

Fighting War With(out) the Aids of Cigarettes, Pinups, Beer, and God

Carl V. Rabstajnek, P.E., M.B.A., Ph.D.

World War II was fought at a time when American society had not shifted its mores toward more socially conscious behaviors and thoughts. Being born in 1941, my conscious awareness of the last century began in the postwar period. The changes that I write about here occurred during my lifetime. Things that are improper now, in the 21st century, were common occurrences when I grew up. This is not a value judgement, but observations of Zeitgeist shifts since my birth. *Things change!*. To see how is informative.

Soldiers, sailors, marines, and air crews fought long and hard under barely tolerable conditions for years to defeat the Nazis and Japanese. Maintenance of morale and mental stability involved the use of means that fell into societal disfavor over the next 70 years.

Combat was a male enterprise during WWII but that does not obviate the stresses and strains experienced by military and civilian women and the many GIs and stateside workers supporting the war effort. My purpose is to highlight some differences in attitudes toward cigarettes, pinups, beer, and God over the past 70 years.

Cigarettes

I never smoked, because cigarettes made me dizzy, but started my professional career sitting in many smoke-filled rooms, with little personal objection. Now, second-hand smoke is very unpleasant. The first [Surgeon General's report](#) denigrating cigarettes was published in 1964. They were [removed from military rations in 1975](#). Perhaps, one might consider that the Department of Defense should not have taken over a decade to react to the Surgeon General's condemnation and the possible reason for this delay. Was it the Vietnam War lasting from 1959 through 1975?

Consider, the next column is topped with apropos photographs of the Commander in Chief and top generals in Europe and the Pacific (Eisenhower, Roosevelt, and MacArthur). On the next page is a collage of smoking photographs and sketches published during the war. For the most part these are shots of actual participants in the war and not Hollywood's glamorization of cigarettes.

For those born well after the war, with little awareness of WWII conditions, hours of war documentaries taken by combat photographers are available. Technology has made many videos accessible free on the Internet via *YouTube* and other sources. Often portrayed is the wounded warrior on a stretcher having a lit cigarette placed between his lips. A smoke was considered to be a palliative for combat casualties and a useful relief for those contending with the stresses of living. The military still has a [higher rate of smoking](#) than civilians and it remains to be seen if a suitable substitute will replace this once ubiquitous crutch.



Pinups

Men and women colluded to make vicarious sex a psychological relief or distraction during WWII. Bob Hope and his bevy of beautiful actresses peppered their USO shows with visual eye-poppers and verbal double entendres. Scantly clad beauties were photographed and their images were pasted on the walls of the GI's quarters and equipment. Planes were given sexy names and provocative visual images were painted on the fuselage.

After 1963 and the publication of [Betty Friedan's](#) book, *The Feminine Mystique*, second wave feminism took hold. With the movement, "objectification" of women was no longer tolerated and men had to remove pinups from their personal lockers, in police and fire stations, for fear a female would be upset if she saw them. For awhile it was improper to refer to women as girls, even ladies, but that prohibition has been relaxed, somewhat. Contrast this attitude with the collage of pinups shown on the next page.

Beer

A Marine sniper in the Pacific and a drill sergeant once told me they knew an invasion was imminent when cases of beer were unloaded at their encampment. I found a newspaper reference to daily ration of two cans of beer during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Most of the literature, however, deals with the down side of drinking. The issue of alcohol in a combat area could be another interesting consideration of what helps warriors to cope with combat. We need more insight into *why* beer was a troop ration.

God

Recently, there have been moves to limit what military chaplains can say in public, particularly the mention of Jesus. This is still controversial, debated, and litigated, so go to Internet news sources for updates. Herein, the point is to consider the approach to God by servicemen in WWII.

Many pictures and videos show priests dressed in vestments conducting mass and serving communion onboard ships, before a landing. Some of these men became casualties in subsequent battles. Commemorated cemeteries are covered with thousands of crosses and Stars of David over the remains of fallen GIs. Religion was once clearly integrated into the lives of the fighting men.

Things Change

War is a horrendous human experience for those on the front line and there were some coping techniques employed in WWII that were later not politically correct. My intent is to identify the changes — not to evaluate the consequences.

