

Between Sex Tips and Shop Talk...



Behind the Scenes at Cosmopolitan

WE LOVE THOSE GUYS!

After months of red-hot barbed-wire-wrangling, *Cosmo* is proud to present the 30 wisest eligible bachelors in the United States, beginning on *Cosmo* Miss page 76. The search begins last March, with a call for readers to send us their favorite single studs they know (stay tuned for details about next year's contest). Then a team of editors waded through all the entries, narrowing them down to the 30 best candidates. Speaking of heads, we keep hearing from fabulous guys serving in the military overseas that reading *Cosmo* is a great diversion. I just wish they were reading the magazine back in their own homes.



Sergeant Anthony Piggard takes a break from military duty to indulge in *Cosmo*.

BOUNCE TO BE A BUNN

Every month I get at least a few letters and e-mails from readers asking why we don't put a guy on the cover. Well, we've finally done it... sort of. As you discovered when you flipped over this month's issue, the gorgeous Matt Damon graces the back. In the way Edward took it for over half a century, our request to be included with a photo died!

Matt dived up at the studio with his girlfriend, Lucy (don't), wearing a tee shirt and Diesel jeans. He was friendly and relaxed, something on sub-and-overage potato chips between takes, despite the fact that he'd occupied *Cosmo*'s barbers rather than mowing and eye-socking the dip before. Read more about this charming actor in the *Cosmo* Miss interview, page 74.

Some unlikely magazines reveal how Americans really feel about the war

BY MAGGIE FRANK

I HAVE WATCHED THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE START of the Iraq war come and go on TV, on the radio and in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report* and *The Economist*, among other news media. In fact, since March 2003, it seems hardly a week has gone by when the Iraq war hasn't made the cover of one of the newsweeklies, *The New York Times Magazine* or some other news periodical. But news magazines aren't the only place to go to get news about the war. Other, guiltier magazine pleasures have also brought many Americans news about the war on a regular basis.

Take, for example, magazines in such unlikely categories as service, regional, women's, gossip and sports—magazines whose recent headlines, reflecting their traditional subject matter, have included: “DIY: What’s That Smell?” (*Popular Mechanics*), “Happy Trails” (*Texas Monthly*), “What His Tattoo Says About Him” (*Cosmopolitan*), “Fashion Police: Lisa Loeb” (*Us Weekly*) and “Vikings Coach Says Culpepper Reminded Him of T.O.” (*Sports Illustrated*).

These magazines have also been covering the war, and it's no surprise that they would—they are in the business of selling magazines, after all, and Iraq is the biggest story of the past three years. But what they report is almost never neutral. While their editors insist that they are not taking sides, non-news magazines are, in fact, on the side of their readers, serving as a moving barometer of public sentiment on the Iraq conflict. Each of these five magazines has followed a trajectory of coverage that closely parallels the evolution of the prevailing views of the war: from foolishly optimistic in 2003 to cautiously skeptical in 2004 to bitter and bewildered by the end of 2005. Because non-news magazines can cover Iraq without parroting the administration's—or

anyone else's—point of view, they have the potential to bring news to readers about the war that they can't get from newsweeklies.

Take *Popular Mechanics*, a magazine whose editor asserts that its war coverage remains firmly in the center. The magazine has been around for more than 100 years and is known primarily for tracking science and technology for the average gadget nut. Jay Leno, the late-night talk show host and zealot automobile collector, writes an especially popular column on cars.

As I flipped through back issues looking for maintenance tips for my 2003 Corolla, I found a trend—periodic reports on the weapons and equipment used to fight this war. “Birds of Mercy,” published in October 2005, follows an air ambulance company as it responds to harrowing calls for medical attention in and around Baghdad. Several other articles written by embedded journalists tell the stories of soldiers and the weapons and equipment they are using to fight in Iraq. In September 2003, an editorial note by *PM*'s editor at that time, Joe Oldham, argues that the U.S. is no longer just a superpower, but “in terms of military might, we're a megapower.” The banner across the top of the December 2004 cover reads: “Back from Iraq: A Hero's Story.”

When I innocently asked *PM*'s current editor, James Meigs, whether such coverage wasn't a political diversion from *PM*'s mission of explaining how the machines of war work, he observed that the headline gives the marine profiled “the respect he's earned,” adding: “You don't have to have a political viewpoint” to be curious about how the Iraq war is being fought. “The *Popular Mechanics* angle is: How are we fighting? It's not about why we are there, but how.”

Perhaps because *Popular Mechanics* narrowly focuses on the weapons of war, the magazine has done some surprisingly compel-

ling reporting on the fighting itself. *PM* writers have been willing to embed with soldiers, and indeed, long after most reporters for major news organizations have given up trying to document the daily conditions of the war from a U.S. soldier's perspective, *PM* has reported exactly how soldiers fight, get injured and die. Although Meigs claims *PM* is neutral, deciding to embed with troops and reporting on the success and failure of troop movements in Iraq makes a statement on the war whether or not the editor means to do so.

Evan Smith, the editor of *Texas Monthly*, also believes a publication can cover the war without taking an editorial position. This, he further claims, is the best way to insure the magazine's bottom line. When Smith published a special "Texans at War" issue in March 2006, featuring a cover reminiscent of the movie poster for "Full Metal Jacket," depicting a helmet with bullets tucked into the strap, a Texas state flag pin (instead of the peace-sign pin as seen on the poster) and the words "God Bless Texas" handwritten on the helmet, he said he made sure the cover betrayed neither a pro- or anti-war stance. Instead, he said it reflected his magazine's mission to report "the shared experience of being a Texan," by covering the war with an approach that would appeal to all Texans. He also stressed that the magazine's most important mission is to sell magazines. Calling that requirement "Rule No.1," he intimated that neutrality not only helped to include all Texans in the issue but was also a more profitable position than choosing sides.

Cosmopolitan treats Rule No. 1 less like a rule than a Commandment. The magazine follows a strict formula of women's shopping, sex and diet, and with nearly 3 million readers a month, the formula is clearly working. But even *Cosmo* mentions Iraq 14 times between Feb. 1, 2003, and Feb. 1 of this year, according to an online search. After initially reporting on "fun, fearless female" soldiers serving in Iraq and the "hunkiest hunk" soldiers who had just returned, by February 2005, *Cosmo* began to focus on casualties and fatalities in Iraq and the families left behind.

A question-and-answer session with an Iraq correspondent and former model, Lara Logan, published in *Cosmo* in July 2003, focuses on her "risk-taking personality." The questioner wonders whether being a former swimsuit model has made it difficult for colleagues to take her seriously. By February of 2005, however, *Cosmopolitan* published a piece titled "Her Fiancé Was Killed in Iraq," indicating a consciousness of the wartime carnage that was clearly missing in the interview with Logan.

Cosmo is not alone. Since early 2005, several women's magazines have regularly published accounts of loved ones pining for soldiers who have been sent away. "Half My Heart Is in Iraq," which appeared in *Redbook* in February 2005, profiles three military wives who "maintain their homes and jobs, raise their children—all while praying that their husbands return home alive." In a section titled "The Waiting Wife," one of the women explains how difficult it is to be separated from a spouse for a year or more. "Nicole began a journal the day after Matt left for Iraq. She was supposed to hear from him when he landed, but he was unable to call her. ..."

Vogue published a white-collar version of the *Redbook* story in December 2004, when journalist Vicki Woods wrote a first-person account of her worry over her son, also a journalist, who had decided to go to Iraq. "As a journalist, Vicki Woods supported her son's decision to go to Iraq to help launch a free press in Baghdad. As a mother, she fears the worst," reads the subhead.

Even magazines dedicated to celebrity gossip—as opposed to real

people—have something to say about the war. In April 2003, *Us Weekly* published its list of six star war correspondents—"Talk about shock and awe! These six on the front lines are keeping you tuning in." A May 2003 *Us* interview with singer Sheryl Crow contains the finest example of a non-news magazine's slaphappy first brush with Iraq coverage. After going through the congratulatory motions of asking Crow what it was like to work with Kid Rock on their hit song, the interviewer, Shirley Halperin, makes a hairpin turn into political territory. "You've spoken out loudly against the war with Iraq," she says. "Now that the war is almost over, what are your thoughts?" *Us Weekly* certainly got the "Mission Accomplished" memo.

It also covered reactions to the war, printing this piece of gossip in April 2003: "Jennifer Lopez prefers to keep her views of the war in Iraq to herself. A source who recently attended a party at the home of Ben Affleck's mother in Cambridge, Massachusetts—where politics dominates the dinner conversation—went up to Lopez and asked, 'What do you think of the war?' The source says Lopez, 32, answered, 'I don't think about that stuff. I leave it up to him,' pointing to Affleck ... The source then told Lopez: 'You'd better get an opinion because people are going to be asking you what your stance on the war is.' But J. Lo, who has performed for the troops ... chose not to stick her neck out. 'She just smiled.'"

Ironically, because they don't take their subjects seriously, it turns out to be easy for gossip editors to work war coverage into their magazines without worrying about whether or not they appear neutral. Most of their reporting on the war consists of repeated celeb sightings. All they need to do is spot them entertaining troops at a base near Tikrit instead of entering Forty Deuce in L.A.

But what about magazines that take a more serious, almost reverent, approach to entertaining subject matter, such as sports magazines? The editors of *Sports Illustrated* seem to have realized that more maimed soldiers are returning home than ever before, and the magazine has seized the opportunity to report on these soldiers' struggles to return to civilian life. Both pro- and anti-war activists have had sympathy for U.S. troops from day one of the war, and when a magazine covers a soldier, it does not feel a need to justify his mission. *Sports Illustrated* published "Run to Daylight" in December 2005, which relates the individual stories of a group of Iraq war amputees running a 10-mile race. Like the coverage of a "war hero" amputee in *Popular Mechanics*, *Sports Illustrated's* story reflects the torturous recovery process the amputees involved in the race had to go through and the alienation they felt when they return to the States. However, unlike *Popular Mechanics*, the sports magazine chose not to refer to the soldiers in the story as heroes, opting instead to emphasize their averageness as G.I. Joes and Janes.

"Run to Daylight" lets the soldiers tell their own stories of the war, but the article doesn't draw any conclusions. *SI* may be, as its managing editor, Terry McDonell, put it, "the conscience of sport," but that conscience does not extend into politics. Like J. Lo, non-news magazines avoid sticking their necks out, shying away from taking sides. They have used the war to sell magazines and have shaped the narrative in ways that best suit their own missions. But their coverage of this story also reflects the ambivalence Americans feel about the war—and reflects it as well as, if not better than, news magazines. Because they can leave aside reporting on carnage and policy, they can focus on reporting to us that the war, as it drags on, is eating away at the hopes of readers of news and non-news magazines alike who wanted to see its quick and easy resolution. ◆