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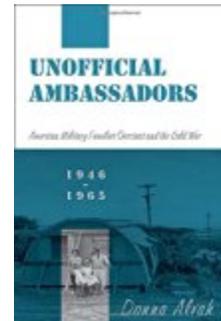
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Donna Alvah. *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965*. New York: New York University Press, 2007. xi + 291 pp. \$42.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-0501-8.

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Published on H-Minerva (April, 2009)

Commissioned by Kara Dixon Vuic



Families, Friendship, and Foreign Policy during the Cold War

As the United States expanded its military presence throughout the world in the early years of the Cold War, Defense Department officials granted permission for families to join personnel stationed overseas. The policy had its roots in the immediate aftermath of World War II and concerns about the morale of war-weary troops. The idea was that sending wives and children abroad would lessen the strain on servicemen called to participate in postwar rebuilding and security efforts. Thus began a fascinating chapter in the history of U.S. foreign relations that, as Donna Alvah explains, reveals the intimate side of U.S. overseas interventions during the Cold War.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe before becoming Army Chief of Staff, understood the emotional difficulties of prolonged separation from family. Writing to General George Marshall while stationed in Germany, Eisenhower confessed that “I just plain miss my family,” and he arranged for his son, John, who served in the First Division in Europe, to remain in Germany rather than be transferred to the Pacific (p. 24). Eisenhower also noted the strain separation had on his wife, Mamie. However, he refrained from requesting permission for Mamie to join him in Europe out of concern that such a move might draw public ire since it was not general army policy. Ultimately, though, the army began allowing families to join personnel overseas in February 1946.

What began as a troop morale building effort soon became a foreign policy initiative. Defense Department personnel deemed service wives and children “unofficial ambassadors” who would represent the goodwill of U.S. intervention. They wielded the “soft power” that U.S. policymakers hoped would ease the minds of peoples alarmed by American military and political incursions. By working in orphanages, raising money for impoverished mothers, and attempting to establish common ground between American and local cultures, service wives helped foster ties between the United States and its allies. Indeed, some service wives considered their work a means of furthering the goals of U.S. international relations, and they demonstrated the belief held by many Americans that U.S. intervention was noble and beneficent. In the early Cold War, U.S. foreign policy was a two-pronged endeavor of friendship building and nation building, and humanitarian efforts conducted by service wives demonstrated a maternalism that worked in tandem with the paternalism of U.S. military intervention. Yet, like paternalism, the motherly concern of service wives was predicated on notions of American cultural superiority, which became especially apparent when race was a factor. Alvah uses Americans’ encounters with Okinawans to highlight the role race played in shaping paternalistic relationships between the United States and certain allies. While Americans found commonalities with Germans in Christianity and whiteness, they cast Okinawans as childlike and in need of American guidance. These attitudes were not lost on Okinawans,

many of whom came to resent U.S. intervention.

Drawing on a diverse set of sources, including military documents, U.S. census data, memoirs, magazines, newspapers, and Defense Department records, Alvah's book makes three important contributions to the scholarly literature on the history of U.S. Cold War foreign relations. First, it reveals an American aspect of what historian Ann Laura Stoler calls the intimate side of imperialism. Day-to-day personal interactions between foreigners and locals expressed power relationships just as demonstrations of military might did. Although the United States in the Cold War did not practice nineteenth-century European-style colonialism, its foreign policy aimed to build democracies of its own likeness, and, as Alvah illustrates, interactions between service wives and local populations were fraught with the tension between goodwill efforts and a sense of cultural dominance. Second, the book shows how Cold War-era family and gender constructions were deployed as part of U.S. foreign relations. Scholars, such as Elaine Tyler May, have explored the ways in which Cold War imperatives shaped the image of the nuclear family, but Al-

vah demonstrates how families became vehicles of foreign policy. Third, Alvah's book contributes to the relatively new process of incorporating women into the U.S. Cold War foreign relations narrative. Not only does the book bring women's voices into the story, but it also illustrates how constructions of femininity were key parts of U.S. overseas interventions. Alvah's work both builds on previous scholarship and broadens the historiography.

Criticisms of the book are minor. The subtitle suggests that the monograph examines the experiences of military families, but American service wives receive the most attention by far. Alvah covers children in one chapter, and she states up front that wives, not husbands, are the focus of her inquiry, because during the Cold War the majority of U.S. military personnel were men. However, a deeper examination of masculinity and its uses in military endeavors would have bolstered Alvah's argument that both maternalism and paternalism informed U.S. Cold War foreign policy. Overall, though, Alvah's work is a necessary read for scholars of U.S. foreign relations and a useful addition to graduate and upper-level undergraduate courses in diplomatic history.

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Citation: Heather M. Stur. Review of Alvah, Donna, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946-1965*. H-Minerva, H-Net Reviews. April, 2009.

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