The First Ambush?

Effects of army training and employment

Veterans for Peace UK

Veterans for Peace UK is a voluntary ex-services organisation of men and women, who collectively have served in every war that Britain has fought since the Second World War. We say: 'War is not the solution to the problems we face in the 21st Century.' We belong within a wider international movement that began in the USA in 1985. We have members all over the UK with Action Groups in most regions. Find out more at vfpuk.org.

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'Unbeknown to me at the time, [the army's] training and/or indoctrination would come to shape my life, my decisions and my neurological processes for years to come… I suppose at the time we took it all in our stride and laughed it off. But we as people and in particular our brains were being prepared for the inhuman rigours and demands of traditional war fighting, closing with and engaging the enemy and by extension modern international conflicts.'

Ryan Hall, British infantry, 2000-2008.

'Bayonet training is teaching you to kill a person with a blade on the end of a rifle. You'll be put through loads of physical punishments – you're crawling through mud, screamed at and shouted at, kicked, punched while you're on the floor, anything to get you angry – they want you to release this insane amount of aggression, enough to stab another man when they say, basically, on the flick of a switch… Every single person I spoke to since leaving the army has been affected.'

Wayne Sharrocks, British infantry, 2006-2013.

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Executive summary

About this report

This report draws on veterans' testimony and around 200 studies from the last half-century to explore the effects of army employment on recruits, particularly their initial training. The studies are mainly the work of military academic research departments in the UK and US, supplemented by research in other countries including Australia, Canada, Germany, and Norway.

The report finds that army employment has a forceful impact on recruits' attitudes, health, behaviour, and financial prospects. This is partly due to soldiers' war experiences, but also to how they are recruited and trained, how they are conditioned by military culture, and how they re-adjust to civilian life afterwards.

Army recruitment and training

Army recruiters in the UK and US strategically target deprived neighbourhoods and children below enlistment age, presenting a sanitised picture of war, and romanticising the soldier's role. The substantial risks, restrictions of liberty, and ethical challenges that follow enlistment are not mentioned in the marketing materials. It is British army policy to channel the youngest recruits and those from poorer backgrounds into the infantry, which uses the most coercive training methods, has the army's highest trainee drop-out rate, carries the greatest risks in war, and whose veterans face a particularly high rate of unemployment. [Refer to chapter 2 and figure 11]

To ensure that recruits will follow all orders and kill their opponents in war, army training indoctrinates unconditional obedience, stimulates aggression and antagonism, overpowers a healthy person's inhibition to killing, and dehumanises the opponent in the recruit's imagination. Recruits are taught that stressful situations are overcome through dominance, and that soldiers are superior to civilians. [Refer to sections 3.1-3.4]

To achieve these changes, army training isolates recruits from their civilian past, disorientates them, controls every aspect of daily life, keeps them under stress, and uses group punishments to enforce compliance and 'weed out' those who fall behind. Humiliation and violence are routine. According to US military officers, these methods make recruits more obedient, because 'the intense workload and sleep restriction… leaves [recruits] little attention capacity for processing the messages they receive about new norms'.[1] [Refer to sections 3.1-3.4]

Many trainees leave or are dismissed. Around 35% of British infantry recruits are discharged during training, for example. Younger recruits from poorer backgrounds with limited education are more likely than other recruits to drop out. Those who stay tend to rate the army highly during training, but not afterwards: in 2016 job satisfaction among British trained soldiers stood at 44%. [Refer to sections 3.5-3.7]

[1] (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, pp. 22-23)

Effects of army training and culture

The intensity of military training and culture affects soldiers even before they are sent to war. While more research is needed, the available evidence points to appreciable changes to the recruit population once they are enlisted: to personality (more antagonistic and conformist, and less emotional); to attitudes (more authoritarian and militaristic); to mental health (more anxious, depressed, and suicidal); and to behaviour (more likely to drink heavily and behave violently, including the sexual harassment of women by men). Traumatic war experiences typically reinforce these changes. [Refer to chapters 6, 7, and 8]

There appears to be no evidence to support the common assumption that military training speeds the transition to adulthood. Nor is there evidence that the military's structured environment reduces violent behaviour, heavy drinking or substance abuse by recruits from deprived backgrounds. Research in the UK and US has found that military training and culture combine with pre-existing issues (such as a childhood history of anti-social behaviour) to increase the risk of these behaviours. Traumatic war experiences further exacerbate the problem. Violence and heavy drinking by veterans are serious public health problems. [Refer to chapters 6, 7, and 8]

Outcomes of army employment

Although the military has, in the past, functioned as a route out of poverty, research into the employment outcomes of veterans indicates that it no longer does so in the UK or US. Reduced military wages (relative to civilian pay), improvements in civilian education, and a high rate of early attrition, have devalued the army as a socioeconomic opportunity for people from poor backgrounds. While committed, career soldiers can fare well, these are the minority. In the UK, almost half of the army's youngest recruits, having left full-time education early to enlist, leave within four years. They then face a high risk of unemployment and long-term disadvantage. An official report in 2013 found that 30% of British infantry soldiers who left the army within four years were still not in work or education 18 months later. [Refer to chapter 8]

The army's requirements for health and fitness, the camaraderie that many soldiers value, and the steady income, can help to buffer some of the impacts discussed here. Nonetheless, the health advantage that soldiers enjoy over civilians at the start of their career is lost in later life. Despite army trainees' generally good health and fitness, veterans' higher rates of drinking and smoking, common mental health problems, and physical injury, correspond with poorer general health in later life. [Refer to chapter 9]

Conclusion

In the process of transforming civilians into soldiers, army training and culture forcibly alter recruits' attitudes under conditions of sustained stress, leading to harmful health effects even before they are sent to war. Among the consequences are elevated rates of mental health problems, heavy drinking, violent behaviour, and unemployment after discharge, as well as poorer general health in later life.

Introduction

Background

Since the Vietnam War, the effects of warfare on veterans have attracted widespread media and academic attention. It is now well established that lethal, large-scale violence harms the minds and undermines the life trajectories of those who take part in it, particularly when their involvement is repeated or prolonged (Friedman, 1994; 2004; Jones & Wessely, 2001; Iversen, et al., 2008; Hoge, et al., 2004; Gee, 2013). In contrast, the effects of other aspects of military employment, particularly military training and enculturation, remain underexplored.

Veterans rarely speak of war in isolation when talking about their experience of the armed forces, which is also shaped by their recruitment, training, garrison routine, exercises and operations, eventual discharge, and beyond. As they attest, military employment as a whole, rather than war alone, has an impact on who recruits become, how they see the world, and how they behave.

Veterans for Peace UK has pointed to the 'brutalising' nature of army training, for example (2017). Perhaps counter-intuitively, veterans often argue that their military training contributed as much to later difficulties, or indeed more so, than exposure to traumatic events in war (Sharrocks, 2016). Thus, a research focus on the effects of war risks misrepresenting veterans' experiences, if it fails to consider how military employment in all its aspects may alter attitudes and behaviour.

This report tries to ascertain some of the effects of army training and employment on those who enter it. Specifically, it asks what the available research tells us about the impact of military life on personality, health, attitudes, behaviour, and socioeconomic outcomes.

Army structures and terms

The effects of military employment can differ markedly according to the position that personnel occupy in the military structure. This section explains these differences.

All training for the armed forces applies multiple stressors to inculcate unconditional obedience to authority, but the intensity of the experience varies. Training for the army and marines is more coercive than that for the navy and air force.[2] Recruits for an army's largest component, the infantry,[3] see tougher training than do recruits for other army jobs. A particularly high degree of coercion is used in training for elite light infantry units, namely the airborne infantry and marines.

In a war fought largely on the ground, the same military structures similarly differentiate the experiences of personnel. Air force and navy personnel (except the marines) are less likely than soldiers to participate in multiple traumatic events. Within the army, infantry soldiers (infanteers) are particularly likely to experience such stressors. They are also more likely than other recruits to be susceptible to traumatic experiences, and so the psychiatric risks faced by infantry soldiers and marines are particularly high (Iversen, et al., 2007).

Experiences of military employment differ again with the status of personnel in the military hierarchy. Enlisted personnel can normally only join at the lowest rank.[4] Even after a long career

[2] The Royal Marines are part of the British navy; the US Marine Corps is a separate branch of the armed forces.
[3] Approximately one-quarter of British soldiers are infanteers, making the infantry the army's largest component.
[4] In the UK, all enlisted personnel join at the lowest rank; this is usually also the case in the US and some other countries, although there is some variation.

of regular promotions, they may only reach one rank below the most junior commissioned officer.[5] Compared with enlistees, commissioned officers are drawn from a background of relative privilege. Their terms of service are less restrictive, their pay and conditions are superior, they enjoy more control over their work, their initial training is less coercive, and they are less likely to suffer a traumatic stress reaction in war. Consequently, officers are more likely than enlistees to be satisfied with their work and to recommend the army to others.[6] Finally, strong differences are also found between current personnel and those who have left, with the latter being more likely to struggle with mental health, relationships, and finding sustainable re-employment.[7]

These various factors structure a great diversity in veterans' experiences of military employment. The risks faced by a commissioned officer trained for a support role in a navy ship deployed in a stand-off position are likely to be few. Conversely, the stresses encountered by a young infantry recruit from a poor background, who is intensively conditioned by training and then deployed to the front line of a war for the first time, are commonly great. Much of the British and American mental health research does not adequately account for these differences.

In view of these differences, this report assumes a relatively narrow focus on army enlistees, as the largest single group of armed forces personnel, and in particular the infantry, an army's largest single component. A further limitation is the inevitable need to discuss soldiers collectively, often glossing over the diversity of their experiences, particularly those of minority groups in the military. Accordingly, where the findings of this report point to a general effect on a military group, some individuals still buck the trend, while others exemplify it more strongly than the average.

About the evidence base

The report is informed by conversations with veterans, and by around 200 academic studies and government sources. Most studies were conducted in the UK and US; some in Canada, Germany, Norway and other countries. Between them they span approximately 50 years, with an emphasis in this report on recent studies where possible. Most of the data are quantitative, exploring statistical differences or trends in groups of several hundred, sometimes several thousand, military personnel or veterans. Some of the research explores differences in the same group over time (e.g. before and after enlistment). Other research compares two groups (e.g. civilians vs. soldiers).

The research is subject to two significant limitations. First, the measures that researchers use can only approximate to the real-life experiences of the people they study. For example, although veterans experience the traumatic after-effects of war in a wide variety of ways, most research relies on the binary notion that veterans either 'have' or 'do not have' post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[8] Second, due to the relative lack of research into the effects of military employment excluding war experiences, the evidence base for this report combines research in several countries over a long period. This approach assumes a degree of consistency across geography and over time. Where possible, the report flags where studies have been replicated in more than one country, and when the findings of studies contradict one another.

[5] In the British army, for example, Commissioned officers join at the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, which is one rank above the highest rank for enlisted personnel, Warrant Officer, Class 1.
[6] Satisfied with army life in general: officers, 56%; enlistees, 44%. Would recommend joining the army: officers, 58%; enlistees, 43%. (Ministry of Defence, 2016d)
[7] For a discussion of these differences, refer to Gee, 2013.
[8] For a discussion of the measures used in studies of PTSD, refer to Gee, 2013.

PART I: Army recruitment, training and culture

1. The purposes of military recruitment and training

While national armed forces are used for tasks as varied as peacekeeping, interventions in civil crises (e.g. flooding), and public relations (e.g. ceremonial parades), they exist to enable the state to threaten or wage war.[9] Whereas most Western states configure their armed forces for territorial defence, those with larger forces – France, the UK, and the US – readily project their power overseas in extensive, coercive actions, notably in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria.

Despite technological advances towards the automation of warfare, it still depends on mobilising large numbers of people; to quote the British army, 'Man is still the first weapon of war.' (British Army, 2000, p. 3:3) A state must forfeit its war-making options unless it either compels or persuades citizens in their youth to enlist and prepare to 'out-injure'[10] its opponents. As US military officers acknowledge, training young people for mass violence would clearly be 'ludicrous' in other contexts, but the armed forces depend on it absolutely (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, p. 16; Grossman, 2009).

2. Army recruitment

In the UK, as elsewhere, researchers have found that two motives drive army recruitment (Q A Research, 2009): first, the need to escape disadvantage; and second, the allure of the soldier's life, which is particularly characteristic of the youngest recruits. In most cases, both motivations – the push and the pull – influence the decision to enlist.

2.1. The push

Around the world, young soldiers point to the socioeconomic deprivation of their background as one of the main reasons for joining a military organisation (UNICEF, 2009). Economically developed countries are no exception. After the US suspended conscription in 1973, 'the military disproportionately attracted African American men, men from lower-status socioeconomic backgrounds, men who had been in nonacademic high school programs, and men whose high school grades tended to be low' (Segal, Burns, Falk, Silver, & Sharda, 1998). These demographic characteristics predominate today and generally also describe the minority of recruits who are women. In the American and British armed forces, commissioned officers are overwhelmingly white, older, and from upper-middle class backgrounds, while working-class adolescents fill the

[9] 'It is a fundamental tenet of British military doctrine that the Army should be organised, trained and equipped first and foremost for war.' (British Army, 2000, p. 1:3)
[10] Scarry, 1985, p. 12.

ranks (Bachman, Segal, Freedman-Doan, & O'Malley, 2000; Gee, 2013; Ministry of Defence, 2016h; US, Department of Defense, 2016).[11]

Recruiters deploy their resources accordingly; American academics have used the terms 'creaming' and 'dredging' to describe the strategy (Segal, Burns, Falk, Silver, & Sharda, 1998). That is, recruiters expect to 'cream off' high-achieving adults for officer roles, and to 'dredge' the poorest neighbourhoods for younger people to fill the ranks. Reflecting this class division, the British army visits English universities and private schools in the search for future officers, while targeting poorer neighbourhoods for enlisted personnel, particularly in northern cities and in Wales (Hansard, 2012; House of Commons, 2015).[12] For example, its January 2017 recruitment campaign, *'This is belonging'*, was aimed at 16-24 year-olds living in economically depressed cities, particularly young people in working-class families with an average annual household income of £10,000 (Ministry of Defence, 2017f).

Recruitment for the ranks divides again: between skilled jobs which require academic qualifications and are typically joined by young adults; and other jobs, including direct combat roles, which largely attract adolescents who underachieve in school. Consequently, the younger and more-disadvantaged recruits are over-represented in jobs involving the most coercive training and the highest war risks.

The British army exemplifies these divisions. Its policy is to enlist 16-year-olds, who also tend to be disadvantaged by background, 'particularly for the infantry', because it is difficult to attract adults to be infanteers (Ministry of Defence, 2013, p. 2). Consequently, minors are over-represented in the infantry.[13] Compared with the armed forces as a whole, British infantry recruits are 50% more likely to have experienced a 'high' level of adversity during childhood, and twice as likely to join up without any qualifications from school.[14] When the army is short of infantry recruits, it reduces the minimum entry standard of literacy from a reading age of 7-8 years to one of 5-7 years (Ministry of Defence, 2017c).[15]

In most economically developed countries, young people now continue in full-time learning to age 18 or further. In the UK, for example, 83% of young people from deprived backgrounds continue in full-time education for at least two further terms after the last year of secondary school, and typically for longer (Department for Education, 2017).[16] Consequently, targeting minors with army marketing encourages them to leave the education system early. They may also 'sack off' their school work, according to anecdote, since poor exam results will not jeopardise their prospective enlistment (Sharrocks, 2016), although they will restrict their choice of army trade to non-technical roles, particularly the infantry.[17] These early enlistees commonly regret abandoning full-time

[11] In the British army, women and non-white groups are under-represented across all ranks, but particularly among enlisted personnel (Ministry of Defence, 2016h).
[12] Manchester provides more of the army's enlistees than any other city, followed by Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Nottingham and Preston (Hansard, 2012).
[13] In 2015-16, a typical year, 41% of newly enlisted minors joined the infantry vs. 32% of adult recruits (House of Commons, 2016; Ministry of Defence, 2016h).
[14] 17% of the infantry joined up without any qualifications, approximately twice the average (8%) for the armed forces as a whole (Iversen, et al., 2008; Sundin, et al., 2010). Whereas 24% of armed forces personnel at all ages report a 'high' level of adversity in childhood, 36% of infanteers do so (ibid.)
[15] In the UK, reading ages are grouped as follows: reading age of 5-7 = Entry Level 1; 7-8 = Entry Level 2; 9-11 = Entry Level 3. Hence, the army reduces the minimum standard from Entry Level 2 to Entry Level 1 to leverage infantry recruitment.
[16] Here, disadvantaged is defined by eligibility for free meals at school, which applies to around 15% of children (Department for Education, 2017).
[17] Three-quarters of 16-year-old recruits for the British army have a reading age expected of a child aged 11 or younger. (Ministry of Defence, 2015c).

education so soon (Swain, 2016a) and advise other potential recruits against it (Army Rumour Service (ARRSE), 2017).

While international law does not directly forbid the recruitment of minors from age 16 for military purposes, its legality as practised is disputed (Child Soldiers International, 2015).[18] The policy is also strongly discouraged 'in view of the degree of associated risk and harm' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016b, p. 11). Enlistment at 16 is now rare worldwide; fewer than 20 states recruit from such a young age and two-thirds allow only adults to enlist (Gee & Taylor, 2016; Child Soldiers International, 2016b). The UK's strategic reliance on children is particularly unusual in view of the numbers enlisted. More new British army recruits are 16 than any other age, despite the ban on their participation in war or peacekeeping until they turn 18 (Ministry of Defence, 2016h). Other major Western military powers – the French and Americans – recruit from age 17, but only 3% of their recruits are that young (CNA, 2015; France, Ministry of Defence, 2014). Despite widespread calls for change,[19] the British army believes that it could not fill the ranks from adults alone (Cavanagh, 2015), although it has not substantiated that conclusion or responded to evidence contradicting it (Gee & Taylor, 2016; Child Soldiers International & ForcesWatch, 2014).

2.2. The pull

While socioeconomic deprivation drives much army recruitment, so do high expectations of the soldier's life. Research commissioned by the British army in 2009 found that recruits typically imagine the army as an adventure-in-waiting that will help them to get ahead and 'make them into better people' (Q A Research, 2009, p. 9). In a typical comment made to the researchers, an infantry trainee said that he 'wanted to move out of my mum's house, earn my own money, get out on my own...'. Another recalls that 'the narrative of preparing to become a warrior tickled my restless young soul, and I was yearning for adventure and travel'.[20]

Such romantic notions of military life are often formed at an early age. In 2007, the head of British army recruitment said that the process starts with a seven-year-old boy watching the airborne infantry jump from a plane at an air show, after which the army angles for his future enlistment 'by drip, drip, drip' (Armstrong, 2007).[21] Any number of childhood experiences, such as spending time in the local cadet force, or being shown a photo of soldiers scuba diving as part of an army recruitment presentation, further romanticise the soldier's job (Gee, 2014). Recruiters gain additional leverage by embedding a military presence and its symbols in civilian culture. Examples include official military branding of toys and play areas, ceremonial roles for soldiers at sporting events, and hand-to-hand combat demonstrations in public spaces (Gee, 2014; Ministry of Defence, 2015d; Anon., 2013a).

The entertainment industry also plays a role, as fans of Hollywood and videogames hope to trade up their military fantasies to the 'real thing' (Schulze von Glasser, 2013; Publicis, 2012; Q A Research, 2009). Recruiters have encouraged an elision between war fantasies and military life since the US Navy broke recruitment records in 1986 by setting up stall in screenings of *Top Gun* (Sirota,

[18] A discussion of the legality of child enlistment by economically developed states will also appear in a forthcoming publication by Child Soldiers International, due for release in 2017.

[19] Among those to challenge the policy in the UK are the Children's Commissioners, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and the UN, as well as veterans, child rights groups, health professionals, and faith groups (Louise, Hunter, & Zlotowitz, 2016; Veterans for Peace UK, 2017; House of Commons and House of Lords Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2009; Child Soldiers International, 2016c; 2016b; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016a). The enlistment of minors has also met with criticism in other states that practise it, e.g. (American Public Health Association, 2012; Germany, Commission for Children's Concerns, 2016).

[20] Refer to the appendix for the full quotation.

[21] A similar approach is encouraged in the US (Bachman, Freedman-Doan, & O'Malley, 2000b).

2011). In a comment typical of many, a British infantry soldier told the army's researchers that war films 'make you want to get out there and get involved' (Q A Research, 2009, p. 12). The US and British recruiters have turned also to computer games. A state-of-the-art, official US Army game sends performance results to recruiters, who then contact players to praise their skill as virtual soldiers and encourage them to join the army (Gee, 2014). In 2009, a British version, *Start Thinking Soldier*, offered young people a role in a bloodless Afghanistan War, collecting gamers' contact details and producing record recruitment results (Publicis, 2012; Gee, 2014).

Accompanying a child's romantic conception of war is a common fascination with the soldier as an ideal warrior, heroically dedicated to public service (Q A Research, 2009; Swain, 2016b; Hockey, J, 2003; British Army, 2010a, p. 2:18; Woodward, 2000). For many boys, the warrior-hero appears to be the 'natural state' of a mature man (Ridge, D et al.), who successfully integrates personal power, social belonging, and societal purpose. For a teenager seeking an unambiguous gender identity, the warrior-hero ideal is a seductive prospect, which recruiters intentionally elide with adolescent aspirations to maturity. In Australia, the infantry's 'warrior culture' is attached to a 'strong male orientation' (Australia, Department of Defence, 2006, p. 103). In the US, 'Join the army, Be a man'; 'The army will make a man out of you'; and 'We only take a few good men' were among the slogans used during the Cold War (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978, p. 154). In the UK, a poster above a urinal in Hull told men relieving themselves that in the Royal Marines they could 'hold a REAL gun'.[22]

As the armed forces try to recruit more women, 'Be a man' has morphed into 'Be a hero' (British Army, 2009), but men and traditional masculine norms still dominate military life (Hockey, J, 2003; Swain, 2016b; Woodward, 2000). British, American and Australian army doctrine officially prizes the traditionally masculine 'warrior spirit' or 'warrior ethos' as the hallmark of an effective soldier, whatever their gender (British Army, 2010a, p. 2:18; US Army, n.d.; Australia, Department of Defence, 2006, p. 103). Recruitment literature for combat jobs continues to present the soldier as an ideal man who is 'harder, faster, fitter, stronger' and 'helping people' abroad (British Army, 2013a, pp. 4-5, 10-11).

Recruits' expectations of the army – as an escape from poverty and an adventure in maturity – jar with a common assumption that they are 'selfless', feel a 'strong sense of social obligation', or are 'following a calling' (Javid, 2014; Reinke & Miller, 2008). Such altruistic motives are important to some, but only a minority, according to British and American research (Q A Research, 2009; Ministry of Defence, 2016g; Pliske, Elig, & Johnson, 1986). British army researchers found that:

> 'A minority of the [infantry] recruits spoken to gave ideological reasons for joining. Their belief in the cause of wars in Iraq or Afghanistan had prompted them to sign up:
>
> "I joined because I believe in the war, because of September 11th and the London bombings and that." (Duke of Lancaster Regiment)
>
> "I want to get out to Afghanistan to help out." (Yorkshire Regiment)
>
> 'Other recruits agreed with this point when made, however their lack of desire to contribute anything further around this point would suggest that ideological reasons for enrolment were secondary at best amongst the majority.' (Q A Research, 2009)

The one-dimensional depictions of military life common to recruitment materials soon wear thin once young people have signed up; fewer than half of trainees think that the information that recruiters gave them described army life well (Ministry of Defence, 2016g, p. 44). Some former recruiters and marketeers agree, and admit that the messages provided to children are dishonest

[22] Poster seen by the author, c. 2005.

(Gee, 2014, pp. 108-109). Nonetheless, the effect of the army's long-term marketing strategy is that many young people resolve to join up long before they are old enough to do so. To recruiters, these committed children – the 'core intenders' – are as good as in the door, whether they enlist at 16 or older. But unless their expectations of military life are tempered by frank conversations with veterans themselves, they will be unprepared for what comes next.

3. Army training

3.1. 'Forced change'

In countries where conscription is no longer used, the public is usually not aware of the process by which soldiers are produced from a nation's youth. Military training centres are closed institutions; even the 'open day' at the British army's training depot for 16-year-olds is closed to all but the immediate families of recruits. The media gain access only at the discretion of the military authorities, which stipulate strict conditions (Ministry of Defence, 2016e). When access is granted, the media typically present training as a rite of passage, in which a few weeks of personal effort is crowned with a day of public recognition at passing-out (BBC, 2011; Channel 5, 2016). Audiences would not be aware that military training is, as one well-informed observer commented, 'deliberately designed to erase the recruits' civilian self-image so that the army can start to fashion the identity of the soldier on a blank piece of paper' (Swain, 2016b, p. 119).

Veterans tell a more complex story, as does the research literature, most of which is co-authored by senior military officers with academic credentials. In a classic account by one such military academic, basic training in the US army is characterised as 'forced change' (Bourne, 1967, p. 187). Others have described it with approval as 'intense indoctrination' under sustained mental stress with the express aim of guaranteeing recruits' unerring conformity with the military regime and all its demands (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, p. 22). Collectively, academics and military officers alike describe basic training as a coercive process, characterising it variously as 're-socialisation', 'assimilation', 'psychological conditioning', 'programming', and simply 'control' (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006; Grossman, 2009; Dornbusch, 1955; Swain, 2016b; McGarry, Walklate, & Mythen, 2015; Wesbrook, 1980; Winslow, 1998).

The military rationale for the coercive manipulation of recruits is that mere instruction would not produce soldiers who will face down mortal danger and direct lethal violence at others on demand. A healthy person's innate aversion to killing other people must be dulled, as must the natural tendency to appraise a course of action on its merits before committing to it. To ensure that the military group will work as a unit, personal individuality must be suppressed and loyalties realigned until recruits assume military culture as their own and accept the supremacy of its demands. In sum, the military expects to gain dominance over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Jim Burnett joined the British army in the 1970s:

> 'When I joined the army at 15, I had no personality and I had no character – I was a pretty blank page. Therefore, the character that I developed was the character the instructors and the sergeants above me wanted me to have. They'd been in the army all their life and I was a blank page, they were writing all over it – I became what they wanted… They got the idea across to me that killing was our game.' (BBC, 1990)

The following description of initial soldier training attempts to describe its operation on the minds and bodies of recruits, concentrating on features common to the armed forces of economically developed states over the last half-century.[23]

3.2. Stripping the civilian

Basic army training can be understood in three parts. The first aims to overpower recruits' civilian identities, which has been described as 'breaking down' or 'stripping' (Hockey, J, 1986; Jackson, 2012; Bourne, 1967; Elder, 1986; McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006; Griffin, 2015):

- First, the training regime *traps* recruits. For the first few weeks (six in the UK), trainees are forbidden to leave the training estate. A recruit has no right to be discharged in this period, even if still a minor; any trainee who tries to leave is arrested and returned.[24]

- Second, the regime *suppresses* recruits' civilian identities by shaving the head, imposing a uniform, denying access to private space, and banning the use of first names. For the first few weeks, recruits may not receive any visitors and email/phone contact is tightly restricted. (British trainees are forbidden their own computer; mobile phones are stored securely for the first six weeks, released between 8pm and 10pm for a single daily call home.[25])

- Third, the army *disorientates* recruits by keeping them in the dark about what is coming next. In the words of an American recruit: '[Y]ou are ignorant of what is expected or what actions are right or wrong. You fear making a mistake and you fear the consequences… You have no clue, and that is a big factor in the stress…' (Gold & Friedman, 2000)

- Fourth, training *dominates* recruits by controlling their daily routine totally, denying them any choice over their personal affairs. There are right and wrong ways to stand, make a bed, polish boots, and fold a t-shirt. A mistake, however inconsequential, brings an aggressive reprimand. Instructors 'rule by fear', according to Andy Blair, who joined the British infantry aged 17.[26]

- Fifth, training *depletes* recruits by applying stressors continuously. Day in, day out – and at night – instructors can deprive recruits of essentials, such as sleep, food, shelter, or time to go to the toilet. Beastings are routine: instructors shout insults into a recruit's face and give orders intended to humiliate. Physical aggression is also routine, in degrees from pushing a recruit over to hitting them. In 2002, at the British army's training camp for its youngest recruits, 16-year-old Tyrone Davis was made to stand in line with his peers 'and allow the corporal to strike a golf club to our chest – I still got a scar…' The relentless depletion of recruits helps to secure their compliance, according to US military officers:

  > 'The intense workload and sleep restriction experienced by military recruits leaves them little attention capacity for processing the messages they receive about new norms… Therefore, recruits should be less likely to devote their remaining cognitive effort to judging the quality of persuasive messages and will be more likely to be persuaded by the messages…' (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, pp. 22-23)

[23] The principal written sources used for the remainder of this chapter are: Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006; Bourne, 1967; Dornbusch, 1955; Hockey, J, 1986; Eisenhart, 1975; Sharrocks, 2016; Griffin, 2015; Kiernan, Repper, & Arthur, 2015; Grossman, 2009; Winslow, 1998; Christian, Stivers, & Sammons, 2009; Faris, 1975; Swain, 2016b; Hockey, 2003; McGarry, Walklate, & Mythen, 2015; and Gold & Friedman, 2000.

[24] In the UK, recruits have no legal right to leave in the first six weeks, even if they are aged under 18. To leave at the six-week point, they must give two weeks' notice after the first 28 days of service.

[25] AFC First Six Weeks Policy, paragraph 36. Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, 12 May 2017, ref. FOI2017/02411.

[26] Andy Blair, British infantry, 2014-2017. Personal communication with the author, 2017.

- Sixth, the instructor *punishes* a struggling recruit, who is 'singled out for weakness, humiliated, and isolated', as British infantry veteran James Florey has characterised it.[27] For example, an instructor might empty a recruit's wardrobe across the room and order that it be replaced perfectly. The instructor then punishes the whole group, which then resents the individual, whose social standing is now in jeopardy. Rowan McAllan, who joined the British army in 1999, describes the beastings he received as 'punishments for nothing', which were 'often degrading in the extreme'.[28] In 2014, Andy Blair's first day of infantry training was dominated by the extended beasting and punishment of two soldiers for nothing more than looking out of a window.[29] The punishments themselves are often bizarre. Ben Griffin, who trained for the British infantry in 1997, recalls that the corporals would 'go along the line pinching our tongues'.[30] Infantry trainee James Florey was ordered to run 'around the squad whilst marching with a weapon over my head having to shout, "I'm a fucking bender."'"[31]

  Repeated punishment serves several functions: it excites a fear of failure in the recruit, which is a powerful incentive for compliance; it builds the unitary nature of the group, to which an individual's needs are subordinated; and it helps the army to 'weed out' individuals who cannot or will not meet its demands. According to Falklands veteran Dominic Gray:

  > 'The whole idea is to make sure that you can take any type of abuse... If you can handle that then you can handle an assault on an enemy that is five times your strength because you're so gung-ho.' (BBC, 1990)

3.3. Moulding the soldier

The initial stages of training have subjected recruits to stress, suppressed their former identities and denied them a way out. Meanwhile, training has engulfed them in a new, military culture with its demanding and often irrational norms, which would have been incongruous in their now-deprecated civilian past. The second dynamic of training offers recruits the opportunity to (re)gain dignity, on condition that they perform in their new identity as soldiers:

- First, instructors *reward compliance* by allowing relief from stressors when recruits meet the demands made of them. A section that bulls its boots to perfection, salutes with alacrity, and endures beastings with stoicism, may be allowed a five-minute break on the way back from a run, for example. Recruits are not merely relieved at these concessions; they are grateful for them, but they learn that they depend on their continued compliance.

- Second, trainers *reinforce the soldier identity* by rewarding them with praise when they perform well. Their ability to withstand training thus far is offered as a mark of their character *as soldiers*, and their new skills as a sign of their professionalism *as soldiers*. After various privations, recruits are eager to hear these affirmations of their worth.

- Third, the trainee group, cut off from friends and family, *forms a bond of mutual loyalty,* the immediate intensity of which they are unlikely to have experienced before. The bond helps to buffer the stresses of training, but its shadow is the exclusion of group members who fall behind socially or professionally, particularly if they are temperamentally anxious or shy. For those not excluded from it, the 'we-feeling' (Dornbusch, 1955, p. 318) is deeply affirming. Recruits credit the army for it and contrast it with the past social life. Although the bond can feel permanent, it tends to dissipate after the stressful conditions of initial training have passed.

- Fourth, instructors *instil a presumption of heroic superiority* by teaching recruits that they inherit the triumphant history of their regiment, whose soldiers are a cut above the rest. Beneath a

[27] Refer to appendix for the full quotation.
[28] Refer to appendix for the full quotation.
[29] Personal communication with the author, 2017.
[30] Refer to appendix for the full quotation.
[31] Refer to appendix for the full quotation.

recruit's own regiment in the hierarchy of esteem sits the rest of the army, which is nonetheless superior to the rest of the armed forces. The armed forces of the nation, whichever it happens to be, are deemed better than in other countries, and the military profession ranks above civilians, who are said to lack self-respect and are denigrated as, for example, 'losers' or 'pond life' (Sharrocks, 2016; Ricks, 1997). Foreign nationals are the most disparaged group of all. Even the recruit's family and friends, the heart of their pre-enlistment life, now rank below army society. Jez Dyer, who trained for the British airborne infantry (the 'Paras') in 1999, recalls that beastings were used to fix his regiment's supremacy in recruits' minds. In this example, his platoon has been given press-ups as a punishment:

> '[O]n the way down we were instructed to shout out, 'I HATE CIVVIES' and on the way back up we were commanded to shout out, 'I LOVE THE PARAS'… Somehow it made us feel stronger or perhaps more superior than the civvies. These training methods coupled with commonplace terminology such as 'civvie puke' and 'civvie creatures'… obviously strongly shaped our views and thinking toward the civilian population.'[32]

Despite the minority presence of women and girls, the training setting remains heavily masculinised, as seen for example in the porn pinned on dorm walls and the common equation of a soldier's incompetence with impotence and femininity (Anon, 2013b; Green, Emslie, O'Neill, Hunt, & Walker, 2010; Woodward, 2000). Several commentators have noted that recruits who joined up to realise a warrior-hero ideal rehearse traditionally masculine behaviours through their training (Hockey, J, 2003; Swain, 2016a; Woodward, 2000), inapt though it may be for the battlefield, where soldiers operate collectively under orders as functionaries of the military machine. The appeal of the warrior-hero wanes once recruits join the battalions (Swain, 2016a), although research also confirms that initial training reinforces masculinist attitudes (Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962; Butcher, et al., 1990).

3.4. Practising killing

If training has gone well, recruits claim as their own the regime of pervasive control imposed on them. Once, they resisted compliance, now they desire it, and they derive satisfaction from performing well as soldiers. But their conditioning is not complete until they are capable of killing a person; on this their identity as soldiers depends absolutely.

A healthy person is profoundly averse to the intention to kill another person, thanks in part to two blocks in the psyche. The first is cognitive, represented by a moral conviction that harming other people violates our common humanity ('*I ought not to kill.*') The second is physiological, felt as a visceral repulsion against killing another human being (*'I cannot kill.'*) Some individuals do not experience either of these strongly, but most do, and military training aims to suppress and overcome them. The training regime operates in three ways to achieve this.

The first, as discussed, is the principal goal of initial training: to secure unquestioning obedience to all orders. Crucially, obedience is experienced collectively, leaving little or no room for individual autonomy. As an official report into Australian Defence Force training has put it:

> 'Willingness to apply lethal force requires… sufficient bonding within the team to override each individual's natural human resistance to kill. The toughness and bonding required increases the closer the contact with the enemy.' (Australia, Department of Defence, 2006, p. 31)

Collective, unconditional obedience increases the likelihood that recruits will enact a kill order without pausing to evaluate it rationally or ethically. For example, Wayne Sharrocks trained for the British infantry in 2006:

[32] Refer to the appendix for the full quotation.

> 'At the start of training, if they told you, for instance, "Take all your clothes off and run around the block naked…" you'd probably question it… but six months down the line for some reason you want to get into this thing so much… that you will just do whatever they say whenever they say it.'

The second objective has two parts: a) to dehumanise; and b) to demonise the soldier's opponent in war. Rather than a human being whose guts will spill out when shot in the chest, who will die moaning, and whose death will bereave a family, the soldier's opponent is depersonalised as an 'enemy target' to 'be engaged', which will 'fall when hit'. Somewhat paradoxically, the opponent is also demonised as a merciless savage; he fights because he hates. He does not share the soldier's regard for humanity and therefore *ought* to be killed. Seldom is the soldier's opponent envisaged as a woman or child, or as a man with children of his own, who might be fighting for much the same reasons that other soldiers fight. In sum, the human complexity of the enemy is effaced from the trainee's imagination. Rarely will trainees appreciate, as veterans often do later, that this indoctrinated construct of the enemy also dehumanises the person who accepts it as real.

On the rifle range, the standard *Figure 11* target shows an unkempt male combatant charging towards the viewer, eyes in shadow, bayonet fixed, looking much like the dehumanised, savage enemy that recruits have been encouraged to imagine. The trainee – ready to obey, eager to achieve, and reducing their opponent to an object – shoots the targets down, aiming at the chest. Outward aggression is not required; efficiency and accuracy are. The effective marksman maintains a state of mindfulness, remaining still, breathing carefully, aligning the sight, and gently squeezing the trigger. Recruits gain points, with which they are compared against their peers; the better marksman is regarded as the better soldier.

Figure 1: A 'Figure 11' target

Far more difficult, for most people, is to kill another person at close quarters. At hand-to-hand distance, soldiers are expected to direct intense aggression lethally, which is the third objective in producing soldiers who will kill. Throughout their training, recruits are stimulated to summon adrenalised aggression as the means to overcome adversity; the ability to aggress is praised as a soldier's virtue. Recruits who do not or cannot aggress on demand are considered weak as individuals and deficient as soldiers. (Trainees rehearse aggression in their own time; a home video shows the British army's youngest trainees holding a full-contact boxing match in their dorm, for example [Anon, 2007].)

In war, most soldiers are not expected to fight at close quarters, but the infantry are, so their training is designed to intensify their capacity for animal aggression. For infanteers, beastings and the other stressors of initial training are more intense and the requirement for obedience stricter, while additional training activities stimulate and encourage interpersonal violence.

One such activity is milling, a gladiatorial rite of passage required of recruits aged 17 and above for the British airborne infantry. One soldier has described it as 'a great and noble and mindlessly brutal tradition' (Army Rumour Service (ARRSE), 2006). Its official purpose is to '[replicate] the conditions of stress and personal qualities required in a combat situation' (British Army, 2017) or, in the words of an instructor, to get recruits 'to deliver maximum violence onto their opponent' (Forces TV, 2014).

Trainees are paired off by weight and instructed to punch each other's faces as furiously as possible for one minute. Recruits are told: 'You must aim to dominate your opponent with straight punches to the head. No ducking, parrying or other boxing defence moves are allowed' (British Army, 2017). Since evasive action is forbidden, it is normal to see a recruit bleeding from the nose or mouth. Recruits may be knocked down repeatedly; the clock is paused while the blood is wiped away, and, however dazed the dominated recruit may be, the fight then continues until the bout is over (Forces TV, 2014; Personal communication with veterans, 2017). Officers watch from a raised platform and award the win to the most aggressive recruit. Milling is the 'flagship event' of the airborne infantry, based on the (unsubstantiated) assumption that the millers will more readily participate in, rather than flee, the brutality of the battlefield. Its unbridled violence must be seen to be appreciated – many clips are available online (Runnerpart2, 2007; Forces TV, 2014; FlashSportStreamsUK, 2011; TheAirbornePainTrain, 2013a; 2013b).

Figure 2: Milling in P Company, Parachute Regiment

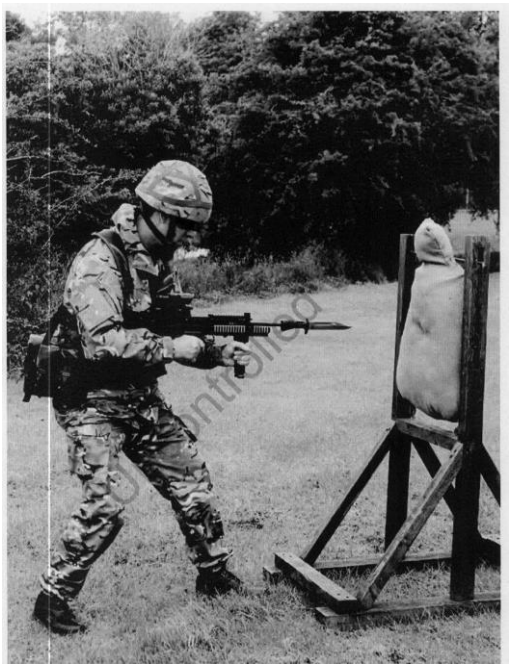


Figure 3: Image from British army bayonet training instruction manual

Towards the end of training, all infantry recruits are put through bayonet practice, when they impale an effigy of a person. In the hours beforehand, recruits are deprived of sleep and made to run for an extended period (two hours or more is reported), shouting 'Kill!' on every second step. They arrive at the bayonet practice site depleted and resentful. Instructors beast recruits to transfigure their resentment into an animal rage, expressed as a 'war face' and a collective 'war cry': *Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!*… They are told that the stuffed dummy, which is sometimes filled with offal or bags of blood, represents 'the enemy' who has just killed their mates. They are then ordered to charge at it screaming, and to drive the bayonet into its 'guts'.

In the UK, recruits as young as 16 are put through this ritual, which brings together the three conditioning processes discussed here: collective, unconditional obedience; a dehumanised, demonised opponent; and lethally directed aggression.

In a BBC film from 2011, available online,[33] the instructor yells at recruits:

> 'I wanna see it in your eyes that you wanna kill these fuckers. Imagine these dummies are the fucking Taliban and they've just killed some of your mates. You wanna fuckin' kill them. Show me your war face! [recruits yell] You need some fucking more aggression, show me your war face. [louder] Show

[33] See youtube.com/watch?v=_Op1zjd7KKE.

> me your war face! [recruits roar] What do we wanna do to the enemy? [recruits yell as one – 'Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!' – and charge at the dummies]' (BBC3, 2011)

In the US, a similar film shows an American instructor and his recruits roar out a well-worn call-and-response litany:

> Instructor: 'What's the spirit of the bayonet?' Recruits: '*Kill! Kill! Kill without mercy!*' 'What makes the green grass grow?' '*Blood! Blood! Blood makes the green grass grow!*' 'There are two types of bayonet fighters, the quick and the dead – which are you?' '*The quick, Drill Sergeant!*' 'Let me hear your war cry!' *[Recruits keep yelling, banging their rifles on the ground.]*' (PBS: POV Interactive, 2015)

When the cameras are not looking, the process is more brutal. Gary Latto trained for the British infantry in 2008:

> 'We were kept up most of the night to "prepare for a big inspection" the next day. We were woken up in the early hours… and ran around camp for a few hours… and every time our left foot hit the ground we were to shout "KILL". Bayonet training involved us stabbing straw dummies filled with blood bags and intermittent "beastings". Fights often broke out amongst recruits and this seemed to be encouraged. At any point we were asked what a bayonet was for we were to reply 'KILL, KILL, KILL!' Afterwards we were locked down and were not allowed to leave camp for 24 hours.'[34]

The simulated opponent which recruits meet in training – the 'eyeless, aggressive, charging, paper enemy', as one infantry veteran has described it,[35] and the inanimate sack that awaits their bayonets – are alien to the real person who faces the soldier in war.[36] Nonetheless, when combined with dehumanisation of the enemy, the inculcation of obedience, and the stimulation of aggression, these stylised combat drills increase the probability that trainees will kill when so ordered (Grossman, 2009).

Such conditioning of the personality for violence has profound effects on the trainee group. Their aversion to violence is reduced, such that acts normally considered wrong are now deemed legitimate for military purposes. They have been trained to react to adversity antagonistically and with aggression. They have also been encouraged to valorise military culture as superior to the civilian life they left behind. They carry their soldier programming with them at work and at home, and it persists after they leave the army. Its marks are seen in, for example, elevated levels of anxiety, a greater likelihood of violent behaviour and, for many, debilitating feelings of shame once actions on the battlefield are evaluated humanely, in their wider moral complexity.

3.5. 'Success'

Some months after they arrived, recruits emerge from their 'temporal cocoon in which a phenomenal metamorphosis must take place' (Bourne, 1967, p. 187), ready to be used as 'fighting material' (Swain, 2016b, p. 129). As some commentators have noted, the training process has kept the army's recruits in an infantile role: inescapable dependency on an all-controlling system (Bourne, 1967, p. 195; Swain, 2016b). Nonetheless, the passing-out parade is offered as evidence that once-dissolute boys and girls are now dignified men and women, and the cameras are allowed in. The audience applauds the show of discipline, but the parade also displays the depth of the army's control over its recruits, sealing their new identity as soldiers.

Recruits tend to rate their training highly. In the British army, around nine in ten trainees say they would recommend it to a friend, seven in ten strongly agree that they are proud to be in the army,

[34] Refer to appendix for the full quotation.
[35] Refer to appendix for the full quotation.
[36] Or, more likely, remains unseen.

and most also report a sense of personal achievement (Ministry of Defence, 2016g, pp. 7, 105, 109). Trainees who enjoy the training often approve fulsomely of its manipulative nature, as these two infantry recruits, quoted in a study of initial training by Jon Swain, imply:

> 'You do, you dog things out, and you get respect. It's the hard things, the harder the thing you complete, the harder it is to complete, the more respect you get for completing it.'
>
> '[E]very single person will get smashed, no matter how perfect you are, you can come here with the most positive attitude in the world, but at the end of the day they're here to smash you because they're going to turn you from a) a boy to a man and b), they've got to teach to discipline, how to work off your own back.' (Swain, 2016a, pp. 127, 128)

Less clear is whether recruits' positive appraisal is due to, or despite, their 'thorough indoctrination' into the military system (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, p. 27). Researchers have found that the harder it is to enter an exclusive group, the greater the willingness of initiates to endure stress and even humiliation to prove themselves, and the greater their loyalty to it afterwards (Kavanagh, 2017). The trainees quoted above illustrate this. The adolescent male recruit wants to be transformed from 'a boy to a man' by passing into the trained soldiery. He is willing to 'dog it out', even to be 'smashed', to get there, accepting a degree of privation far greater than he normally would. Having endured a rite of passage to pass out into the trained soldiery, the whole journey feels worth the struggle.

Recruits are not rewarded with a leap forward in maturity, however. As discussed later in this report, young recruits do mature through their training, but no faster than young civilians. The army does not transform them in a few months from a boy into a man or a girl into a woman. An early commentator found that some soldiers blamed the training regime for failing them in this regard – their complaint was not that training was too brutal, but that it was not coercive enough to deliver on their high expectations of personal transformation (Bourne, 1967).

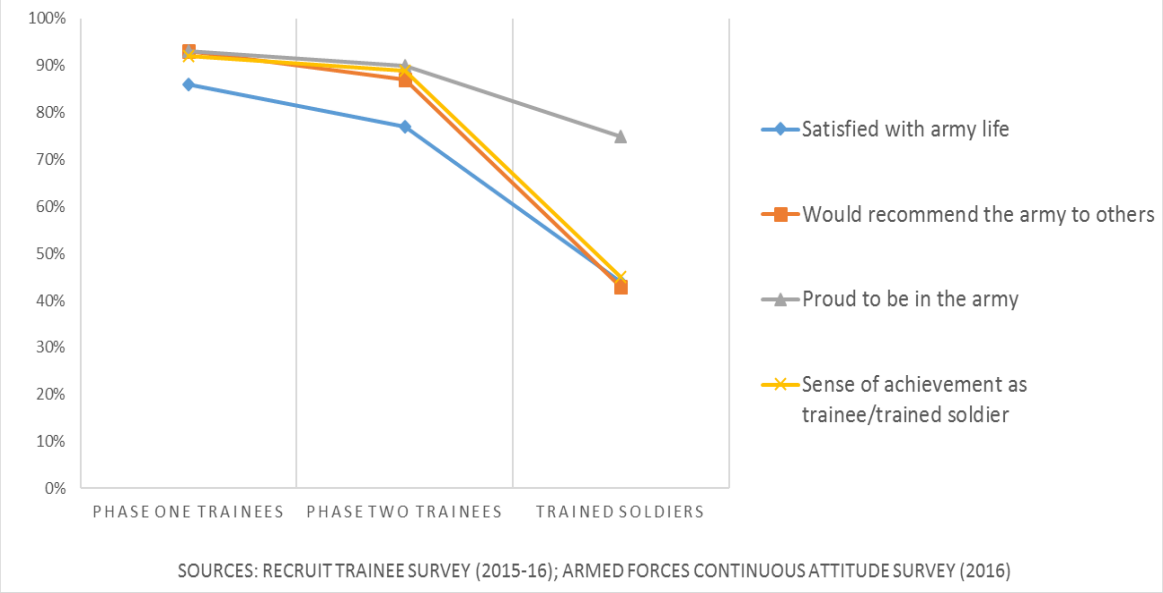
Nor does recruits' high satisfaction last. Although most trainees endorse their initial training, an early study by the US army found that belief in the institution diminished sharply afterwards:

> '[T]he discovery that the new life and new value system that appeared to be offered in basic training were in many ways illusions probably also contributes somewhat to the soldier's overall level of alienation in general.' (Wesbrook, 1980, p. 179)

A similar picture is seen in the UK. Whereas almost all recruits in training would recommend the army to others, fewer than half of trained soldiers say the same; see Figure 4 (Ministry of Defence, 2016d, p. 133). Clearly, while some soldiers continue to love army life, a large proportion feel disenchanted, but by the time they finish training they have normally lost their right to leave. After the first few months, soldiers are automatically locked in to the army until between four and six years have passed from the day they enlisted.[37]

[37] After the first three months, an adult recruit is obliged to complete four years' service before becoming eligible to leave; once a minor turns 18, he or she is obliged to remain in the army until the 22nd birthday at the earliest. Recruitment literature does not explain this (Gee, 2008).

Figure 4: Recruits'/soldiers' appraisal of the army, by career stage



3.6. 'Failure'

The shadow-side of each passing-out parade is the many absent trainees who have already left the army. Figures from 2013/14 and 2014/15 show that 23% of British army recruits left before they finished training, which automatically excluded most of them from the satisfaction survey mentioned in the preceding section.[38] The rate of attrition in the infantry is twice as high as in the rest of the army (35% vs. 17%), shown in Figure 5.[39] Only a third of these infantry dischargees leave by choice during the short period in which they are allowed to do so, known as 'discharge as of right' (DAOR) (Ministry of Defence, 2017d). The rest are dismissed by the army.

As an official report for the Australian Defence Force has put it, some young people simply 'cannot be socialised into the [military] group' (Australia, Department of Defence, 2006, p. 31). Some military academics have characterised these leavers as 'failed recruits' who were 'unable to adapt and cope' (UK) or 'unable to complete the challenge of indoctrination' (US) (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, p. 25; Kiernan, Repper, & Arthur, 2015, pp. 929-930). This further skews the picture. While some recruits leave because their training is just 'too hard' (Kiernan, Repper, & Arthur, 2015, p. 929), others leave by choice because they dislike the army, as these British recruits illustrate:

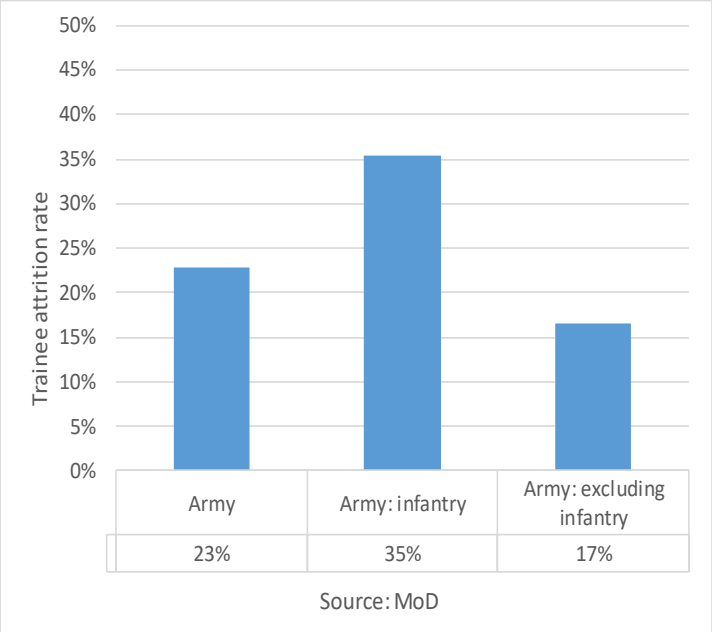
> 'I want to be my own person; I don't want to be told what to do all the time… I don't like the lack of privacy.' (ibid. p. 928)
>
> '[T]he Army has prevented me from making friends as we are always in competition with each other… I don't fit in here, the sacrifices are too great… the training is bullshit… the blokes are idiots who I would never associate with outside of here.' (ibid. p. 928)

[38] Army enlisted intake: 2013/14, 6,440; 2014/15, 7,650; total, 14,090 (Ministry of Defence, 2016h). Army trainee attrition: 2013/14, 1,480; 2014-15, 1,730; total, 3,210 (House of Lords, 2016). Attrition rate: 23%.

[39] Infantry enlisted intake: 2013/14, 2,009; 2014/15, 2,619; total, 4,628 (Ministry of Defence, 2017e). Infantry trainee attrition, 2013/14, 850; 2014/15, 790; total, 1,640 (Ministry of Defence, 2017d). Attrition rate derived from figures cited: 35%. The attrition rate of 17% among non-infantry army trainees is calculated by subtracting infantry intake/attrition from army intake/attrition figures.

According to the Ministry of Defence (2016g) the reasons most often given for choosing to leave the army are: realising that it falls short of expectations; disliking the diktats of the training regime; and missing friends and family. Whereas some recruits are willing to be 'smashed' (Swain, 2016b) in the hope of personal transformation, those inclined to leave criticise the reward-and-punishment regime as petty and patronising (Q A Research, 2009). It appears that recruits' appraisal of their training depends on whether they acquiesce with, or are determined to resist, their forcible resocialisation as soldiers.

Figure 5: Army enlisted intake: rate of trainee attrition by infantry/non-infantry role, 2013/14 & 2014/15 (MoD, 2017d; 2017e)



3.7. First in, first out: the youngest and poorest

While it is often said that the youngest and most disadvantaged recruits gain the most from training (Blake, 2006, pp. 386-387), the available evidence clearly points the other way. Attrition from basic training is closely related to age and socioeconomic background, such that the youngest recruits from the most deprived backgrounds are the most likely not only to join up, but also to drop out.

It has been known in the US for some decades that poverty and young age at enlistment increase the risk of early attrition.[40] The research has found that all of the following poverty-related factors contribute: underachievement in, or exclusion from, school; underdeveloped literacy or numeracy; a history of unemployment or job instability; rebelliousness or anti-social behaviour; a history of arrest; a feeling of alienation from society; a history of physical or sexual abuse; anxiety or depression; mental health problems requiring counselling; unstable family relationships; and mental health problems in the recruit's family.[41] Poverty-related factors increase the likelihood of discharge for a range of reasons: psychiatric problems; military offences; and poor performance (Talcott, Haddock, Klesges, Lando, & Fiedler, 1999). That is, American enlistees from poorer backgrounds are more likely than other recruits to struggle in training, to resist military authority, and/or to have debilitating mental health problems that prevent them from continuing. There have been similar findings in other countries operating both conscription and non-conscription systems (Salo & Siebold, 2006; Lee, McCreary, & Villeneuve, 2011).

The American research has also found repeatedly that a lower age at enlistment and/or relative immaturity increase the risk that a recruit will leave during training or within the first three years

[40] For example, see Carbone, Cigrang, Todd, & Fiedler, 1999; Mirin, 1974; White, Rumsey, Mullins, & Nye, 2014; Young, Kubisiak, Legree, & Tremble, 2010; Talcott, Haddock, Klesges, Lando, & Fiedler, 1999; Crawford & Fiedler, 1992; Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004; and Plag, 1962.

[41] For example, see Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004; Booth-Kewley, Larson, & Ryan, 2002; Wesbrook, 1980; and Shulman, Levy-Shiff, & Scharf, 2000. Only two socioeconomic factors appear unrelated to early attrition in the US: a history of incarceration and moderate (but not severe) alcohol misuse (Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004).

(the optimum recruitment age was found to be 19-23 years) (Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004; Jensen, 1961; Plag, 1962).

Researchers have explained this by pointing to difficulties adjusting to the culture and demands of military life. Early research discovered that rebelliousness (as resistance to authority demands), diffidence arising from chronic anxiety, and low tolerance for frustration, are anathema to the training regime but common among recruits from poorer backgrounds (Mirin, 1974; Plag, 1962). Such recruits are also more vulnerable to stress (McLeod & Kessler, 1990), particularly to over-stimulation of the acute stress response (the so-called *fight-or-flight* mechanism) (Brunner, 1997), and so are more likely to react negatively to coercive training methods (Vickers, Walton-Paxton, Hervig, & Conway, 1996b). Another early finding was the importance of maturity and life experience in buffering the stresses of training, favouring the slightly older recruit: 'The recruit who has been away from home at college, on an athletic team, or even in jail, will experience less stress from [basic training] induction than his less experienced colleague.' (Bourne, 1967, p. 190).

In sum, while some adolescents disadvantaged by background do well in the army, the research shows repeatedly that this group is also the most likely to reject it, or to find that it rejects them. As one study put it, it would benefit all parties if 'those clearly unsuitable for military life can be spared the emotional hardship of futile attempts to "mold" them to the ways of the military' (Crawford & Fiedler, 1992, p. 645). For this reason, Americans without a high school diploma are normally deemed too cost-ineffective to enlist (White, Rumsey, Mullins, & Nye, 2014) and, compared to the UK, the US recruits relatively few minors (Gee & Taylor, 2016).

As noted earlier, the British army has taken a different path, actively seeking adolescents in their mid-teens from deprived backgrounds and without GCSEs, particularly for infantry jobs. But as in the US, so in the UK, young age and background disadvantage lead to a high rate of attrition. A third of the British army's intake of minors drop out of their training, representing an attrition rate nearly 50% higher than adult recruits.[42] In fact, almost half of those who leave school at 16 to join the army have left it within four years.[43] Similarly, a third of all army recruits without core GCSEs at any grade drop out of training, a rate of attrition around 50% higher than among recruits with A*-C grades.[44] This contributes to a high rate of unemployment among ex-soldiers, particularly if they left full-time education early (discussed later).

These striking differences in British army attrition by age and socioeconomic background are due in part to the over-representation of younger, typically disadvantaged recruits in the infantry, where training is tougher and retention is poor. This is only a partial explanation, however.[45] The other factor is the greater susceptibility to the stresses of training found among younger adolescents from adverse childhood backgrounds, if the American research is a guide. Thus far, British ministers

[42] British army intake of minors, 2008-09 to 2012-13 inclusive: 15,395; of whom dropped out during training: 5,310 (34.5%). Adult intake, same period: 41,480; of whom dropped out during training: 9,700 (23.4%) (Ministry of Defence, 2016h; House of Lords, 2016).

[43] Junior Soldiers from age 16 at the Army Foundation College who leave the army within four years: 48%. Standard Entrants from age 17½ at the Infantry Training Centre who leave within the same period: 33% (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012, p. 243).

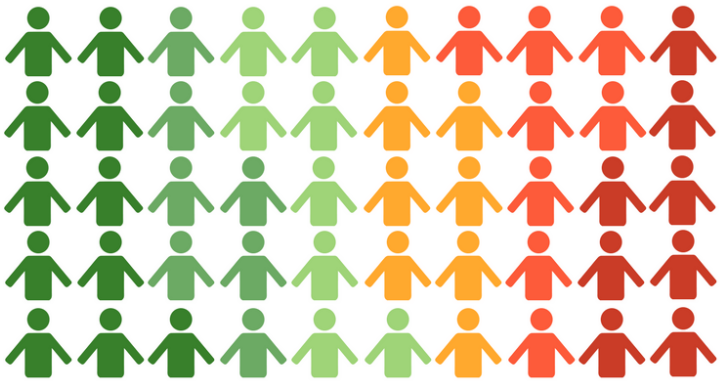
[44] Army recruits who arrived to train in 2016-17 without a) English GCSEs at any grade: 35% attrition during training (vs. 20% of those with grades A*-C); and b) Maths GCSEs at any grade: 34% attrition during training (vs. 19% of those with A*-C) (House of Commons, 2017).

[45] While younger recruits with poorer GCSE results are over-represented in the infantry, the difference is not great enough to account for the very large difference in attrition rates.

have dismissed these data, albeit without evidence.[46] Consequently, every year the lives of hundreds of young people are disrupted when they join the army only to be discharged shortly afterwards.

Figure 6 shows how few young recruits remain in the army and are satisfied with it. It represents 50 of the British army's youngest enlistees, aged 16-17½, four years after enlistment. The soldiers in dark red on the right left training by choice (47%);[47] those shown in pale red were dismissed by the army during training; and together they account for 33% of the original enlisted cohort (Kiernan, Repper, & Arthur, 2015; Child Soldiers International, 2016b). Soldiers in amber completed training but then left; together with recruits who left during training they make up 48% of the original cohort (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012, p. 243). After four years, the army is left with just over half of the minors it enlisted, shown in green on the left. Of these, 31% are dissatisfied with army life, shown in pale green (based on job satisfaction across all ages) (Ministry of Defence, 2016d, p. 31). Those in mid-green (25%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; and the dark green figures (44%) are satisfied. Thus, after four years, 11 of the 50 recruits, or 22%, are still in the army and satisfied with it; the other 78% either left, or stayed but are less than satisfied.

Figure 6: Retention and job satisfaction rates of army intake aged 16-17.5 (data from 2012 and 2015/16) – see text for key. (Sources: Ministry of Defence, 2016d; Kiernan et al., 2015; Child Soldiers International, 2016b; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012)



4. Army culture

4.1. A culture apart

In the UK, US and elsewhere, the armed forces distinguish themselves as a culture apart from civilian society, which they denigrate as inferior (Strachan, 2003; Huntington, 1957). As Samuel Huntington wrote in 1957, the American military's 'ordered serenity' and 'structured purpose' put to shame the 'incredible variety and discordancy' of civilian life (Huntington, 1957). Similarly, the British army's first formal statement of values berated the growing recognition of civil rights for undermining authority power, eroding responsibility, and feeding violent crime (British Army, 1993, pp. 1-2).[48] The trend threatened the army's 'traditional values', it said, and thus its

[46] For example, see letter from child rights organisation to the Ministry of Defence in 2016, and the ministerial reply, online at https://www.child-soldiers.org/shop/open-letter-to-the-ministry-of-defence-from-childrens-rights-organisations-1.

[47] According to infantry data, 47% of recruits who leave during training do so by choice (Kiernan, Repper, & Arthur, 2015).

[48] Similar views are held by US military officers, according to a large survey conducted at the turn of the millennium (Holsti, 2001).

effectiveness (p. 2). As these pronouncements imply, military culture proudly distinguishes itself as conservative and authoritarian, looking out with distaste on the creeping liberalism of society.[49]

As the British army struggles to attract recruits from a broader demographic, and women in particular, it has diluted its criticisms of life outside the wire, although the same tensions remain. Ideal military values are still prescribed as a corrective to the civilian norms 'reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of those who enlist', for instance (British Army, 2012).[50] Young people who choose not to join up are said to be a 'self-interested' generation (Carter, 2017), while the army hopes to enculturate those who do enlist into its own outlook.

4.2. Military enculturation

Military culture is often said to contribute to personal development by imbuing young recruits with ethical commitment (Travis, 2006; Huntington, 1957; British Army, 2000). To this end, the British army has adopted six official values: courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty, and selfless commitment (British Army, 2012). These are defined narrowly. In the army 'discipline means that all soldiers will obey orders', which require 'unquestioning acceptance'; loyalty means fidelity to the army; and courage means a readiness to kill and to accept the risk of being killed (British Army, 2012, pp. 3B2-3B3; British Army, 2000, p. 1:1). The official values also jar with military culture as practised. 'Respect for others' is absent, for example, when the army punishes a trainee in a manner intended to humiliate, and the 'selfless commitment' said to motivate soldiers is obviated by terms of service which deny them the option of leaving the army for several years.

Table 1: Character strengths and virtues favoured by official US military values, according to Matthews et al. (2006)

	Favoured strengths and virtues	**Other strengths and virtues**
Strengths	Bravery Creativity Fairness Honesty Hope Judgment Kindness Leadership Perseverance Social intelligence Teamwork	Curiosity Gratitude Forgiveness Humility Humour Love Prudence Love of learning Appreciation of beauty A sense of perspective Self-control Spirituality Zest
Virtues	Courage Justice	Wisdom Self-restraint Transcendence

Nonetheless, American military academics have tried to demonstrate that military culture builds character, by mapping official military values onto a model of 24 notionally universal 'character strengths' (Matthews, Eid, Kelly, Bailey, & Peterson, 2006). Their (intuitive) analysis concluded that military values contribute to around half of these strengths. See Table 1 for details. The same model of character clusters the 24 strengths into five principal 'character virtues'. The study's list of military character strengths is revealing for which of these virtues they favour (courage[51] and

[49] The military's critique of civilian norms also cuts the other way: the international relations academic Paul Dixon notes an apparent opposition between conservative authoritarianism of military culture with the values needed for democracy to function well, which he lists as 'equality, diversity, dissent, participation, autonomy' (Dixon, 2012, pp. 112-113).

[50] A similar attitude has prevailed for decades in the US army (Wesbrook, 1980).

[51] Courage: defined in the model as a composite of bravery, honesty, perseverance, and zest.

justice[52]), and which they do not (wisdom,[53] self-restraint,[54] and self-transcendence[55]). Whereas courage and justice are consistent with a traditionally masculine attitude of heroic dominance, the three unsupported virtues imply thoughtfulness and mutuality. Leaving aside the study's tendentious methods,[56] it illustrates the partial nature of official military values, which favour certain personality traits while overlooking or subduing others. In such conditions, maturing as a 'whole person' – in particular, a person whose maturity is not bound to a masculine conception of adulthood – is likely to be elusive.

5. Competing narratives: benefit and detriment

The salesmanship of military marketing, the socioeconomic deprivation characteristic of the major recruitment pool, the 'forced change' (Bourne, 1967) that the army effects in new recruits, and the high rate of early attrition, particularly among the youngest and most disadvantaged, all raise obvious ethical questions about the armed forces' relationship with its recruits.

Leading US military academics are content that the psychological conditioning of recruits achieves 'laudable goals' by sustaining the armed forces for the state's use (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006, p. 14). Detractors argue that potential recruits are misled by marketing into a brutalising training process, which is particularly objectionable when recruits have yet to reach the age of adulthood (Gee & Taylor, 2016; Gee, 2008; Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Griffin, 2015; Sharrocks, 2016; American Public Health Association, 2012; Veterans for Peace UK, 2017).

How do military training and employment affect young people who enlist? Two distinct narratives compete for the answer. In the dominant one, enlistment is a positive 'turning point' in young people's lives (Elder, 1986). That is, military employment builds character and provides socioeconomic stability, enabling young people to transcend prior disadvantage, rein in any antisocial behaviour, and develop as responsible citizens. For example, the Gates Commission, which recommended in 1970 that US armed forces transition from conscription to voluntary enlistment, made several claims for the benefits of military life:

> 'Military life is thought to have a discernible and beneficial impact on an individual's capabilities, attitudes, and behaviour patterns as they are carried over into the veteran's civilian life. The differences between veterans and non-veterans are described in a variety of ways. Veterans are said to display more patriotism and to be readier to serve our nation. Some argue that veterans are better informed and more concerned about a wide variety of foreign and domestic affairs and, thus, are more alert to threats to the nation. Veterans are alleged to behave differently – to have more self-discipline and to pay greater attention to neatness and hygiene. Veterans are said to do better economically than non-veterans, to participate more in community social and political activities, and, in general, to make better and more productive citizens.' (Gates et al., 1970, p. 151)

[52] Justice: defined in the model as a composite of fairness, judgment, and leadership.
[53] Wisdom: defined in the model as a composite of creativity, curiosity, love of learning, and a sense of perspective.
[54] Self-restraint: defined in the model as a composite of humility, self-control, forgiveness, and prudence.
[55] Transcendence: defined in the model as a composite of spirituality, appreciation of beauty, humour, and gratitude.
[56] The study used an unattested model of character, assumed uncritically that officially prescribed military values guided the lives of personnel, and intuited the relationship between the two.

The British government has made similar claims. In 2016, it stated:

> 'The training offered is viewed as attractive to both potential recruits and their parents, delivering vocational education, leadership and initiative training as well as the core military syllabus… Junior entrant training [for 16- and 17-year-olds] provides emotional, physical and educational development to recruits.' (Earl Howe, 2016)

The Gates report ran to more than 200 pages but did not offer evidence for the benefits of military life. At the time of writing, the British government has also yet to substantiate its own case.

A second narrative argues that enlistment tends to disrupt and retard the personal and socio-economic development of young people, jeopardise their health and wellbeing, and exacerbate prior antisocial behaviour to the general detriment of society. Criticism of recruiting vulnerable adolescents has been particularly strong. For example, Commodore Paul Branscombe, who managed a major military welfare service after a navy career of 33 years, writes:

> 'At [age 16] recruits are not emotionally, psychologically or physically mature enough to withstand the demands placed upon them… Many of the welfare issues I have encountered among armed forces personnel, during and after service, have been related to enlisting too young, not just in terms of the immediate impact on individuals, but also in the transmitted effect upon families which can continue long after service ceases.' (Hansard, 2016)

Many veterans go further, arguing that the effects of military employment are not felt by the youngest age group alone. In the experience of Wayne Sharrocks, who joined the British infantry at 17 and left seven years later, army training diminishes recruits as persons, whatever their age:

> 'It is clear to me that military training is hugely psychologically damaging. I do not only think it is psychologically damaging to children I think it is as a whole physiologically damaging.' (Sharrocks, 2016)

Other infantry veterans, Ryan Hall and Terry Wood, sound a similar warning:

> Terry Wood: 'Having talked with former colleagues that got through the training and made it to the battalions, without exception this has stayed with them and me for all their adult lives.'[57]

> Ryan Hall: 'Unbeknown to me at the time, all of this training and/or indoctrination would come to shape my life, my decisions and my neurological processes for years to come… I suppose at the time we took it all in our stride and laughed it off. But we as people and in particular our brains were being prepared for the inhuman rigours and demands of traditional war fighting, closing with and engaging the enemy and by extension modern international conflicts.'[58]

The rest of this report explores which of these narratives, if either, is supported by the available evidence.

[57] Refer to the appendix for the full quotation.
[58] Refer to the appendix for the full quotation.

PART II: Effects of army training and culture

6. Personality and worldview

6.1. A military personality?

The guiding question of this section is whether military training and culture shape a military personality with specific and predictable characteristics. The earlier discussion indicated that military training and culture encourage conformity, aggression, idealisation of the military, and patriotism, so it is plausible that these traits and attitudes are more common in soldiers than civilians. This hypothesis finds some confirmation in the few studies that have touched on this question, although more research is needed.

It is helpful to distinguish three successive processes which favour certain attitudes and personality traits in a military setting. First, there is a *selection effect*: young people with certain characteristics are more likely than others to apply and be accepted for military jobs. Second, there is a *socialisation effect*: military training and culture reinforce the traits of an effective soldier, while suppressing others. Finally, there is what could be called a *winnowing effect*: individuals inclined to conform are retained, while others leave or are removed by the army. At each stage, traits and attitudes favoured by the military become more concentrated in the recruit population, while others become attenuated.

6.2. Effects on personality: more antagonistic and conformist, less emotional and neurotic

Of these three processes, the first – selection – appears to account for most of the personality differences found between military and civilian groups (Lovell & Stiehm, 1989). For example, research in Germany and the US has found that people drawn to military service tend to be more extraverted than average (Jackson, et al., 2012; Vickers, Hervig, Paxton, Kanfer, & Ackerman, 1996a). They are also more dutiful and compliant ('conscientious' is the term used in the personality model); more conformist (less 'open'); and less emotional under stress (less 'neurotic') (ibid.). Once recruits have been selected, the re-socialisation process of military training reinforces some personality traits and suppresses others; for example, compliance continues to grow while emotionality decreases (Vickers, Hervig, Paxton, Kanfer, & Ackerman, 1996a; Jackson, et al., 2012; DeVries & Wijnans, 2013; Schult & Sparfeldt, 2015).

One notable difference between the personalities of soldiers and civilians is in the degree of antagonism, according to some American, Canadian and German research. In Germany near the end of the conscription era, young people choosing military service over the civilian alternative tended to be more antagonistic (i.e. less 'agreeable' when relating to others, in terms of the personality model used) (Jackson, et al., 2012; Schult & Sparfeldt, 2015).[59] The same research found that the military group became more antagonistic during their training, and that this effect persisted and increased for at least five years, even after their return to civilian education or employment.

[59] Germany suspended conscription in 2011.

This finding coheres with earlier research in the US, which found that infantry trainees became more aggressive, impulsive, asocial, and self-important over the course of their training (Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962).

There is also a winnowing effect. Just as the military appears to select for, and develop, antagonism in recruits, so those who are less antagonistic are also less likely to finish their training, according to Canadian research (Lee, McCreary, & Villeneuve, 2011). In fact, the study found that, the more antagonistic recruits are, the more likely they are to get through their training.

In sum, the available research indicates that, in general, soldiers tend to be more antagonistic than civilians. That is, those with a more antagonistic personality were more likely to enlist; basic training then reinforces antagonism in recruits; and less antagonistic recruits are more likely to be weeded out. The effect is that, relative to civilian culture, antagonism as a personality trait becomes progressively more concentrated in the army. Antagonism then increases again after deployment, according to another Canadian study, while decreasing among those who are not deployed (Sudom, Lee, & Zamorski, 2014).

The repeated reinforcement of antagonism can help soldiers to adapt to the stresses of deployment and reduce the risk of PTSD (Lee, Sudom, & Zamorski, 2013), but it is also associated with difficulties in social relationships (Jackson, et al., 2012).

6.3. Effects on attitudes: more conservative, authoritarian, militaristic

As with personality traits, so with attitudes, selection accounts for most of the variation found between military and civilian groups; that is, young people with certain attitudes are more likely to enlist. The available research is mainly US-based. Young Americans drawn to the armed forces are found to be more conservative, nationalistic, and patriotic than average (Ricks, 1997; Dorman, 1976; Reinke & Miller, 2008; Holsti, 2001; Huntington, 1957). A study into public attitudes in several economically developed countries[60] found that the same attitudes correlated with support for militarism (McCleary & Williams, 2009). As might be expected, American recruits have been more likely than their civilian counterparts to support increased military spending, the pursuit of US supremacy, and the threat or use of armed conflict to achieve political or economic goals (Bachman, Sigelman, & Diamond, 1987; Bachman, Freedman-Doan, & O'Malley, 2000b).

Besides these political views, personal attitudes also play a role in attracting some people more than others to military life. For example, early research found US enlistees to be more 'authoritarian' than average, referring to an orientation that affirms both dominance over others and submissiveness to those who are dominant (Robinson Kurpius & Lucart, 2000; Lovell & Stiehm, 1989; French & Ernest, 1955; Bachman, Sigelman, & Diamond, 1987; Campbell & McCormack, 1957; Dorman, 1976). A study in the 1980s appeared to confirm this, finding that American school students intent on enlisting were more likely than others to believe that military personnel should 'obey without question' (Bachman, Sigelman, & Diamond, 1987). The implication appears to be that 'free-thinkers', who critically assess the demands of authority, are less likely to enlist.[61]

The American research also indicates that military training deepens many of the attitudes that are already over-represented in those drawn to enlist. In particular, training appears to reinforce

[60] The countries included in the study were Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Korea, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, Sweden, the UK, and the US.

[61] Early research in the 1970s also found that punitiveness – an authoritarian inclination to endorse punishment as a response to perceived wrongdoing – is more common among enlistees than civilians (Dorman, 1976). Punitiveness is also a particularly strong correlate of ideological militarism, which provides some further evidence of adherence to militarist ideology among prospective enlistees (McCleary & Williams, 2009).

conventionalism and hard-headedness which, as attitudes associated with authoritarianism, help to facilitate acceptance of military culture (Lovell & Stiehm, 1989; French & Ernest, 1955). Perhaps unsurprisingly, recruits also become more militaristic as they pass through basic training, after which they are more likely to support the pursuit of US supremacy, interventions abroad, and increased military spending (Bachman, Freedman-Doan, Segal, & O'Malley, 2000a). Since civilians tend to become less militaristic as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (ibid.), the combined effect is a civil-military divergence in attitudes to foreign affairs, resulting in a hawkish military relative to the public.

There is also an apparent winnowing effect as recruits with certain attitudes are less likely than others to embrace military culture, and so they opt to leave or are dismissed. For instance, recruits who arrive to train with authoritarian or patriotic attitudes are more likely to commit (Lovell & Stiehm, 1989; Young, Kubisiak, Legree, & Tremble, 2010). Again, the implication appears to be that 'free-thinkers', who are less willing to obey without question, are more likely to be weeded out during training, although personnel appear to become less authoritarian as their military career develops (Campbell & McCormack, 1957; Roghmann & Sodeur, 1998).

6.4. Effects on character and maturity: no difference

Despite a common narrative that military training fast-tracks teenagers into adulthood – traditionally characterised as 'turning boys into men' – there appears to be no evidence for this. Nor does the research support the contrary view that military employment retards maturation; Israeli research shows that, by young conscripts' own estimation, they continue to become more competent and (to a lesser degree) more expressive (Dar & Kimhi, 2001). However, insofar as personality develops during military employment, the differences appear little or no different from the changes expected in young people as they mature in other social contexts, according to some German research (Jackson, et al., 2012; Schult & Sparfeldt, 2015). For example, although emotions become more stable during military employment, this is normal as teenagers become less neurotic in the transition to adulthood (although military personnel overall are more likely than civilians to suffer from nervous disorders such as anxiety and depression [Goodwin, et al., 2015]).

Another popular view is that military training builds character more effectively than civilian alternatives. 'Character' is difficult to define and model, but the limited available research gives no grounds to prefer military settings. Research into the character virtues of officer cadets in the US found no appreciable difference between the start of their training and its end four years later (Matthews, 2009). A similar study comparing Argentinian male officer cadets with male university students found that neither group outstripped the other, although the character traits of each group diverged (Cosentino & Castro Solano, 2012). Research into the psychological hardiness of Norwegian officer cadets in three training institutions found that their three-year training had made no difference (Hystad, Olsen, Espevik, & Säfvenbom, 2015), whereas a study of Canadian enlistees found that psychological hardiness decreased slightly from basic training to between five and nine years afterwards (Sudom, Lee, & Zamorski, 2014).[62] And an early study of US infantry training found that recruits' egos were more inflated after the first six weeks, but no stronger (Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962).

[62] See Table I and Table III of cited study.

6.5. Summary

In summary, there is evidence to show that military service tends to attract some personalities over others, that it does not bring benefits over civilian developmental trajectories, and that it makes personnel somewhat more antagonistic in ways that may affect relationships with others in the long term. The differences found are generally small, but the narrative that military training/employment is a high road to maturity and character development, or makes people psychologically hardy, is not borne out by the available research.

7. Mental health

7.1. The impact of poverty and war

Since the Vietnam era, hundreds of studies have investigated the impact of war on the mental health of veterans. It is now well established that prolonged or repeated frontline deployment injures the psyche of most, possibly all, personnel (Jones & Wessely, 2001; Grossman, 2009, p. 48). Major stressors in warfare include being attacked (particularly by ambush), fear of imminent attack, killing and injuring people, witnessing friends or civilians (particularly children) injured or killed, and handling mutilated bodies or parts of them (Hoge, et al., 2004). Also well-known is that trauma-exposed frontline troops account for most (not all) of the elevated rate of stress found in deployed personnel, particularly those already vulnerable to stress due to an adverse childhood of socioeconomic deprivation (Iversen, et al., 2008; Iversen, et al., 2007). Unfortunately, most studies lump this exposed group together with personnel who never spend time at the front line, appearing to dilute the effect of traumatic events on troops exposed to them (Gee, 2013, p. 37).[63]

A discussion of the effects of military employment on mental health is available in a companion report, *The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces* (Gee, 2013). Drawing on British and American research, the report shows that stress-related mental health problems are more common in military populations than in the general population, particularly among veterans who have left the forces. Grouping the major risk factors into clusters at three points in time, the report finds that those most likely to suffer mental health problems: a) enlist at a young age and/or are from a deprived background; b) are deployed to war in a frontline combat role, meaning one where the frequency of traumatic experiences is greater; and/or c) struggle to readjust to civilian life after leaving the forces. Since recruits who enlist in their mid-teens and from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely than others to be given direct combat jobs and to lack social support as veterans, the report concludes that this group faces the greatest long-term mental health risks.

Whereas defence ministries often argue that war only affects the mental health of a small minority of the current armed forces (Atkins, 2013a), they often ignore the higher prevalence of problems experienced by veterans who have left (Buckman, et al., 2013; Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray, & Harrison, 2009). In the British armed forces, rates of PTSD among ex-forces war veterans have been found to be three times as high as personnel who deployed to war and are still in service, for example (Gee, 2013, p. 25). Heavy drinking, anxiety and depression, and self-harming behaviour

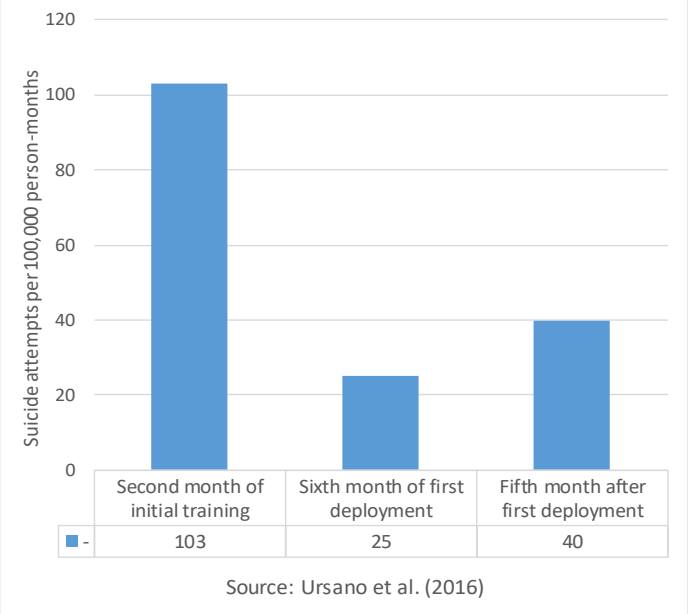
[63] While a 'front line' now rarely exists in warfare, troops in direct combat roles deployed to a 'forward area' continue to experience more traumatic events than those in support roles stationed in a 'rear area', although these geographic distinctions are becoming less marked in practice.

are also markedly more prevalent among ex-forces veterans, including among those who were not sent to war (ibid.). Of British veterans, those who left the forces within four years of enlisting (who are overwhelmingly from the army) show alarming rates of mental health problems: 20% of this group screened positive for PTSD in 2004-2006, for example (Buckman, et al., 2013). As discussed earlier, these early leavers are disproportionately those who enlisted as minors and came from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. While the effects of war on mental health are now better understood, the question for the present report is whether military training and culture also have an impact.

7.2. Military training and stress

One of the principal military causes of ill-health is the stressors of basic training. A US study found that the greatest stress is felt in the first few days, particularly at the end of the first week (Davis Martin, Williamson, Alfonso, & Ryan, 2006).

Figure 7: Peaks in rates of attempted suicide in the US army, 2004-2009, by career stage (attempts per 100,000 person-months)

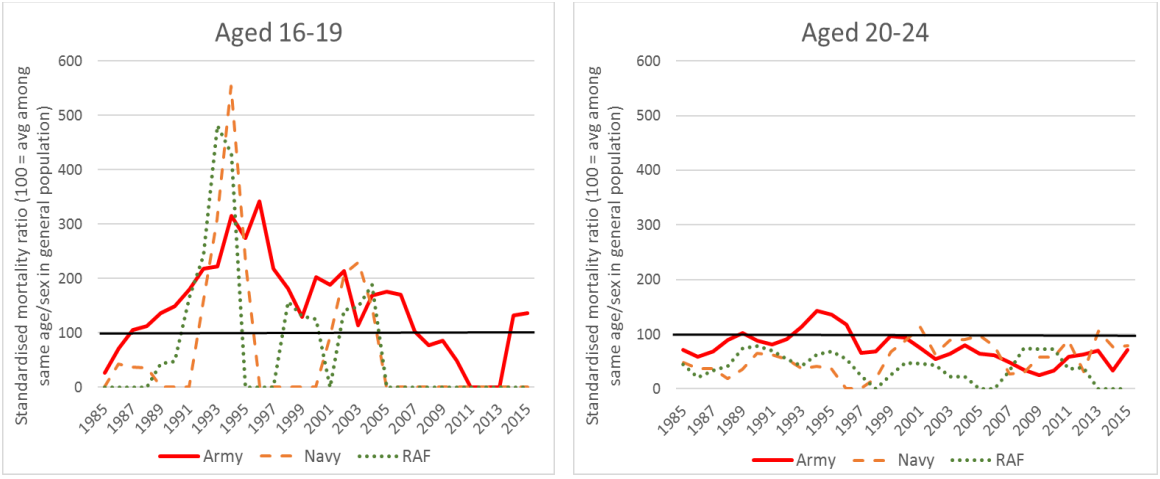


One barometer of stress in a population is the rate of attempted suicide. By this measure, American research indicates that the stresses on recruits during basic training are greater even than in war (Ursano, et al., 2016). Between 2004 and 2009, the rate of attempted suicide peaked in the second month of army basic training, after which it fell away but remained elevated, confirming the results of an earlier study (Davis Martin, Williamson, Alfonso, & Ryan, 2006). The rate then spiked again in the sixth month of a first operational tour, but the peak during initial training was – strikingly – four times as high as the peak during deployment; see Figure 7.[64] The study shows that, for American soldiers as a whole, initial training is the most stressful period of a military career (although those in close-combat roles experience greater deployment stress than other soldiers). Other American and British research shows that stress peaks again after soldiers leave the army, when the rate of suicide climbs once more (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016; Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray, & Harrison, 2009). At greatest risk of stress are younger recruits from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds. The Ursano et al. study found that US army recruits with the least education were twice as likely as other recruits to attempt suicide (Ursano, et al., 2016).

[64] 103 vs. 25 suicides per 100,000 person-months in the period 2004-2009. Person-months refers to the product of the number of persons at risk multiplied by the number of months during which they are at risk.

The suicide rate in the British armed forces is lower than in their American counterparts. It is also lower than that found in the UK general population, which is to be expected given that the latter include the unemployed and infirm. The clear exception to this is male soldiers aged under 20, whose suicide rate over the last two decades has been 57% higher than civilians of the same age and between two and three times as high as their same-age peers in the navy or air force (Ministry of Defence, 2016i). The difference is shown in Figure 8, which compares the armed forces male suicide rate in the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups (Ministry of Defence, 2017b).

Figure 8: Male suicide rate among British armed forces personnel (three-year rolling average), ages 16-19 and 20-24 (standardised mortality ratios: 100 = average rate for same age/sex in general population)



Once British veterans return to civilian life, their suicide risk rises to match that of civilians and, in the case of the youngest, to exceed it by a large margin. Research published in 2009 found that veterans aged 16-24 had been between two and three times as likely to kill themselves as non-veterans of the same age (Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray, & Harrison, 2009).[65] Whether this is mainly due to the socioeconomic disadvantage characteristic of enlistees, or to the stresses of military life, it highlights the marked vulnerability of the youngest recruits in an army environment.

As an act of extreme self-harm, suicide is rare; other stress-related mental health problems are common, particularly depression and anxiety (known as common mental disorders or CMDs). A British study in 2015 found that military personnel are twice as likely as working civilians to suffer from CMDs (Goodwin, et al., 2015). Even military personnel from higher social classes were more likely to suffer from CMDs than working civilians of all social classes. This cannot be explained adequately by the stresses of war, since similar CMD rates were found in 2002, 2004-2006 and 2007-2009, when the volume of troop deployments varied widely (Jones, Rona, Hooper, & Wessely, 2006; Goodwin, et al., 2015).

Since neither socioeconomic background nor deployment can adequately explain why stress-related mental ill-health is so much more common among soldiers than working civilians, then basic training is likely to be a major factor, being the most stressful period of a military career for most. There is some evidence for this. American research shows that incidence of depression increases during basic training, peaking after 20 and before 60 days (Davis Martin, Williamson, Alfonso, & Ryan, 2006). It has also found that temperamental anxiety, which indicates susceptibility to stress and depression, is the character trait most strongly associated with attrition

[65] The same study found that the suicide rate among veterans who dropped out of their basic training is 50% higher than veterans who left the forces as trained personnel.

during training (Elsass, Fiedler, Skop, & Hill, 2001).[66] A study in 2002 found that US Navy recruits prone to anxiety or depression were more than four times as likely as others to leave in their first year (Booth-Kewley, Larson, & Ryan, 2002). Temperamentally anxious recruits who get through training are not necessarily out of the woods; they remain susceptible to mental health problems in a military environment (Iversen, et al., 2007).

7.3. Military training and cultural indoctrination

Although initial training indoctrinates recruits to contrast a noble soldiery with dissolute civilians, one day they return to civilian life, which brings multiple challenges of readjustment. Infantry veterans of the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan wars interviewed for this report and *The Last Ambush?* believe that the changes wrought by their basic training thwarted a smooth transition to civilian norms. At an early stage in their lives, the army institutionalised them and inculcated unconditional obedience, which displaced the autonomy and personal responsibility required in civilian society. Whereas their social standing as soldiers depended on cultivating social dominance and 'passing harsh tests bravely' (Hale, 2012, p. 705), the same attitude has jarred with their new civilian context as veterans, which tends to reward attitudes of mutuality and agreeableness.

Some effects of military training may be particularly difficult to reverse. A British Falklands veteran relates that, 30 years on, he still 'threat-assesses' the street, looking for windows left ajar where a sniper could be waiting. In his case, a heightened *fight-or-flight* response (the acute stress response) interfered with daily life as a civilian, which left him suspicious of the high street. Crucially, the initial cause of his hyper-active *fight-or-flight* response was not war, but military training. The problem grew worse in the intense, close-quarters fighting of the Falklands, but it did not begin there.

Problems such as these are ubiquitous in veterans' stories of life after the army, when it can feel impossible either to 'switch off' their militarised psyche or to adapt it for the new context. Many say that they insulate themselves in a 'bubble' or a 'suit of armour' and/or use aggression (not necessarily violence) to deal with stressful situations. Indeed, British veterans tend to be more socially isolated once they re-join civilian life, participating in fewer social activities and losing connections with the friends still in the forces (Hatch, et al., 2013).

Despite this, the impact of military enculturation – rather than war itself – on veterans' re-adjustment to civilian life has attracted little quantitative research. In 2017, a review of the literature on the psychological impact of aspects of military employment other than war did not find any work on this (Brooks & Greenberg, 2017).

7.4. Military training and moral injury

In 1981, while interviewing traumatised American veterans of the Vietnam war, the journalist Peter Marin noticed a theme in their narratives that had not been widely acknowledged: 'profound moral distress' (Marin, 1981). Their suffering was not due solely to the intense fear induced by the mortal dangers of war, he found, but to guilt also. After the war, its multiple brutalities had become a source of shame and grief for many thousands of veterans, as well as a stimulus to anger and depression. Marin characterised their experience as 'moral pain'.

[66] For other evidence on the association between temperamental anxiety and attrition, see Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004; and Lee, McCreary, & Villeneuve, 2011.

Pain implies injury, and so in 1994 Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat trauma and the undoing of character* introduced the term 'moral injury' (Shay, 1994). Neither injury to the body, nor to the psyche in the medicalised sense of a 'mental health problem', a moral injury is to the soul, after profoundly dehumanising violence has poisoned a person's intuitive trust in the world as a place of meaning. It is 'a response to the world's condition that produces a feeling of despair, disgust, or even a sort of radical species-shame, in which one is simultaneously ashamed of oneself and one's kind', according to Peter Marin (1981).

Veterans' moral pain can be understood as a traumatic breach between their faith in the moral meaning of the world ('what should be') and their experience of an apparently catastrophic violation of that meaning ('what is'). Their stories offer myriad examples. Jonathan Shay quotes a Vietnam veteran recounting his part in a massacre, in which a fishing village had been razed to the ground by order of the chain of command. With evident anger, the veteran recalled that his Commanding Officer told his platoon not to worry about it, and all were awarded medals afterwards, but 'you know in your heart it's wrong…' he said (Shay, 2016). British infantryman Vince Bramley tells a similar story of his participation in the bloody, close-quarters battle of Mount Longdon in the Falklands:

> 'It wasn't until daylight, when I ran into the bowl on the summit and saw the number of dead people there, including my own friends and colleagues, that the shock hit me. Nobody touched me, but it was as if somebody had punched me in the stomach… I hadn't realised until then that I wasn't the only one crying. And there were Argentines who had been taken prisoner, and they were crying as well. I think all of us were shocked at the extent of what we'd done to each other.' (Bramley, 1999)

As a form of traumatic stress, moral injury is often subsumed conceptually into PTSD, but that is a fudge. Moral injury implies that the tacit, fundamental trust between human beings has been violated, whereas many other events that precipitate PTSD, such as road accidents and natural disasters, do not (Bryan, Bryan, Anestis, & Green, 2015). That is, moral injury points directly to the harm caused by severe violence to an individual's faith in others, in oneself, and in the world.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledges the reality of moral injury and in the last decade the issue has attracted some research, but it is not yet recognised clinically. The term has yet to achieve any currency in the UK; there appear to have been no British studies of moral injury in a military context. Consequently, research into the mental health of British veterans risks pathologising conscience, as the humane complexity of moral responses to war exposure are labelled a 'stress reaction' and lost from view. Veterans who experience moral injury do so because their conscience is strong, not because their mental health is weak.

While the limited available research into moral injury focuses on the effects of traumatic war experiences, veterans interviewed for this report believe that their initial training is implicated also. Two features of training, discussed earlier, stand out.

First, training *instrumentalises the recruit as a killer*, suppressing a psychic barrier that has evolved to keep most human beings who have not been militarised from committing acts of severe violence against one another. In the first instance, it achieves this by insisting that recruits obey orders with 'unquestioning acceptance' (British Army, 2000, p. 1:1), relinquishing sovereignty over their choices. This is followed by the repeated stimulation of anger and aggression in various simulations of war, until violence is normalised and recruits are willing and able to kill others on demand. In other words, military training conditions people to commit morally injurious acts which they would not otherwise carry out.

Second, training *inculcates a high degree of trust in the military system*. The army casts the soldier as a public servant and the army itself as the heroic guarantor of peace; recruits are taught that military

culture is morally superior to the civilian life they have left. In these ways, training conditions recruits to hold faith that the acts of violence expected of them are also acts of service, and that the army's ability to kill with efficiency is its professional virtue. That faith will face intolerable strain if it cannot make rational or moral sense of the sheer brutality of war, at which point the army's prescribed narrative of moral meaning falls away. Soldiers may then feel betrayed by the military, and yet conflicted as their loyalty to it abides indelibly, forged as it was in the crucible of basic training.

Soldiers' conditioned readiness to participate in killing, combined with their indoctrinated trust in the architects of that killing – both of which are established in basic training – radically increase the risk of moral injury later. For many veterans so injured, the full cognisance of their own participation in harm becomes the greatest source of their own shame, according to Peter Marin (1981). Veterans may regret their actions deeply, or their failure to act, believing that they should have made other choices but lacked the strength of character to do so (Alford, 2016). Others may feel betrayed by the military system, which reneged on its implicit promise to the newly enlisted recruit: that the soldier always serves humanity. Still others experience both shame and betrayal, manifested as anger and grief, which typically surface only after veterans have left the forces.

An indication of the scale of the problem is offered by a US study published in 2017. It found that 11% of combat-exposed veterans admitted moral transgressions on the battlefield; a quarter witnessed transgressions by others; and a quarter felt morally betrayed by their peers or leaders, or by others (Wisco, et al., 2017).[67] Each group was substantially more likely than veterans without such experiences to have mental health problems, which is consistent with other findings that killing other people is strongly associated with PTSD, irrespective of the threat to the self at the time (ibid.). For example, veterans who felt moral betrayal were twice as likely as others to attempt suicide, even after other risk factors for suicide, such as age and severity of combat experiences, were accounted for (ibid.).

A tentative indication of which soldiers are more prone to moral injury is also available, based on a study of German veterans of the Afghanistan war (Zimmermann, et al., 2014).[68] Researchers asked soldiers a series of questions about their values, using a well-attested model.[69] They found that other-regarding individuals – soldiers committed to 'understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of other people', or to 'respect, commitment, and acceptance of customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self' – were 2.3 times as likely as other veterans to screen positive for PTSD after combat exposure. Conversely, those committed to 'social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources', or 'pleasure and sensuous gratification of oneself', were about half as likely to screen positive. It appears that soldiers disposed to care highly about the welfare of others are substantially more likely to suffer PTSD after combat, whereas those who endorse dominance as a relational attitude are relatively protected. This points to a possible connection between other-regarding attitudes and moral injury.

7.5. Benefits to mental health?

Evidence for mental health benefits of military employment is scant. One advantage enjoyed by military groups is a greater rate of physical exercise (Brooks & Greenberg, 2017), which stimulates stress-relieving endorphins (Brunner, 1997), although the overall health of personnel appears to

[67] The sample of soldiers included those exposed to any combat from the Vietnam era to the present day, who had left the armed forces.
[68] See Table 3 and discussion in main text.
[69] The researchers used the Schwartz model of basic human values. See cited study for a summary.

tail off with age and dip below that of civilians (discussed later). A study in 2005 found that a relatively stress-free deployment to Iraq could marginally reduce anxiety and depression, at least in the short term (Hacker Hughes, et al., 2005), but the finding is an isolated exception in a wealth of research showing the opposite (Gee, 2013).

None of the studies reviewed for this report or for *The Last Ambush* (Gee, 2013) quantifies a mental health benefit of military service as a whole, or of military training in particular, which is not also generally present in civilian occupations. Where the impact of military stressors may be buffered by good working conditions, such as good leadership, good relationships with peers, and strong social support (Brooks & Greenberg, 2017), there is no evidence to show that these are no more common in the military than in civilian employment.

7.6. Summary

Stress-related mental health problems are substantially more common in the armed forces than in the general population. They become still more prevalent once veterans re-join civilian life, which is partly due to difficulties re-adjusting to civilian norms, which military culture had deprecated.

Veterans' mental health difficulties are not due to war alone, since they also affect those who were not deployed. The stress and indoctrination of basic army training and culture have their own long-term effects, which can combine hazardously with the effects of an adverse childhood and, for those who encounter them, the traumatic experiences of warfare, to magnify the burden.

In addition, many veterans experience shame and guilt when returning from war. This is conditioned in part by the indoctrination of military training, during which recruits relinquish control over their choices, suppress their innate aversion to killing, and are taught to trust that their orders in war will be moral and rational. Many then discover that certain military actions, and war itself, are morally chaotic experiences, prompting them later to question their participation, leaving them with chronic shame and grief.

8. Violent behaviour

8.1. Violent behaviour by veterans: a major public health problem

Most military personnel are not habitually violent, but the minority who are is substantial. In the UK and US, violent behaviour, particularly against intimate partners, is more common in military populations than the general population (Jones A. D., 2012; MacManus, et al., 2013; Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005; Holbrook, 2013), and is arguably the greatest public health problem associated with membership of the armed forces.

A British study in 2012 found that 13% of British personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan admitted behaving violently inside or outside the family in the weeks following their return (MacManus, et al., 2012). Applied to all personnel deployed to Afghanistan alone over the course of the war, this proportion is equivalent to 17,500 individuals.[70]

[70] Based on 139,030 personnel deployed (Ministry of Defence, 2015b).

In the US, 9% of veterans from the Vietnam era to the present reported committing 'severe violence' in the previous 12 months, according to a study in 2014 (Elbogen, et al., 2014). American research into spousal violence by male army veterans found that between 11 and 13% commit 'moderate' violence at least once in a year, and between 3 and 4% commit violence deemed 'severe' (Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005).[71] A limitation of the studies is that few distinguish the behaviours of men and women. In addition, surprisingly little is known about the prevalence of violence by military personnel outside the family; one American study for a Master's thesis found that they were about twice as likely to get into fights as civilians (Holbrook, 2013).

The following is now well established in the UK and US:

1. Most veterans are not habitually violent, but they are more likely than non-veterans to commit violent behaviour in daily life (MacManus, et al., 2013; Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005).
2. In the US, partner violence committed by veterans tends to be more severe than that committed by non-veterans (Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005; McCarroll, et al., 2010).
3. Enlisted soldiers are substantially more likely to behave violently than the officer class, or their enlisted counterparts in the navy or air force (MacManus, et al., 2013; Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005).
4. The prevalence of violent behaviour in military populations is statistically explained partly by pre-enlistment factors (such as a history of anti-social behaviour, which is common in military groups) and partly by post-enlistment factors associated with military employment (MacManus, et al., 2011; MacManus, et al., 2015; Elbogen, et al., 2014).
5. Of the post-enlistment factors, the most influential is deployment to a war zone, particularly when personnel, *inter alia*: spend long periods there; are posted to forward areas (i.e. the 'front line'); experience traumatic events repeatedly (e.g. killing someone at close range, or seeing a friend injured or killed); or have a direct combat role (McCarroll, et al., 2010; MacManus, et al., 2015; Gee, 2013).
6. The rise in violence committed after deployment corresponds with a rise in rates of PTSD and heavy drinking; a review of the literature from different countries found that a quarter of military men with PTSD commit violence against a female partner (Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005; MacManus, et al., 2015; Trevillion, et al., 2015).

It is crucial to recognise that the most important factor determining violent behaviour is the choice to commit it, while appreciating that many factors influence the risk of doing so. Among these are personality traits, patterns of thought, social competence and communication style, strain in relationships, cultural norms and values, the culture of an immediate peer group, genetic factors, gendered attitudes, and situational stresses (Rosen, Kaminski, Moore Parmley, & Fancher, 2003). The military context adds other factors, which combine to increase the risk, including the effects of traumatic exposure in warfare, of the relative childhood poverty of many personnel, of the psychological conditioning of military training, and of a heavily masculinised military culture. Considering these facts, there is no doubt that war abroad contributes to violence at home.

8.2. The impact of warfare and socioeconomic background

Direct and prolonged exposure to traumatic events in war does more than anything else to drive up the risk of violent behaviour by armed forces personnel. The effect of deployment is high indeed if soldiers witness or participate in traumatic events, such as killing other people at close range or seeing friends or civilian bystanders killed.

[71] The ranges given reflect the difference in reports from soldiers and their spouses.

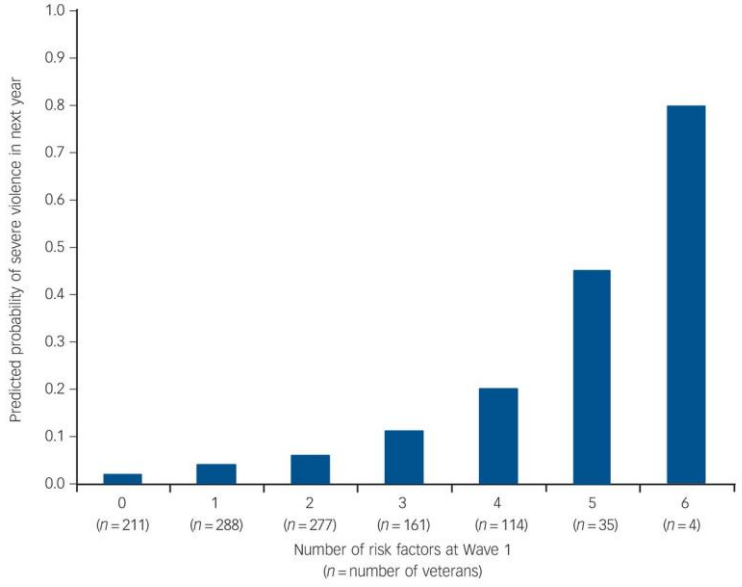
A study of British personnel returning from Iraq found that 24% of those who had experienced four or more traumatic events said they were violent when they came home, vs. 4% of those without such experiences (MacManus, et al., 2012). When researchers asked British personnel how often they were angry enough to yell at someone, kick or smash something, slam the door or punch a wall (etc.) (Rona, et al., 2015), they found that those in direct combat roles were twice as likely as those in support roles to have behaved in this way often in the last month (18% vs. 9%).[72] A similar picture is seen in the US, where soldiers deployed for 6-12 months were found to be 22-35% more likely than their nondeployed counterparts to commit severe violence against their spouses afterwards (McCarroll, et al., 2010).[73]

Perhaps counterintuitively, the problem tends to grow with time after deployment. Researchers have found that the risk of violence by British personnel with direct combat roles (largely the infantry) continues to increase for at least seven years after their deployment (MacManus, et al., 2013). As time passes after exposure to war trauma, hostility tends to grow in veterans with symptoms of PTSD, while their ability to manage anger diminishes (Orth & Wieland, 2006). Indeed, angry outbursts are one of the symptoms of PTSD.

While war violence increases the prevalence of violence after homecoming, it is important to bear in mind the characteristics of those most exposed to warfare, particularly the infantry. Compared with the rest of the British army, infantrymen are younger, have less education, experienced a relatively high degree of adversity during childhood, entered the armed with higher rates of mental health problems, have higher rates of anger, are more likely to have a pre-enlistment history of anti-social behaviour, and drink more heavily (Gee & Taylor, 2016; Sundin, et al., 2010; Iversen, et al., 2008; Rona, et al., 2015). These factors are a potent cocktail of risk of violent behaviour after a traumatically stressful tour.

An American study sought to quantify the cumulative effects of these factors, with startling results (Elbogen, et al., 2014). The researchers grouped post-9/11 war veterans according to how many of six risk factors for violent behaviour they endorsed. The six were: age below 34; struggling to meet basic needs; pre-enlistment history of violence; greater-than-average exposure to warfare stressors; exhibiting symptoms of PTSD; and drinking heavily. For each group, the researchers then calculated

Figure 9: Predicted probability of severe violence by US Afghanistan War veterans, by number of risk factors endorsed (below average age, not meeting basic needs, pre-military history of violence, above average combat exposure, PTSD, alcohol misuse). (Elbogen et al., 2014)



[72] Figures calculated from the values in Table 1 of cited study. Combat roles (n = 2,316); anger case: 421 (18%); anger non-case: 1,895. Support roles (n = 7,456); anger case: 674 (9%); anger non-case: 6,782.
[73] See cited study, Tables III and V for details. The criterion used in the study was committal of severe spousal violence by previously deployed personnel in the previous 12 months.

the statistical probability of violent behaviour in the next year. They concluded that 2% of veterans with none of the risk factors were expected to behave violently, vs. about 10% of those with three. The rate then climbed exponentially. Five of the risk factors drove up the probability of violence to more than 40%, and it touched 80% of the few veterans unlucky enough to fall foul of all six (see Figure 9, above, for details). The study showed that pre- and post-enlistment factors combine to magnify dramatically the risk of later violent behaviour among war veterans, particularly soldiers from troubled backgrounds who occupy combat-exposed military roles and habitually drink heavily – namely those in the infantry.

8.3. The impact of military training: focus on indoctrination

As described earlier, the army tends to attract people with certain characteristics, which are then reinforced during military training. Some of those characteristics are associated with an increased risk of behaving violently.

There are many reasons why shaping a person for military conflict risks misshaping responses to interpersonal conflict. The coercive training process forcibly heightens the *fight-or-flight* response while making a virtue of anger and aggression (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Trevillion, et al., 2015). Temperamental antagonism increases (Jackson, et al., 2012; Lee, McCreary, & Villeneuve, 2011),[74] which is associated with the aggressive attitudes and emotions underlying a propensity to violence (Barlett & Anderson, 2012). The ability to produce such responses is rewarded in army culture as the hallmark of the accomplished soldier, who 'should have an offensive spirit' and cultivate the 'warrior' ideal (British Army, 2010a, p. 2:18).

Training also engenders hostility towards the 'otherness' of 'outsiders'. The sociologist Ben Wadham has studied Australian military culture:

> 'The common theme of fraternity is structured by regimentation, hierarchy, chain of command and the development of a capacity for violence. There is a strong distinction between military and civil society that is characterized by a culture gap. The intensity of fraternity generates a hierarchy of oppositions – officer/enlisted; army/navy/air force; arms/service; squadron vs. squadron, corps vs. corps, pilot/navigator/the rest; submariners/the surface fleet; sea vs. land; air vs. land, military/civilian; ally/enemy; male/female; Australian/immigrant; straight/gay etc. These oppositions establish the potential for abuse and inappropriate conduct.' (Wadham, 2011)

Having stimulated aggression in recruits and hostility towards 'othered' groups, basic training also conditions them to contain and release violence on demand. As one infantry veteran has put it, a soldier's habitually heightened aggression is contained in a box or cage; an order to attack opens the box and another order closes it again (Confidential communication, 2017). The prevalence of violent behaviour by a large minority of soldiers shows that such controls may be weak or absent when personnel are in their homes and civilian community, and after they have left the military regime of control. Soldiers disposed to 'high' levels of aggression have been six times as likely as those with 'low' aggression to behave violently after deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, for example (MacManus, et al., 2013).[75]

Military training also legitimises violence as a conflict tactic, as trainees are conditioned to dominate when facing adversity, especially when under stress. A wide-ranging review of the military research into mental health and the risk of violent behaviour concluded that the legitimisation of violence by military culture as a means to resolve conflict is likely to encourage the use of violence in other contexts (Trevillion, et al., 2015). Some quantitative research from the US shows that men in jobs

[74] Antagonism = reduced 'agreeableness' in the model used by the studies.
[75] See Table 4 of cited study.

that require the controlled use of violence – the military, police, and prison service – are more likely than men in most other jobs to use violence against female partners, even after other risk factors, such as age, education, and alcohol use are accounted for (Melzer, 2002).[76]

In sum, not only does sending people to war exacerbate the prevalence of violent behaviour at home, so does preparing them for it.[77]

8.4. The impact of military culture: focus on gender

Researchers in feminist and gender studies have argued that a hegemonically masculine worldview and the attitudes that it engenders lead inexorably to violent domination. Cynthia Cockburn argues that delegitimising violence in the home as delinquent, while legitimising the violence of war as noble, is magical thinking, since war entrenches gender norms that set the ground for violence in other social spheres (Cockburn, 2010, p. 144). Mary Caprioli's systematic analysis of late-20th century conflicts confirms an association between gender inequality and political violence (2000; 2005),[78] while others have established the link between gender inequality and violence against women (Melzer, 2002).

In particular, the valorisation of traditional masculinity, of which the warrior-hero ideal is an example, is known to increase the risk of violence (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003; Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Rosen, Kaminski, Moore Parmley, & Fancher, 2003; Gallagher & Parrott, 2011; Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015; Moore & Stuart, 2005). The issue is not traditionally masculine traits themselves, such as 'toughness'. Rather, risk increases when a man who identifies as traditionally masculine feels that this identity is under threat, or when a man believes that violence is a legitimate or righteous act in a conflict (Moore & Stuart, 2005). The implication is that a man is *more likely* to behave violently if he expects to be dominant and does not feel so, or believes punishing wrongdoing violently is a duty.

In sum, the legitimation of violence, and the fêting of heroic dominance, which reflect traditionally masculine gender norms and are encouraged by army training and culture,[79] have been found to magnify the risk of violence. A consequence is the denigration of women as co-workers. In 2006, a major report found that it was common for men in the British army to consider women a 'liability' in what they still saw as a man's job (Rutherford, Schneider, & Walmsley, 2006, p. 9). Women in the army are confounding this prejudice, showing that they too are 'prepared to kill', as one (male) reporter has put it (Wallop, 2016). Nonetheless, the advice of one female officer to women joining up shows that men and their expectations remain dominant:

> 'You are going into a male dominated environment. You should all be aspiring to meet the male standard. If you want to be respected by the males you are going to be working alongside, this is what you need to do.' (ibid.).

While the sexual harassment and assault of women is shamefully common in American and British civilian society, the problem is amplified in their armies (British Army, 2015a; Anderson & Suris, 2013). Research in each country has found that women affected are more likely to be younger (UK) and to have enlisted younger (US) (Rutherford, Schneider, & Walmsley, 2006; American Public

[76] The study also found that unemployed men and men working in jobs where women predominate were 47-50% more likely than men in managerial jobs to behave violently.
[77] Refer to earlier discussion, chapter 3, for a description of military training methods.
[78] Mary Caprioli found that the statistical associations between gender inequality and war remained strong even after controlling for other known risk factors for violent conflict, such as poverty, wealth inequality, and a history of conflict.
[79] Refer to earlier discussion, Chapter 4, for details.

Health Association, 2012). In cases of sexual abuse leading to psychiatric trauma, the risk of PTSD increases markedly once women are deployed; a US study found that the risk increased ninefold (Anderson & Suris, 2013).

Some examples of the sexist and sexualised exploitation of women in the British army:

- Rachel Thompson, who joined up as a minor in 1998, recalls that every individual on the all-male staff was sleeping with the 16- and 17-year-old female recruits; complaints were suppressed by bullying. The girls in training were known collectively as the 'slags', she adds (Thompson, 2017).
- In one of several instances of abuse documented by researchers in 2006, a group of men grabbed a female officer while on exercise and 'ducked her head in a bucket of water and each time she came up for breath she had to repeat "I am useless and I am a female"' (Rutherford, Schneider, & Walmsley, 2006, p. 13).
- In 2011, Corporal Anne-Marie Ellement killed herself after an alleged rape and subsequent intense bullying by two male peers. A coronial inquest found that the exploitation had 'deeply and permanently affected her', contributing materially to her suicide (Walker, 2014).
- In 2015, a thread on the soldiers' forum showing an overweight woman under the title 'How would you rape this?' gathered more than 100 responses, none of which called the thread into question (Haynes, 2014).
- In 2017, a website titled 'Blockrat of the day' showcased graphic images of sex between soldiers at Catterick and women invited illicitly onto the base, dubbed 'blockrats' (Ward, 2017).

In 2016 the head of the British army, General Carter, publicly recognised its 'overly sexualised' culture (Farmer, 2016) and has been determined to tackle it in the face of official statistics indicating a worsening problem. In 2009, an official, anonymous survey found that 8% of women in the army had had a 'particularly upsetting' experience of sexualised behaviour directed at them in the previous 12 months (British Army, 2015a, p. 33). Six years later, the figure had grown to 13% (ibid.), which is equivalent to about 1,000 women affected each year.

8.5. Quantifying the effect of military training on violent behaviour

The evidence presented in this chapter has shown how aspects of military employment other than deployment contribute materially to the elevated prevalence of violent behaviour by soldiers and veterans. Some quantitative research sheds light on the size of this effect in the early stages of a military career.

An American study in 2005 expected to show that joining the army reduces violent offending, only to discover the opposite (Bouffard, 2005). The increase was particularly marked among recruits with a history of anti-social behaviour, but those without such a background were also more likely to offend after they enlisted than before. In the same year, a study of US Navy personnel reported that the proportion of men committing 'severe violence' against intimate partners increased from 4% in the year before they enlisted to 16% after their second year in the navy (Merrill, Crouch, Thomsen, Guimond, & Milner, 2005).[80] (The same study found contrary results for enlisted

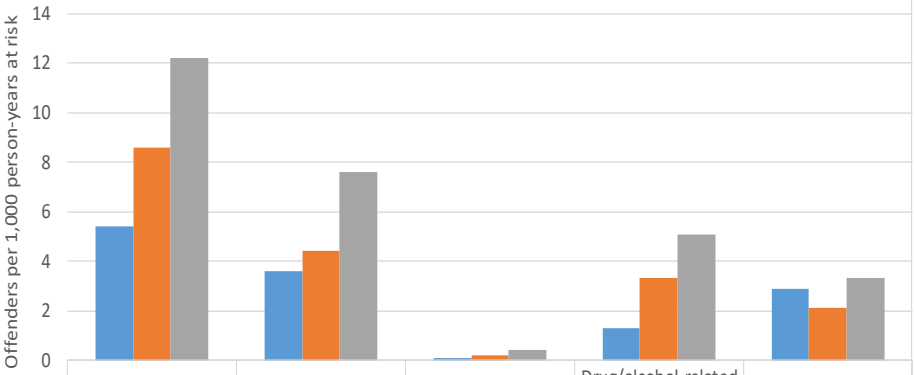
[80] Conceivably, recruits' increasing age or their operational deployment could explain this increase in violent behaviour, but it is unlikely. The study's authors ruled out age as a factor, finding that it was unrelated in this case. With respect to deployment, only a minority of personnel would have been deployed in their first two years of service and relatively few navy personnel experience war zone stressors associated with violent behaviour.

women, for whom the prevalence of violent behaviour decreased from 20% before they enlisted to 12% afterwards.)

British research has reached similar conclusions. A *Lancet* paper by the King's Centre for Military Health Research in 2013 matched military personnel with their police records. The researchers plotted offences over time, divided into three periods – pre-enlistment, post-enlistment but pre-deployment, and post-deployment – and calculated an annual rate of offending for each career stage. As expected, the study found a large increase in violent and sexual offending after deployment, reaching more than double the pre-enlistment rate. But they also found that the rate had increased by approximately a quarter after enlistment but before recruits were sent to war.[81]

Showing a similar pattern, the rate of drug- and alcohol-related offences increased after enlistment and again after deployment. On the other hand, the rate of convictions for non-violent offences went down after enlistment, indicating a positive effect of enlistment on the prevalence of non-violent, non-drug-related crime. This shows that the spike in violent crime after enlistment is not due to general criminality, but relates specifically to increased violence following exposure to military training and culture. (Once personnel were sent to war, the rate of non-violent offences did rise, exceeding the pre-enlistment rate, so military employment, when deployment is included, was accompanied by a rise in criminal offending of all kinds.) Figure 10 sets out the details.

Figure 10: Offending by UK armed forces personnel deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq, by career stage and offence type



	All offences	Violent offences	Sexual offences	Drug/alcohol-related offences	Other offences
Pre-enlistment	5.4	3.6	0.1	1.3	2.9
Post-enlistment, pre-deployment	8.6	4.4	0.2	3.3	2.1
Post-deployment	12.2	7.6	0.4	5.1	3.3

Source: Macmanus et al., 2013

Other British research has found that being in a combat role is associated with higher levels of anger even before a soldier is deployed, and even after controlling for age, mental health problems, and such pre-enlistment factors as a history of anti-social behaviour (Rona, et al., 2015). The study's results indicated that, while a history of anti-social behaviour and current anxiety or depression were the greatest factors accounting for elevated anger in personnel, simply having a job in the infantry or another combat role was also implicated.[82]

[81] Overall, the number of convictions by personnel was small – less than 1% of personnel per year – but the conviction rate is a proxy for violent behaviour not leading to conviction, which is more common, and the rate of violent offending found was higher than in the civilian population.

[82] 13% of the elevated anger was due to being employed in a combat role; 22% to a history of anti-social behaviour; and 30% to current problems with anxiety or depression. See Table 3 of cited study.

The results of similar research in conscription-based systems are more mixed. Studies in Argentina, Australia, and Denmark found no association between compulsory military service and violent crime (Siminski, Ville, & Paull, 2016), whereas a Swedish study found a large increase (Hjalmarsson & Lindquist, 2016). In none of these countries did young people become less likely to behave violently after they were conscripted, however.

8.6. Summary

The evidence outlined here strongly indicates that joining the army, irrespective of later deployment, is associated with an increase in violent (including sexually violent) and drug-related offences; and that being sent to war is associated with a further increase crimes of all types, well above pre-enlistment rates. Personnel who enlist at a younger age and come from disadvantaged backgrounds are the most affected. Being in the infantry or other combat role, irrespective of other factors, independently contributes to higher levels of anger and of violence. The evidence also indicates that the over-stimulation of aggression and hostility in army training, as well as the army's valorisation of traditionally masculine norms, contribute to the risk of violence, including against female peers.

In the research reviewed for this report, the only potentially verifiable evidence of a possible protective effect is a reduction in neurotic tendencies during training and the high frequency of physical exercise, both of which can buffer the effects of stress (Jackson, et al., 2012; Klee & Renner, 2016; Brunner, 1997; Brooks & Greenberg, 2017). The benefit is likely to be slight, however; although reduced neuroticism tends to reduce aggressive emotions, it does not appear to reduce aggressive *attitudes* or violent behaviour itself (Barlett & Anderson, 2012).

These findings should put to rest the popular assumption that enlistment 'straightens out' young males with a history of violent behaviour. The available research points the other way: to a marked increase in violence following enlistment, affecting the youngest and most disadvantaged recruits the most, particularly those who join the infantry.

Table 2 and Table 3, opposite and overleaf, set out some of the main risk factors for violent behaviour by military personnel. For each factor, columns show: a) whether evidence indicates that it is over-represented in military groups; and b) whether it is reinforced by military training.

Table 2: Military personality factors associated with violent behaviour

Factor type	Evidence that factor is associated with increased risk of violent behaviour	Evidence that factor is over-represented in military groups	Evidence that factor is reinforced by basic military training
Personality factors	Impulsivity[83]	Yes[84]	Yes (US: limited evidence)[85]
	Antagonism (reduced agreeableness)[86]	Yes (Germany, Canada)[87]	Yes (Germany, Canada)[88]
	Conventionality (reduced openness to experience)[89]	Yes (Germany)[90]	Unknown
	Authoritarianism[91]	Yes (US)[92]	Mixed evidence (US[93] and Germany[94])
	Aggression under stress[95]	Yes (UK[96] and US[97])	Yes (US)[98]
	Hostility to other groups[99]	Unknown	Yes (UK[100] and US[101])
	Ego-inflation (narcissism)[102]	Yes (US)[103]	Yes (US: limited evidence)[104]

[83] Source: (Wong & Gordon, 2006)
[84] Source: (Montes & Weatherly, 2014)
[85] Source: (Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962)
[86] Source: (Barlett & Anderson, 2012)
[87] Sources: (Klee & Renner, 2016; Jackson, et al., 2012; Lee, McCreary, & Villeneuve, 2011)
[88] Sources: (Jackson, et al., 2012; Lee, McCreary, & Villeneuve, 2011)
[89] Source: (Barlett & Anderson, 2012).
[90] Sources: (Klee & Renner, 2016; Jackson, et al., 2012).
[91] Source: (Moreno Martin, 1999). An 'authoritarian' attitude presumes the right to have dominance over others and the duty to submit to those who are dominant.
[92] Sources: (Ricks, 1997; Dorman, 1976; Reinke & Miller, 2008; Holsti, 2001; Huntington, 1957).
[93] Sources: (Campbell & McCormack, 1957; Dorman, 1976; Lovell & Stiehm, 1989; French & Ernest, 1955).
[94] Source: (Roghmann & Sodeur, 1998).
[95] Sources: (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Wong & Gordon, 2006).
[96] Sources: (MacManus, et al., 2015; Trevillion, et al., 2015).
[97] Source: (Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005).
[98] Sources: (McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006; Christian, Stivers, & Sammons, 2009; Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962).
[99] Source: (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015). Hostility is defined here as 'negative judgement and dislike of others'.
[100] Sources (including anecdotal): (Hockey, J, 1986; Sharrocks, 2016; Griffin, 2015).
[101] Sources: (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Bourne, 1967; Eisenhart, 1975; Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962).
[102] Source: (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).
[103] Source: (Bourgeois, Hall, Crosby, & Drexler, 1993).
[104] Source: (Ekman, Friesen, & Lutzker, 1962).

Table 3: Military occupational, cultural, health and pre-enlistment factors associated with violent behaviour

Factor type	Evidence that factor is associated with increased risk of violent behaviour	Evidence that factor is over-represented in military groups	Evidence that factor is reinforced by basic military training
Occupational and cultural factors	Traditionally masculine/hypermasculine culture[105]	Yes (UK[106] and US[107])	Yes (UK[108] and US[109])
	Occupational training in use of violence[110]	Yes (UK[111] and US[112])	Yes (UK and US) [113]
	Heavy drinking[114]	Yes (UK[115] and US[116])	Unknown
Health factors	Mental health problems (PTSD, anxiety, depression)[117]	Yes (UK[118] and US[119])	Unknown
Pre-enlistment factors	History of anti-social behaviour[120]	UK[121] and US[122]	N/A

[105] Sources: (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003; Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Rosen, Kaminski, Moore Parmley, & Fancher, 2003; Gallagher & Parrott, 2011; Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015; Moore & Stuart, 2005).
[106] Source: (Green, Emslie, O'Neill, Hunt, & Walker, 2010; Hockey, J, 2003; Woodward, 2000; Rutherford, Schneider, & Walmsley, 2006).
[107] Source: (Butcher, et al., 1990; Anderson & Suris, 2013).
[108] Sources: (Hockey, J, 1986; Swain, 2016b; Woodward, 2000).
[109] Sources: (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Eisenhart, 1975).
[110] Source: (Melzer, 2002).
[111] See discussion in this paper.
[112] Source: (Melzer, 2002).
[113] See discussion in this paper.
[114] Sources: (MacManus, et al., 2015; Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005).
[115] Source: (Head, et al., 2016).
[116] Source: (Mattiko, Olstead, Brown, & Bray, 2011)
[117] Sources: (MacManus, et al., 2015; Wong & Gordon, 2006; Marshall, Panuzio, & Taft, 2005; Elbogen, et al., 2014; Trevillion, et al., 2015).
[118] Sources: (Goodwin, et al., 2015; Jones, et al., 2012; Jones, Rona, Hooper, & Wessely, 2006; McManus, Meltzer, Brugha, Bebbington, & Jenkins, 2009).
[119] Source: (Hoge, et al., 2004).
[120] Source: (MacManus, et al., 2011).
[121] Source: (Iversen, et al., 2007).
[122] Source: (Segal, Burns, Falk, Silver, & Sharda, 1998).

PART III: Outcomes of military employment

9. General health

Since the army screens out applicants who fall short of high standards of health and fitness, soldiers – including those from deprived backgrounds – are generally heathier on the day they enlist than their civilian counterparts, who include the infirm and unemployed. This statistical health disparity is sometimes called the 'healthy soldier effect' (Mclaughlin, Nielsen, & Waller, 2009).

In the first years of their career, the health of soldiers continues to exceed that of civilians. British soldiers are less likely than civilians to be overweight (Public Health England, 2016; Sanderson, 2014),[123] and US soldiers show a lower-than-average mortality rate (Mclaughlin, Nielsen, & Waller, 2009). For example, deployed US personnel who survived their war have continued benefit from a lower mortality rate than civilians seven years afterwards, on average (ibid.).[124]

This health advantage is lost in later life, and indeed reversed. In the UK, the Annual Population Survey shows that health of veterans is, in general, slightly worse than that of non-veterans (Ministry of Defence, 2016c). The survey found that 74% of veterans reported being in good or very good health, vs. 78% of non-veterans, and 40% reported at least one long-term health conditions, vs. 35% of non-veterans (Ministry of Defence, 2016c, pp. 9-11). In 2014, research by the British Legion found that working-age veterans were nearly twice as likely as non-veterans of the same age to report a long-term illness with debilitating effects (24% of veterans vs. 13% of non-veterans) (British Legion, 2014, p. viii).[125]

In the US, veterans' mortality rate increases to exceed that of non-veterans, according to two wide-ranging reviews of the research from the Second World War to the mid-2000s (London & Wilmoth, 2006; Maclean & Elder, 2007). In particular, there was no 'turning point' effect on the general health of young people: enlistees aged under 20 were just as likely as older enlistees to have died earlier than non-veterans, even after socioeconomic variables such as education and race were accounted for (London & Wilmoth, 2006). The first study concluded that:

> '…we find very little evidence to support the notion that there are any benefits that accrue to men and materialize in their lives as a lower likelihood of dying as a consequence of military service overall or at any particular age at [the point of] enlistment.' (London & Wilmoth, 2006, p. 156)

The second study found:

> 'With few exceptions, this work finds that military service negatively affected mental and physical health, particularly when veterans were exposed to combat.' (Maclean & Elder, 2007, p. 181)

[123] 57% of soldiers were overweight in 2014 vs. 63% of the general population in England in 2016.

[124] The cited study excluded deaths during deployment from its calculations.

[125] The British Legion study found rates of certain illnesses reported among veterans (vs. civilians) as follows: depression (10% vs. 6%); back problems (14% vs. 7%); problems with legs and feet (15% vs. 7%), or arms (9% vs. 5%); heart problems (12% vs. 7%); diabetes (6% vs. 3%); difficulty hearing (6% vs. 2%), or seeing (5% vs. 1%).

The evidence at hand indicates that, while there are wide variances, military employment tends to cancel out and partially reverse the better-than-average health that veterans enjoy on the day they enlist. The remainder of this section explores some of the probable causes of this.

9.1. Physical injury: training and deployment

In 2015, a typical year, 1 in 50 (2.0%) personnel were discharged from the British army for medical reasons (Ministry of Defence, 2016b, p. 18). The most common reason was musculoskeletal injuries, then psychological ill-health – particularly stress- and depression-related problems. Medical discharges (for any reason) were most common among personnel aged under 20 (1 in 40: 2.5%); women (approximately 1 in 40: 2.4%); and especially recruits in initial training, of whom one in twenty (5.0%) were 'injured out' (ibid.).

Initial training can severely strain the body, particularly the legs, even when recruits are generally fit. A study of British army training found that an overall risk of medical discharge due to injury equivalent to 3.6% of recruits over six months (Blacker, Wilkinson, Bilzon, & Rayson, 2008).[126] The study found that, compared to the risk for adult recruits, those aged 16 or 17 were 35% more likely to be injured out of training;[127] adolescents are at greater risk because their bones have yet to develop their full, adult resilience to shock (Milgrom, et al., 1994). Recruits who are overweight or otherwise physically unfit before beginning training and/or who smoke are also particularly likely to be injured out (Blacker, Wilkinson, Bilzon, & Rayson, 2008; Ministry of Defence, 2015a).

A similar investigation into British infantry pre-deployment training found that 59% of soldiers experienced one or more injuries, again mostly to the legs or lower back (Wilkinson, et al., 2011). Younger soldiers, aged 17-19, were the most affected. A similarly high incidence of training injury has also been found in the American, Norwegian, and South African militaries (Wilkinson, et al., 2011; Glomsaker, 1996; Gordon, Hugo, & Cilliers, 1986).[128]

Unsurprisingly, the risk of injury peaks again during deployment, albeit with wide variances according to military role and warfare intensity. The Afghanistan war injured or killed 1 in 50 British personnel involved (Ministry of Defence, 2016a; Ministry of Defence, 2015b).[129] The marines and army bore the brunt, particularly the infantry, where the fatality rate was seven times that in the rest of the armed forces (Ministry of Defence, 2016f; Gee & Goodman, 2013; Gee, 2013, p. 58).

9.2. Smoking and heavy drinking

Other causes of veteran ill health and premature mortality are high rates of smoking and drinking, which are major risk factors for the main causes of premature death in later life in economically

[126] The rate of medical discharge due to injury cited in the report is 0.2 discharges per 100 person-days, equivalent to 3.6% of recruits discharged over six months, the length of standard infantry training (calculated from the values in Table 1).

[127] 35% greater risk is calculated based on 4.6% of soldiers who enlisted aged 16 or 17 being discharged per six months (calculated from the values in Table 1 of cited report).

[128] US infantry pre-deployment training injury rate: 101-223 new injuries per 100 person-years; Norwegian army basic training injury rate (conscripts): 15.3 new injuries per 100 person-months (equivalent to 184 per 100 person-years); South African Defence Force basic training injury rate: approx. one-third of recruits injured over the ten-week course.

[129] British military fatalities numbered 453 and there were 2,209 battle injuries, of which 616 were 'serious' or 'very serious' (Ministry of Defence, 2016a; Ministry of Defence, 2016f). (Fatalities [453] + battle injuries [2,209]) / personnel deployed [139,030] = 1.9%.)

developed countries: heart disease, cancer, liver disease, and stroke (Rehm, Gmel, Sempos, & Trevisan, 2003).

In the US military, smoking has been the norm. Studies in the 1990s found that about half of the non-veteran population smoked, but three-quarters of veterans did (Harris, 1997; Klevens, et al., 1995; McKinney, McIntire, Carmody, & Joseph, 1997). The studies also found that veterans had tended to take up smoking after enlisting – so-called 'military-induced smoking' (Bedard & Deschenes, 2006; Harris, 1997; Klevens, et al., 1995; McKinney, McIntire, Carmody, & Joseph, 1997). A study in 2006 found a strong association between military-induced smoking and excess later-life mortality from heart disease and lung cancer (Bedard & Deschenes, 2006).[130] The study estimated that between a third and four-fifths of the excess mortality from these causes was due to military-induced smoking. Since the 1980s, tobacco use has declined but US veterans still tend to smoke more than non-veterans, particularly during deployments. For example, a US study found that soldiers on deployment in Iraq were twice as likely as civilians at home to be using tobacco in some form (Wilson, 2008).

Smoking is less common in the UK and, as in the US, has been in slow decline (Fear, et al., 2010b). Although British military personnel are more likely than civilians to smoke (Ministry of Defence, 2015a, pp. 12-13), this is partly explained by the forces' tendency to recruit from a demographic that would be more likely to smoke anyway, whether or not they had joined up (Fear, et al., 2010b). Nonetheless, the MoD reports that military life can trigger some recruits to take up smoking, and that some army sub-groups are more likely to smoke than 'some of the most deprived communities in England' (Ministry of Defence, 2015a, p. 12).[131]

More serious in the British armed forces is heavy drinking. The most recent study, based on a survey in 2004-2006, found that 13% of British forces personnel were drinking at levels deemed harmful (vs. a 6% rate found in the general population in 2007) (Head, et al., 2016; McManus, Meltzer, Brugha, Bebbington, & Jenkins, 2009, p. 161). The rate was much higher in the youngest group assessed (aged 18-24), at 25%, nearly three times the 9% rate found in a similar age group (16-24) in the general population (ibid.).[132] The prevalence of harmful drinking (irrespective of age) is around 50% higher still among those who have left the British armed forces in the last dozen years or so (Fear NT, Jones M, Murphy D, Hull L, Iversen AC, Coker B et al., 2010a).[133]

Besides generally higher rates of injury, smoking, and drinking, other features of military employment are also likely to contribute to the mortality risk. One is the relatively greater burden of mental ill-health, particularly depression and anxiety, discussed earlier. PTSD is associated with a shorter life expectancy, for example (Maclean & Elder, 2007).

9.3. Summary

In summary, an assumption that enlistment can bring health benefits to young people who would otherwise be denied them is not borne out by the research, which shows that major causes of health problems, particularly physical injury, mental ill-health, drinking and smoking, are markedly more common among military personnel than among civilians. US research indicates that military service has tended to lead to a higher rate of premature mortality, including among young enlistees from deprived backgrounds, than would be expected had the same people not enlisted. In the UK,

[130] Here, 'excess' refers to the additional burden of risk relative to the non-veteran population.
[131] The paper did not state which army sub-groups are most likely to smoke.
[132] The figures for the military group are extrapolated from Table 1 in Head, et al., 2016.
[133] A high rate of alcohol misuse has also been found in the US forces (Mattiko, Olstead, Brown, & Bray, 2011).

veterans have similar or slightly worse health than non-veterans, despite having begun their military careers with better-than-average health.

10. Socioeconomic status

10.1. For richer or poorer?

Among the arguments made for the American All-Volunteer Force – the name given to the transition from a conscription-based system in 1973 – was that 'veterans are said to do better economically than non-veterans' (Gates et al., 1970, p. 151). Similarly, British ministers today argue that recruiting from economically suppressed communities offers young people a route out of poverty that would otherwise be denied them (Mordaunt, 2016; Hansard, 2013). This is also the army's core sales pitch ('Age 16? Earn over £1,000 a month while you train') and it congratulates its new recruits on having more money in the pocket than their peers who stay on in school or college (British Army, 2014; 2015b).

The UK and US governments have not offered evidence to show that military life takes recruits out of poverty (Gee & Taylor, 2016). The evidence at hand indicates that it compares poorly with civilian alternatives, which is the theme of this chapter.

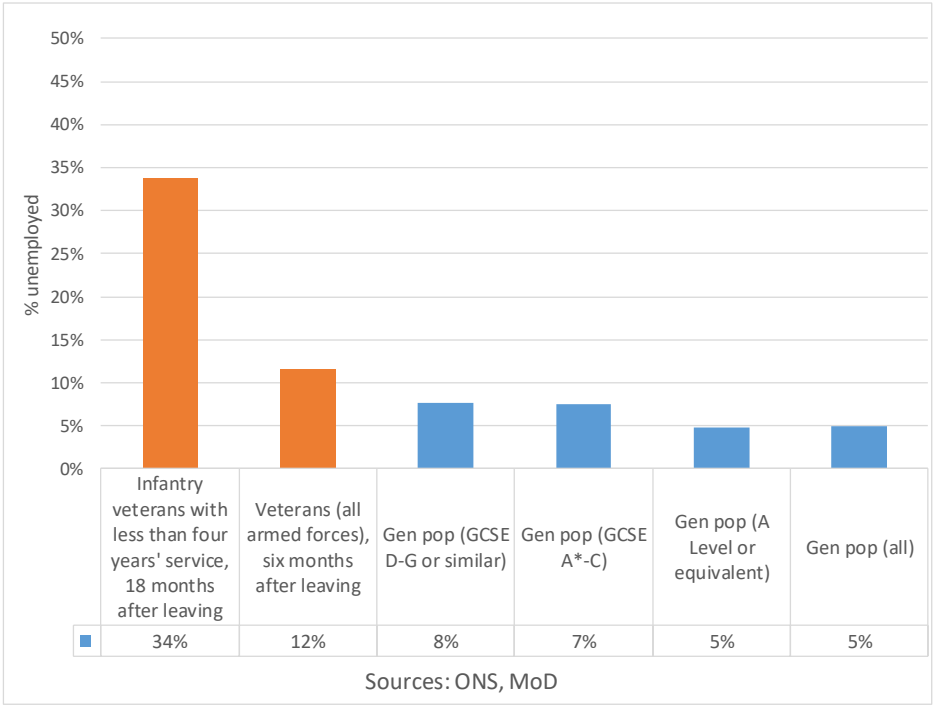
Research in the US has found that soldiers' initial earning advantage over civilian peers has usually been reversed in later life. A wide-ranging review of the research since the Second World War concluded that at no point have American veterans outstripped the socioeconomic gains made by their civilian peers; in most cases, they have fared worse (Maclean & Elder, 2007). Specifically, veterans of the Second World War were no better or worse off than non-veterans; Vietnam veterans were worse off (with 15% less earning power a decade after re-joining civilian life); and veterans since have also been worse off. Combat veterans' prospects are particularly disrupted, but military employment in peacetime also failed to keep up with civilian alternatives (ibid.).

The same research shows that some subgroups can buck the trend. African American veterans have sometimes overtaken their civilian counterparts; the same was also generally true of the officer class (Maclean & Elder, 2007). Some of the research also indicates a marginal positive effect for young people from particularly deprived backgrounds from the Second World War to the Vietnam era (Maclean & Elder, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 1996). This advantage was lost in the 1970s, after civilian opportunities improved and military pay fell relative to civilian levels; by the 1990s the military had ceased to function as a route out of poverty (Sampson & Laub, 1996, p. 364; Angrist, 1998; Maclean & Elder, 2007)

There are no such historical studies in the UK, but the government now collects limited information about the employment status of veterans who pass through the military's resettlement system, six months after they leave (Ministry of Defence, 2017a). One in five veterans do not use that system and nothing is known of how they fare as veterans. Of soldiers who do, 13% who left the army in 2015/16 were unemployed six months afterwards, which is more than twice the national unemployment rate for the same period, at 5% (Ministry of Defence, 2017a, pp. 9-11; Office for National Statistics, 2017). Veterans who leave within four years of joining are particularly

likely to be unemployed, especially infanteers.[134] Even people of working age whose highest qualification is a GCSE at grade D-G are more likely to be in work than veterans six months after discharge, as illustrates.[135]

Figure 11: Unemployment rates after leaving the British armed forces (enlisted personnel only), with comparison to rates in working-age general population, by highest qualification held, 2015/16 (2013 for infantry) [figures exclude economically inactive]



While veterans who leave the forces span a wide age range, the average soldier leaves in their mid-twenties – an age group for whom unemployment is more common than the national average. Even so, in the same year, 2015/16, the veteran unemployment rate – across the full age range – was still higher than the national average rate for the 20-29 age group (12 vs. 9%).[136] Veterans' high unemployment rate persists beyond the initial six months after their discharge, according to research by the British Legion (2016), which found that the working-age veteran population is twice as likely to be unemployed as are non-veterans in the same age group.

Evidently, army veterans are more likely to be unemployed than civilians – even civilians from deprived backgrounds with limited academic attainment. Among the major causes of this, two

[134] In FY 2015/16, 16% of veterans from across the armed forces who had left before completing four years were unemployed six months afterwards, which was three times the national unemployment rate and greater also than the 13% unemployment rate for civilians aged 16-24 (Office for National Statistics, 2017; Ministry of Defence, 2017a). A study in 2013 found that 30% of infantry veterans who had left the army within four years were not in work or education/training 18 months afterwards (Fossey & Hacker Hughes, 2013, p. 9). The national unemployment rate that year was 8% (21% for 16-24-year-olds) (Office for National Statistics, 2017).

[135] These unweighted figures are derived from (Ministry of Defence, 2017a; Fossey & Hacker Hughes, 2013; Office for National Statistics, 2016a). They exclude the economically inactive (i.e. those who are neither in work nor looking for work, such as full-time students). The figure for the infantry is from 2013, and is derived as follows: 1,067 leavers, of whom the destinations of 977 were known; of these, 139 were in education (economically inactive), leaving 838, of whom 556 were in employment 18 months after leaving. 838-556=282 unemployed (34%).

[136] Unemployment: veterans (all armed forces, enlisted personnel, all ages at exit) six months after leaving, 12% (Ministry of Defence, 2017a); general population (20-29 age group), 9%; same age group in general population holding GCSE grade D-G as highest qualification, 13%; GCSE A*-C, 12%; A Level, 7%. Calculated from (Office for National Statistics, 2016a); the figures are unweighted and exclude the economically inactive.

stand out: the rising availability of civilian education for the 16-18 age group; and the army's very high rate of attrition.

10.2. Evolution of civilian education

Civilian education for the 16-18 age group has developed substantially in economically developed countries over the last two decades. In England in 1985, two of every five 16- and 17-year-olds were in full-time education; 20 years on, the proportion was four in five (Department for Education, 2015). By remaining in full-time education until age 18, young people can re-sit GCSEs if necessary, or progress to A Levels or vocational BTECs, improving their prospects for the long term. The benefit is a reduced risk of unemployment later. In 2015/16, 14% of people in their twenties whose highest qualification was a GCSEs at grade D or below were unemployed; vs. 11% among those with A*-C grades, and 7% for those with A Levels or equivalent (Office for National Statistics, 2016a).[137] These qualifications also increase earning power. In the same age group in the same year, those who were working and held a GCSE at A*-C earned 8% more than those with GCSEs at D-G, and those with A Levels earned 19% more (ibid.).[138]

The British army competes with civilian education by encouraging 16-year-olds to leave it and enlist instead. Its own education provision for trainees is unambitious, however, based on rudimentary qualifications that fall well short of the GCSE standard (Child Soldiers International, 2016a). Thus, the socioeconomic case for staying in school to re-sit GCSEs if necessary, or to continue to the A Level/BTEC stage, is appreciably stronger than that for joining the army at 16.

10.3. Army attrition

Another problem with the military narrative of opportunity is that so many soldiers leave the army shortly after joining, or are thrown out. British soldiers who sign up as adults face a one-in-four chance of leaving during their training, and those under 18 a one-in-three chance, according to official data compiled by Child Soldiers International (2016b). Within four years of enlisting, around a third of adult infantry enlistees have left the army, and almost half of the army's youngest recruits, aged 16-17½, have also left (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012, p. 243). These young veterans then face the risk of long-term unemployment, particularly if they had left full-time education to sign up.

Figure 12 illustrates the scale of the problem. It represents 50 soldiers who enlisted at age 16 four years previously. Soldiers in red on the right dropped out of training (33%) (Child Soldiers International, 2016b). Those in amber in the centre completed training but left within four years of their enlistment (usually by dismissal). When combined with soldiers who left during training, this group makes up 48% of the original cohort (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012, p. 243). Of the combined red/amber group, a fifth (20%) have the symptoms of PTSD, about a third (31%) misuse alcohol at levels deemed 'harmful' to health; and just under a half (46%) suffer from anxiety or depression (Buckman, et al., 2013), all of which jeopardise re-employment prospects. So, after four years the army is left with just over half of all the 16-year-olds it enlisted four years previously, shown in green. Attrition then slows, but after nine years the army is left

[137] The figures cited are calculated from the Annual Population Survey 2015-16 and are unweighted.
[138] 2015/16: Average weekly wage for working people aged 20-29 whose highest qualification was: GCSE D-G, £137; GCSE A*-C, £147 (+8%); A Level or equivalent, £163 (+19%). The same trend describes the working-age population as a whole, for whom the weekly wage in each group was £170, £184, and £209, respectively.

with just 14 of the 50 soldiers enlisted four years previously; all the others have re-joined civilian life (British Army, 2010b).[139]

The army's high rate of attrition, together with veterans' subsequent high rate of unemployment, illustrate the socioeconomically precarious nature of military employment. While the army can function as a route out of a poverty for the few, for the many it prolongs childhood disadvantage into adulthood.

Figure 12: Retention rates: Army intake aged 16-17½ (data from 2012-15) – see text for key

10.4. Career soldiers: pay satisfaction

While elevated risks of unemployment face the three-quarters of British soldiers who leave within a few months or years, the remainder can fare well, but only if they rise through the ranks. Around three-quarters of soldiers who stay in the army are promoted by one or two ranks after nine years (to lance-corporal or full corporal), according to an army study in 2010 (British Army, 2010b), by which point they earn more than the national average for the age group.[140] Evidently, promoted soldiers outstrip the earnings of the average employee, but that is also true of promoted civilians, whereas around a quarter of soldiers remain at the lowest rank (private) after nine years (ibid.), earning much less than the average. The youngest of the army's recruits are slightly more likely than adult recruits to be in this position (ibid.).

Soldiers are substantially less satisfied than civilians with their pay.[141] The Armed Forces Pay Review Body, which makes independent salary recommendations to the Ministry of Defence, notes increasing pay dissatisfaction across the armed forces (Armed Forces' Pay Review Body, 2016). Its report also records a common view among personnel that civilians doing similar work are better off:

> 'Some personnel worked alongside contractors who were performing similar roles, but received higher wages and had perceived better terms and conditions. Those with transferable skills were aware of the higher salaries and better work-life balance on offer in the civilian sector generally and in the IT and engineering sectors in particular.' (Armed Forces' Pay Review Body, 2016, p. 3)

Eventually, even long-serving career soldiers re-join the civilian jobs market, usually in their forties, for which age group the national average rate of pay in 2016 was £25,500 for women and £34,700 for men (Office for National Statistics, 2016b).[142] These rates approximate to the median wages

[139] This is based on a rate of attrition of 72% after nine years, according to column AFC(H), Table 9, p. 12 of cited study.
[140] In 2016 the ranks of lance- and full corporal are salaried at c. £25,000–£29,000, which exceeds the average wage of full-time civilian workers in their mid-20s, at £22,000-£24,000 (British Army, 2016; Office for National Statistics, 2016b). See Figure 14 of cited ONS report for civilian pay rates data.
[141] Enlisted soldiers, 2016: Satisfied with pay, 34%; dissatisfied, 38%; the rest were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Ministry of Defence, 2016d, p. 15). Net pay satisfaction: enlisted soldiers, minus 4 points; working civilians, plus 9 points (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2016; Ministry of Defence, 2016d, p. 15). (Net pay satisfaction is calculated by subtracting the proportion of employees who report being dissatisfied with their pay from the proportion who are satisfied.)
[142] See Figure 14 of cited ONS report for civilian pay rates data.

for professional or technical occupations (ibid.),[143] which typically require strong academic attainment. By their forties, most veterans and non-veterans have career experience behind them, but non-veterans are more likely to have stayed in school in their teens to improve their qualifications; this gives them a long-term advantage over veterans at this stage of their career.

10.5. The big exception: the GI Bill of 1944

In general, the available British and American evidence points to a net socioeconomic disadvantage arising from joining the army from a troubled background, but there is a striking exception from history. Young Americans who grew up in Depression-era deprivation and enlisted under the age of 21 were more likely to rise out of poverty than their civilian peers, if they escaped serious injury during the Second World War (Elder, 1986). Indeed, this group tended to outstrip the social mobility of civilians from middle-class backgrounds, too.

The main reason for this was not military employment itself, but the benefits afforded to veterans on their return under the GI Bill of 1944 (Sampson & Laub, 1996). With the express aim of avoiding the prospect of 15 million unemployed demobilised veterans after the war, the Bill provided them with unprecedented opportunities to buy homes, set up in business, and go to college (US Government, 1944; OurDocuments.gov). 90 days in the military earned each veteran a fully funded year in college; a year of service earned two years (Elder, 1986). Eight million young people benefited, including half a million veterans who went to college and would not have been expected to do so (Elder, 1986; OurDocuments.gov). The Bill was very expensive, estimated at $14.5bn, but the relative prosperity it produced in the veteran population produced tax revenues so substantial that it ended up paying for itself (OurDocuments.gov). Never had the US government invested so heavily in the future of its veterans.

Although subsequent incarnations of the GI Bill have been less generous, a post-9/11 revision improved the offer as a response to flagging recruitment rates. It is too early to know whether the new benefits, which include university tuition fees and a monthly allowance, will improve outcomes for the veteran population in the long-term. It is likely that veterans who leave service in good health and go to university will fare well. Those traumatised by their time in the military may be less able to make good on the benefits, and those who leave the army without an honourable discharge (due to trauma-related behaviour problems, for example) are disqualified. The GI Bill, being unique to the military, may also function as a bribe to potential recruits; young people entering civilian public service jobs enjoy no such entitlement.

10.6. Summary

Research in the UK and US does not support the view that the army functions as a route out of poverty. Rather, it shows that enlisting, particularly at a young age, adds several risks to the long-term socioeconomic prospects of people from deprived backgrounds.

In general, the socioeconomic outcomes of soldiers follow a spectrum, with long-career soldiers at one end, and the worse outcomes of those who leave the army during or shortly after training at the other. All are affected by high risks of attrition and high rates of subsequent unemployment, which exceed the national average by a large margin.

[143] See spreadsheet attached to Figure 16 of cited ONS report for pay rates data by occupational group.

Soldiers who drop out of training or leave the army within the first few years are at a marked disadvantage in respect of re-employment, especially if a) they truncated their full-time education to sign up, and/or b) they had joined the infantry.

While some long-career soldiers outstrip the earning power of their civilian counterparts, some fall behind, and all appear to face a disadvantage relative to non-veterans when they re-join the civilian jobs market, usually in their forties.

Conclusion

This report has shown that, in the process of transforming civilians into soldiers, army training and culture forcibly alter recruits' attitudes under conditions of sustained stress, leading to harmful health effects even before they are sent to war. Among the consequences are elevated rates of mental health problems, heavy drinking, violent behaviour, and unemployment after discharge, as well as poorer general health in later life.

As veterans attest, initial training for the army is coercive and often violent. The right to see civilian friends and family is restricted or withdrawn, as is the right to leave; humiliation and punishments are routine; choice over personal matters, even how to fold clothes, is removed. Meanwhile, recruits are conditioned to respond to stress with aggression, winning praise for doing so. In these and other ways, the army gains control of their beliefs and behaviour. By the end of training, recruits obey orders without question, dehumanise their imagined enemy, and affirm lethal acts of violence as a professional responsibility.

Drawing mainly on American and British research, this report has begun to explore the effects of military training and culture on personnel. The available research is limited in extent, and rarely accounts for the differing experiences of minority groups in the military, including women. Nonetheless, it indicates that military training and enculturation affect the personality and values, political attitudes, mental health, and behaviour of recruits. Notable are increases in heavy drinking, anxiety and depression, antagonism, and violent behaviour, including the sexual harassment of women by men. The evidence also indicates that joining the army, particularly at a young age as an alternative to full-time education, appears to retard the socioeconomic development of enlistees. Soldiers from disadvantaged backgrounds are most affected by these problems. While many recruits faced the same problems in childhood, this report has shown that joining the army tends to make them worse, and exposure to war exacerbates them further.

By these measures, this report finds that the influence of army training and employment on health and well-being is detrimental overall. It is important to acknowledge that many soldiers do well in the army, but this is not the norm. In the UK and US, job satisfaction rates are low and retention is poor; there appears to be no evidence for a verifiable long-term health or socioeconomic benefit of enlistment, yet much to show the opposite.

A repeating feature in veterans' narratives is the struggle to unpick the army's norms that they assumed as their own in training. After Wayne Sharrocks left the infantry in 2013, he believed he had to be 'humanised again' after the army had trained him to 'mask your feelings':

> 'It's only years afterwards you start to see other things; [that] civilian life is normal life, and [the army] was actually abnormal life… When I was 19 I thought… "I'm the best guy ever… I've been to war."… It's only when you get out that you realise… [you've] no idea of how to engage with people emotionally. All these troubles just become worse and worse in your own head.' (Sharrocks, 2017)

Rachel Thompson agrees that military employment hampers emotional development:

> 'It has a massive effect on your brain. I did manage to go to university [after leaving the army] and I'm really lucky that I got through… I was only three years older than the other people at university – I was so different… You just feel a bit broken… It's only later on that you realise what's been done to you. So from 14 years of age [in the cadets and army] I've been told that I'm a slag and I've been told that I'm not equal to anybody else or to the men.' (Thompson, 2017)

Rachel and Wayne had both joined the British army as minors. Now they and many other veterans campaign to build public understanding of the harm caused by war.

If military training and enculturation are, as this report concludes, brutalising to those who endure them, then it is because war is an exercise in brutality; for as a state insists on war, so it will insist on conditioning young people to enact violence on its behalf. For this reason, Veterans for Peace UK believes that war cannot be a solution to the problems of this century – war and the militarism that supports it are among the problems that humanity faces. While its brutalities persist, so will the brutalisation of new army recruits around the world; they have a right to know what they enter into, and the impact it is likely to have on their lives.

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Appendix:
Experiences of British army basic training

Veterans for Peace UK asked its members to recall their own experiences of initial training. All the responses appear below, in date order.

'When I joined the Parachute Regiment Depot[144] in 1979, the system was clear. They strip away your personal identity – some are broken with institutional bullying either with rank or physical and psychological force. Having talked with former colleagues that got through the training and made it to the battalions, without exception this has stayed with them and me for all their adult lives.

'After going through heavy combat in the Falklands War, the blind obedience for rank had broken down in the battalion. The bullies had been exposed and only those that pulled their weight at war had any credibility. A lot of good guys left the army within 18 months of the Falklands War, or transferred to other regiments or corps.'

Terry Wood, Parachute Regiment, 1979-1984

'When a mistake was made, a petty mistake, the permanent staff would make the person involved stand in a rubbish bin and the rubbish bin would be placed on the head of the individual who would then have to say: "I am fucking rubbish!" This was done in the corridor in front of everyone.

'When our kit was not up to scratch the staff would swipe it off the bed and out of the lockers with their pace sticks.

'All sorts of collective punishments happened often and [at] all times of the day and night.

'I was glad to have got out of basic training and I remember the bollockings, for any reason or no reason, that were very intense and with hindsight abusive and not necessary! Racism was featured and the fact that I was Scottish and training in England with mainly English recruits and English staff meant I faced some of the nationalist nonsense. I don't know how I lasted the basic training! I suppose that [the] "pride" thing would have been part of it and not wanting to give in and be "defeated"!'

George Hill, Royal Artillery, 1980-1983.

'In training, we'd no such things as ear defenders (amplivox) so when at shooting practice on the ranges the instructing NCOs would always make us push rabbit or sheep shit into our ears (as ear defenders). If we refused we were punished.

'In training, we'd to go through a gas chamber in NBC black,[145] remove our mask and state number, rank, name. Two instructing NCOs in particular would regularly snatch the respirator of Irish and Scots lads, then push us into the chamber shutting the door while yelling xenophobic abuse at us through the gas chamber door until we either collapsed from gas inhalation or they'd tire of abusing us.'

Glenn Bradley, Royal Irish Regiment, 1984-1992

[144] Depot: training centre.
[145] NBC gear: suit and mask designed to protect against nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon attack.

'We were beasted in the evenings in full NBC gear until we choked on our sweat inside our respirators. Log runs involved the instructors hitting our heads against the logs until they bled, we were told to say nothing to the military police when one lad complained. Stress positions were that bad as a young boy you cried through the pain. Whilst doing block jobs the instructors would walk up to you and punch you in the stomach. [We had] change parades[146] until the wee hours of the evening – 0100hrs – and dragging your locker to the guardhouse for inspection to have it destroyed then [having to] make it immaculate for 0500hrs the next day.

'Training was that bad in the 80s that we witnessed one lad shoot his brains out in the barracks whilst we all stood on parade.

'Anyone that was weak was bullied during the evenings by their own platoon members.

'Bedblocks, bulled polished boots and lockers destroyed after hours of making them, boots used to fly out the window and the polish would be cracked – hours of work ruined just for their [NCOs] kicks.

'Mate, years after basic training I trained with the SAS during Close Observation Platoon[147] and [intelligence] training and it never came close to the shit I endured in basic training, mainly because I was too young and scared at that age. I know we are a peaceful organisation [Veterans for Peace] but if I ever saw any of these men that put me through that hell, I don't know if I could be cool.'

Kenny Williams, infantry, 1988-2000

'After a lengthy stint in Headley Court [military] hospital (6 months) after a serious beating from bully doorman thugs in Slough (3 skull fractures and cerebral haematoma), I was still sent to 94 [rifle] range the very next day. They thought I was drunk (why send me then?) but somehow I got into 94 combats. Capt. Toby Till, the ex/present CO[148] 1st battalion Coldstream threatened me with Colchester [military prison] – he thought I was drunken, too!

'I threw [my] SA80 [rifle] at him, said something was effing wrong, then proceeded to… vomit and collapse unconscious, then [I was] taken to Slough hospital intensive care, John Radcliffe [hospital] Oxford and Headley Court...

'Not to mention bayonet training [at] ITC Catterick[149] with pig guts… and dummies, shouting "Kill kill kill" [for] what seemed like all day. For hours and hours, being kicked, punched and [having my] family insulted (i.e. what they've done to your mum, girlfriend etc. etc.), and more punches and kicks.'

Ray Smith, Coldstream Guards, trained 1995

'I once saw a guy who was in my training troop run over and head-butt a guy and knock his front tooth straight out. Then the guy who had done the deed… was the guy we were supposed to look up to because he had what the screws[150] would [call] the killer instinct!

Andrew Lawton, 1996-1998

[146] Change parades: a beasting technique in which recruits must don their different uniforms at speed, with the slowest singled out for punishment.
[147] Close Observation Platoon: a special forces unit used in Northern Ireland, for which the training is particularly harsh.
[148] CO: Commanding Officer.
[149] ITC: Infantry Training Centre.
[150] Screws: NCOs.

'When I was in training our obedience was often tested by the screws. We would be ordered to line up in the corridor and stick our tongues out. The screws would then go along the line pinching our tongues… We all desperately wanted to be Paras and so would do whatever we were ordered to do.'

Ben Griffin, Parachute Regiment, 1997-2005

'You've got 16-year-old girls and married male members of staff sleeping with [them]. Every single male member of staff was sleeping with a 16-year-old girl. Those of us who tried to speak out about it were bullied. They arranged weekends where we could come to London but those of us who would speak out about the fact that they might get a hotel with their young girlfriends, would be put on guard duty for the weekend… This was male members of staff abusing their power over 16-year-old girls – girls who'd just swapped their school uniform for an army uniform. Members of staff once stuck on a friend's backside, "WIDE LOAD" – this is the type of treatment of teenage girls.'

'I injured my legs during basic training… I went sick and I got called names for it. In the end, I ended up taking pain killers most of the way through basic training because people were telling me that I was faking it, that I wasn't trying hard enough, I was just lazy. I now have chronic shin splints, chronic compartment syndrome, and I'm always going to get stress fractures for the rest of my life… I ended up with a medical discharge.

'Part of army training is to break you down, but when you're 16 your brain isn't developed properly… It has a massive effect on your brain… It's only later on that you realise what's been done to you. It's taken years and years to now look back at that damage that's been done and build myself back up.'

Rachel Thompson, Royal Signals, 1998

'When I was in training, during our PT[151] sessions and random/very frequent beastings[152], we were often instructed to adopt the press-up position. Whilst carrying out the exercise, on the way down we were instructed to shout out "I HATE CIVVIES" [civilians] and on the way back up we were commanded to shout out "I LOVE THE PARAS". At the time, we all thought it was highly amusing and somehow it made us feel stronger or perhaps more superior than the civvies. These training methods, coupled with commonplace terminology such as "civvie puke" and "civvie creatures" I think had a massive impact on us all subconsciously, and obviously strongly shaped our views and thinking toward the civilian population.'

Jez Dyer, Parachute Regiment, 1999-2004

'I was always called a little shit by instructors on training and they tried to use my small size against me. One example was [that] we did milling[153] once and I was paired with a guy who was built like a brick privy. I gave him a swift kick to the bollocks before he could hit me and was disqualified!

'Everything about what they did I felt was sadistic. Some instructors were simple bullies. I also found aspects pointless – I'd even say drill was pointless. It was only afterwards that I realised what its purpose was.[154]

'I remember one punishment of running around the squad whilst marching with a weapon over my head having to shout, "I'm a fucking bender."

'I found training – psychologically writing – fairly tough, as my mind was already set so I had to pretend to be something I'm not. But I felt as though I was on a different planet! I felt as though I'd regressed in my life. The aspects I thought utterly unnecessary was the way we were spoken to and shouted at. Singled out

[151] PT: Physical training.
[152] Beasting: the use of harsh and often humiliating treatment as a technique to inculcate obedience.
[153] Milling: furious punching of the head, as a training exercise for the Parachute Regiment (airborne infantry).
[154] The main purpose of drill is to inculcate obedience.

for weakness, humiliated, and isolated. Younger and more junior instructors (lance jacks, a few full screws)[155] seemed to seethe sadism. One of them thought he was a Nazi – had Nazi regalia and used to constantly talk about Hitler, the SS and how much he hated Jews. I saw racism against a couple of black guys – the instructors used to mimic their accents and make comments about their intelligence, eating bananas etc.

'The indifference, absence, and unapproachability of any officers was all part of this I felt.

'When I went to the battalion I found it was more grown up, settled, supportive, and – dare I say – family-like! But only if you spoke the same language/shared the same thoughts/adopted the same attitude. Again I found it totally unreal!

'One of life's ironies is that I buried this anomaly of my life until about this time last year [2016] when I first heard that ex-serving soldiers can get help when homeless. It's opened up something in my memory banks that makes me shake, shudder, feel sad, ashamed, embarrassed, and a failure. That's how the army made me feel from that day to this. Bastards.'

James Florey, infantry, 1999-2000

'Particularly the extracurricular elements of training were often degrading in the extreme. Punishments for nothing included running laps of the barracks in swimming kit, holding stress positions in public places, and picking up cigarette butts from the ground in press-up position using only the teeth.'

Rowan McAllan, Intelligence Corps, 1999-2006

'When I was in training, I was punished by means of a 2-hour beasting in full kit for drinking milk when we were banned from buying "drink from the NAAFI"[156] in my personal time. The beasting happened out of training hours, in the dark by a corporal who was not in my unit. I was not charged or given the opportunity to go through the disciplinary procedure.'

Stuart Wedge, Royal Signals, 1999-2000

'The basic training delivered to young recruits opened my eyes to some of the more gruesome elements of the role of a soldier. Although the narrative of preparing to become a warrior tickled my restless young soul, and I was yearning for adventure and travel.

'We spent long, often demanding periods in the forests and moors of Yorkshire learning the intricacies of the role of the infantryman. Section attacks, bayonetting the enemy in his trench, firing our weapons at the centre of mass of an eyeless, aggressive, charging, paper enemy.

'Somewhat unorthodox and more than concerning, we were told by one instructor that our job was to "bayonet babies in the face and to enjoy it". Another instructor bellowed that he would beat me to death with his helmet if I ever fired my weapon whilst running again. I never repeated the error.

'Unbeknown to me at the time, all of this training and/or indoctrination would come to shape my life, my decisions, and my neurological processes for years to come.

'I remember watching a young member of my section break down in tears in sheer desperation and exhaustion, after spending an extended period of time learning how to live in trenches and conduct patrol after patrol followed by periods of "staging on" or guarding our sleeping colleagues in the field.

[155] Lance jack: a lance corporal; full screw: a full corporal.
[156] NAAFI: The soldiers' bar/shop/social centre on the base.

'Another "buddy" we called Arnie, due to his incredible physique and rigorous physical training regime, ceased "administrating",[157] or looking after himself in the field, chose to eat only cold food, taped up his torn hands with black electrical tape, and started writing poetry.

'I suppose at the time we took it all in our stride and laughed it off. But we as people and in particular our brains were being prepared for the inhuman rigours and demands of traditional war fighting, closing with and engaging the enemy and, by extension, modern international conflicts.

'We were grateful and happy to be stretched. We appreciated being told and probably believed that we were more hardy and had much more developed levels of endurance than our former "civvie" or civilian friends. Now we had a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging. We perceived that we understood how we fit into the bigger picture. As an educated guy from a middle-class family, it was liberating to not have to bother to think for myself, and to follow orders and instructions, even if I thought them to be "bone" or pointless.'

Ryan Hall, Yorkshire Regiment, 2000-2008

'I'd seen people physically assaulted by their commanders, and watched the reaction when they had the temerity to complain – e.g. closing of ranks, denial, intimidation – as well as on number a couple of occasions been a victim of it myself.

'I believe that it's partly due to personal character, but I think that it's as a result of this that I have an irrational dread of talking about grievances in an institutional setting – e.g. the workplace – particularly when their resolution may involve a degree of conflict, no matter how small. I would describe the general feeling as one of impotence.'

John Woods, infantry, 2000-2007

'During training at the Army Foundation College[158] at Harrogate we were made to stand in line and allow the corporal to strike a golf club to our chest. I still got a scar where the button on my uniform had pressed so hard on impact of the strike in 2002.

'At regiment in Germany we had to answer the questions the Regimental Sergeant Major gave, one by one. When it was my turn the RSM asked me what was his name. I had no idea, then he made me run and climb on a lorry and shout to the hole squadron what was his same and report back. I felt so humiliated.'

Tyrone Davies, Queen's Dragoon Guards, 2002-2006

'After a nice abuse-laden warm-up of call and response – "What makes the grass grow?" "BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD!", "What's the bayonet for?" "KILLING!" – part of my training consisted of marching around camp in formation for two hours shouting "KILL!" every time our left foot hit the floor. The effect of this was slightly lessened by the Welsh guy next to me who kept shouting "HELP!" instead. However, I still blacked out while successfully completing the crawling-through-shit-and-stabbing-dummies task this was building up to. I also later blacked out when this conditioning took over during combat, leaving gaps in my memory of these events, and [I have] trouble even knowing exactly what terrible deeds I have to come to terms with while the possibilities play themselves out in my sleep.'

Clem Boland, Mercian Regiment, 2004-2008

[157] Administrating: performing a soldier's daily personal routine, which in the field refers to maintaining a rifle in working condition, keeping good personal hygiene, and so on.
[158] Army Foundation College: initial training centre for army recruits aged between 16 and 17½.

'I recall on the ranges one day one of our fellow recruits gave an NCO a funny look after being dressed down. Another corporal saw this and told him: "If you look at him like that again, I'll shoot you my fucking self." Violence was commonly inferred or threatened outright to motivate recruits.'

Joe Glenton, Royal Logistic Corps, 2006-2011?

'If you get called into the office you don't know if you're going to get punched or made to do press-ups or humiliated – they'll think nothing of humiliating you in front of everybody, just for a laugh, or brutally punishing you until you're sick. These are all things they use to make you stay in line.

'Before we did a tab[159] they used to get these big water bottles and they'd make us stand and drink our water bottles. We weren't allowed to leave this line until we'd finished it and tipped it over our head, but if we were too slow they'd make us fill it up again and I remember people literally being just sick water and then being told to fill it up and doing it again and again, and you're just there for an hour drinking water – just stupid stuff but you just put up with it. If it was anywhere else you'd just drop it and walk out.

'Bayonet training is teaching you to kill a person with a blade on the end of a rifle. You'll be put through loads of physical punishments – you're crawling through mud, screamed at and shouted at, kicked, punched while you're on the floor, anything to get you angry – they want you to release this insane amount of aggression, enough to stab another man when they say, basically, on the flick of a switch.

'Before you join the army you should have to sign another document saying you're about to be subject to six months' mental conditioning that could effectively change your mentality for life. Every single person I spoke to since leaving the army has been affected…'

Wayne Sharrocks, Rifles, 2006-2013

'When I was in Phase 2 Combat Engineer training we were required to compile "best books", a record of all we were taught including hand-drawn diagrams. During room inspection each morning the section commanders would look through our best books and give advice on how to improve them (my troop staff at this stage of training were all uncharacteristically decent blokes when compared to the ones I encountered at Phase 1 training and later on [in] my signals training).

My best book had always been commented on as among the neatest and most well-presented, however one morning about six weeks into the course a new full screw turned up as the "Admin NCO". He looked at my best book and said "Well that's a load of shit isn't it!", a rhetorical question which I answered anyway with "No Corporal, it's actually very good". He then proceeded to shove me up against the locker by my throat and head-butt me, before leaving the room.

'Fortunately, my section commander was present at the time and I gather he reported the incident to the troop commander and the full screw[160] in question was quickly moved on.'

Stu Richards, Royal Engineers, 2007-2016.

'I and a few others were once used as tent poles. Our battalion was hosting a rugby sevens tournament and the officers' tent collapsed due to bad weather. Four or five of us were then instructed to hold the tent up while officers in tweed jackets smoked cigars and sipped brandy underneath it, sheltered from the rain. We held this position until the other side collapsed, and the tent was abandoned.

'The second time we did bayonet training was the hardest. We were kept up most of the night to "prepare for a big inspection" the next day. We were woken up in the early hours of the morning by our section

[159] Tab: long march or run.
[160] Full screw: a full corporal.

commanders and ran around camp for a few hours, we were [then] ordered to march on the spot and every time our left foot hit the ground we were to shout "KILL". Bayonet training involved us stabbing straw dummies filled with blood bags, and intermittent "beastings". Fights often broke out amongst recruits and this seemed to be encouraged. At any point we were asked what a bayonet was for we were to reply "KILL, KILL, KILL". Afterwards we were locked down and were not allowed to leave camp for 24 hours.'

Gary Latto, Royal Regiment of Scotland, 2008-2013

VfP members from the navy and RAF also responded:

'For a bit of fun, Sergeant X would enter the barrack room late at night – somewhat intoxicated – and tip sleeping recruits from their beds.

'Corporal X would forcefully grab those recruits who were "tick-tocking"[161] on the parade square. Clutching their arm tightly he would literally yank them from the group and throw them – quite literally – off the square.

'Fearful of failing their bed-pack inspection, recruits would make up their packs to the required specification and then sleep under their beds for the night.'

Paul Higate, RAF, 1983-1991

'Teambuilding was more a bullying culture at HMS Raleigh in the 80s. Recruits would threaten other recruits that didn't get up to speed with drills or personal hygiene.

'I witnessed a rating[162] being taken to the showers and scrubbed with a yard broom because he was deemed to be a "crabby bastard" – the instructors knew things like this happened. They were just as bad, chucking bedding out of the windows if you were seconds late out of bed, then making people run around the parade ground with the mattresses on their backs.'

Chris Paling, Royal Navy, 1986-1993

[161] Tick-tocking: marching out of time.
[162] Rating: a navy enlisted person.

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This report draws on veterans' testimony and around 200 studies, mainly from the UK and US, to explore the effects of army employment on recruits, particularly during initial training. It finds that moulding young people into soldiers is a psychologically coercive process with a forceful impact on attitudes, health, and behaviour even before recruits are sent to war. Among the long-term consequences are elevated rates of mental health problems, heavy drinking, violent behaviour, and unemployment after discharge, as well as poorer general health in later life.

The author, David Gee, is a researcher with a critical interest in military recruitment practice, military employment, and the mental health of veterans. This report is a companion to *The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces* (2013).

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