is a direct study of the soldiers, families, and communities that are directly impacted by the war in the Middle East. MacLeish provides the reader with an in-depth, behind the scenes look at what life is like as a part of the United States Army. Throughout MacLeish’s work, he sets out to prove that military life and the affects that military lifestyle has on soldiers, families, and the people closest to the war cannot be explained without hearing first hand from those directly affected.

MacLeish’s work sets out to be the first piece of work that gets the true story about military life through the direct source. MacLeish spends his time at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas, interviewing soldiers, spouses and husbands (amongst others) to provide the reader and the public a better understanding of what it truly means to be a part of the United States Army. The reader is provided the opportunity to hear the misconceptions that the public has created when it comes to portraying the military and to truly understanding how the people closest to the war feel about these portrayals and many other different subjects.

MacLeish starts out by describing life after war for countless soldiers returning from their deployments. He mentions in the first chapter, the sign on the side of the road at Fort Hood that writes, “You Survived The War, Now Survive The Road. Drive Carefully.” ¹ MacLeish goes onto explain how so many soldiers return home from war and are killed in automobile

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accidents because they are so used to driving at high speeds in dangerous situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also gives the reader a sincere opportunity to walk a day in the lives of these soldiers as they are constantly struggling with the posttraumatic stress of fighting a war. The reader reads first-hand experiences of lives that have forever been damaged, for lack of a better word, because of the situations that these soldiers found themselves in. We learn of the daily struggles a soldier must face when going to a crowded mall or a dark room at a museum and since these stories are being told by the soldiers whom are directly affected by these types of situations, it seems to touch a much softer spot for the reader.

Perhaps one of the most memorable parts of MacLeish’s book is seen in his last chapter where he cites soldiers explaining their feelings towards civilians who thank them for their services and who interrogate them for first-hand insight on the experiences they went through while in combat. MacLeish cites a soldier saying, “Every time you say thanks to a soldier more interest has accumulated, the debt is even bigger than you realized, and you try to pay more, and it never works.” ² Civilians want to thank soldiers for their work, but through MacLeish’s work, we see that even though soldiers are grateful for the praise, they just want to be recognized for doing their jobs. Soldiers compare it to giving a birthday gift. If you give a birthday gift to someone and then are constantly reminded how great the gift is and how much the recipient loves the gift, it begins to become overwhelming.³ MacLeish does a great job incorporating the opinions of these soldiers and explaining that with every person that comes up and thanks a soldier and eventually pries for stories about life in Iraq, it brings back memories that these

soldiers are trying to forget. It brings back the rock bottom moments of seeing their best friend blown to pieces by an IED.

This book is clear on what it intends to do. By reading this book the reader is able to gain a much clearer insight to the daily lives of soldiers and the people tied to the Army family. By using direct military personnel and the families of these soldiers, the reader gets a true understanding of the hardships, emotions, and fortunes of being a part of the United States Army. The book’s greatest strength is the use of personal interviews with soldiers and their families. By doing this, MacLeish creates a relationship between the reader and the soldier without the two ever meeting. The clarity and readability of the situations that are laid out gives this book an opportunity to touch every reader. Specifically when soldiers are describing war scenes, such as in the heat of battle or traveling down an Afghanistan street looking for hidden IEDs, the reader is virtually brought into the situation.

“Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community” gives the reader a first hand experience of an accurate portrayal of military life. By interviewing more than just the soldier, MacLeish gives the reader a chance to understand how Army wives and Army families are also truly affected by deployment and other hardships the military lifestyle puts on a family. With war stories told from the soldiers’ own perspectives, the reader can envision the scenes as if they were there, offering a different type of credibility to the book. This is a strong piece that gives the soldiers’ point of view, rather than the just how the public perceives life in the Army.